


“Wise”

Sunday, December 10th, 2017

Second Sunday of Advent

[2nd Service, TEXT on Screen]

 **Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)**

Coming of the magi

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, *“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”*

When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born.

They said, *“In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:*

*‘You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the rulers
of Judah, because from you will come one*

who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, *“Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.”*

When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

That question – “*What Child is this?*” continues to drive us as we seek to know more about Jesus, as Messiah, as Redeemer, as God with us.

The Christmas carol tries to help us understand; although it does not specifically mention wise men or magi, it refers to their actions of worship and giving:

"So, bring him incense, gold, and myrrh..."

Today, our story brings another element into The Nativity that expands the significance of this Child and His humble birth.

We see that the whole world seeks Him, whether they realize it or not.

We realize that this Child is here for everyone to find.

Let us pray: Lord, this morning we read about those who made a long journey to meet the newborn King

of a nation to which they did not belong. Help us understand what this means to us today. Show us how this story is relevant today and how Jesus remains a significant figure in the world. We come seeking the Child, for your honor and glory. Amen.

Ordinarily, we think of the Wise Men on Epiphany, January 6th, 12 days after Christmas.

We sing, “*We Three Kings of orient are...*” even though we don’t know how many folks were in this group.

There are ongoing debates about who they were, where they came from, and why they are mentioned in only one gospel.

This year, we’re going to talk about them early because they are part of the story that helps us answer the question of who this child is.

The wise men make their appearance **only** in Matthew's gospel account of the Christmas story.

From the start of chapter two we are introduced to these men and discover some details about their origins and intentions.

As we understand who these wise men were, we find clues to attributes found in the life of Jesus.

According to the text, the magi came "*from the east.*"

Depending on the point of reference, "*from the east*" could mean a variety of places.

Most likely these wise men were Gentiles from Arabia.

For a Jewish Christian living in the Holy Land, "*from the east*" would be a term that referred to any place on the east side of the Jordan River.

Those who lived in the Holy Land in the first century would have referred to the Jordanian desert areas that connect with the deserts of Arabia as "*from the east.*"

This is a wide area that might include modern-day Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and parts of Saudi Arabia.

Some might even visualize "*the east*" as far away as India and the Orient.

One of the strong indicators of where these wise men came from is linked to the types of gifts they brought as part of their intentions to worship this newborn king.

They were carrying gold from a place where it was mined: most likely Arabia.

The remaining gifts of frankincense and myrrh are the real evidence that these men likely came from Arabia; both gifts are harvested from trees that primarily grow in southern Arabia.

Wealthy people living in the Arabian Peninsula would have been in possession of these localized treasures; those in the early church likely would have been aware of these realities.

What do the origin and gifts of the wise men have to do with answering the question: *What child is this?*

It's important to remember that Jesus came, not only to seek and save Jewish working-class shepherds, but He also came for Gentile Arabs.

This word, "*Gentile*" really means any person who is not Jewish.

Jesus is the God who stepped out from the riches of heaven and into the poverty of a lowly manger in a Bethlehem stable; equally, this is the same God who warrants the finest gifts and the worship of the wealthiest people.

The visit of the magi and the value of their gifts also reflects the humility and generosity of Jesus and of those who seek to follow Him.

Jesus is one full of generosity and a giver of great gifts.

He calls upon us to be humble of heart and generous with all that we have.

What child is this? He is the one who would give the ultimate gift; He was born to give His life for many.

Imagining where these men may have started their journey helps us to realize how they were able to find their way.

Matthew tells us they followed a star.

Our video this morning reminds us who oversees moving the stars – God.

God provided a star in the sky that the wise men followed from their homeland.

These men believed all in the heavens were connected and had special meanings with events that took place on earth.

As New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright has said,
"When something important was happening on earth you could expect to see it reflected in the heavens. Alternatively, a remarkable event among the stars and planets must mean, they thought, a remarkable event on earth."

When these wise men *"from the east"* saw the star rising in the sky, they took it as a sign that something significant had happened on earth.

These Gentile men of power, means, and intellect had come from afar to worship and pay homage to this newborn king they likely had heard about due to the centuries-old retelling of the story of a coming Messiah.

The story had been conveyed through the ages by faithful Jews who had been exiled in Babylon and remained scattered abroad after their exile ended.

The wise men were students of philosophies, cultures, and religions, as well as the sky.

Now a star was shining brightly in the sky; it was a sign in the heavens that led to the One who had been foretold throughout the generations.

Gentile wise men would follow the star and seek out this One, born King of the Jews, just as the prophecies had foretold.

The visit of the magi recalls this promise made to the prophet Jeremiah:

"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13)

You see, just as Jesus came seeking to save the lost, the magi came seeking the One people had lost sight of – God, their Creator and Deliverer.

There has been much debate surrounding the origin of these men, when they actually arrived to worship Jesus, in what place they found the family, and how old Jesus was at the time.

Those are interesting questions for scholarly conversation, but they are not the primary concerns of this story.

What is significant here is that these Gentile wise men worshiped this Jewish king of kings who came as the promised Savior of the whole world.

This child in the manger was the Messiah and king of Jews and Gentiles alike...

That's EVERYONE!

Jesus was the one King who was worthy of worship for the Gentiles and the Jews.

The wise men discovered this truth by studying philosophy, culture, and religion; they learned all they could about how God affected the lives of many different people.

They went seeking to know more and more; as they journeyed with the star; they listened to people with many different opinions and beliefs.

Ultimately, they found the child who was born to be worshiped by all people in all nations for all times.

That is part of the answer to the question the song asks:

What child is this? He is the One who is worthy of worship by all people, of all places and races and circumstances.

He is the One True Savior of the entire world that is
worthy to seek and to worship.

May we do as the wise men did.

May we seek Him,

bow before Him,

worship Him,

and give Him the gifts of our lives, as we go and
tell others about Him.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.