

Lessons from the Nativity Story: Wise Men

Hope is a great motivator. It's what gets people excited about both giving and receiving gifts this time of year. You hope you get what you want. You hope people love what you got them.

You also hope that family get togethers go as you want. Maybe you hope everyone can make it. Or you might hope that some family members can't.....

Hope is what keeps the Christian seeking Jesus. Hope is what drives us to follow Him even when it's hard, unclear, or different. It is hope that helps us to trust Him as Joseph did in the scriptures we studied last week.

In today's Lesson from the Nativity Story, we will look at the wise men and their journey of hope:

Matthew 2:1-12 (NKJV)

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Here we have the well known account of the “wise men” traveling to see baby Jesus. It’s a part of the nativity story that I usually just hear, think “yeah, I know that” and then move on.

But as I dug into this story, I was actually quite inspired by these men and their journey.

First you may have already heard but we do not know how many men there were, 3 is assumed because there were 3 gifts but there could have been 2 or more. These men were “wise men” some bible translations say magi which comes from the Greek word magos (ma-gaas) meaning astrologers, interpreters of dreams, and teachers.

They were wise because they knew lots, they were well educated, and part of this was a knowledge of sacred writings....so they likely had a knowledge of the writings of the prophets.

They were not kings. Rather, they were probably advisors to kings. They knew science and religion, interpreted dreams....handy guys for a king to have on call.

We read this story and it’s easy to see that they saw a star, and followed it. Well done..... I could do that.....I mean they know the scriptures so they knew that the Messiah was coming and would be born in Bethlehem, and they knew the stars so they knew which one to follow.

Here is the main point today that we must learn from the wise men.....yes they had the knowledge, and it was knowledge that not many had when you combine both parts. But it’s not just the knowledge that they had.....it’s what they did with it.

The wise men used their knowledge to seek Jesus!

These are men that were advisors to kings, smart, rich, and somebody. Dined with the richest people, had all the word had to offer. But they knew there was something more important, something special that nothing else could compare with.....seeking the King.

Psalm 14:2 (HCSB)

2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the human race
to see if there is one who is wise,
one who seeks God.

Is this where you find yourself today? We have the knowledge of who Jesus is.....we have the understanding of what He has done.....is that enough for you? Just to know?

Or do you seek Him? Do you set aside time, sacrifice what you want to do, to intentionally go after Him? This is what the wise men did. It wasn't just know, see a star and drive to Effingham to see Jesus. They sacrificed time, money, probably relationships and occupation, to seek Him.....

They show up in Jerusalem and say "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

This shows us that these gentiles (not jews) had a knowledge and expectancy for the Messiah...and that is who they desired to meet. They had a desire to know Him not just know about Him.

They had seen His star and came to worship Him. We often think of this story and picture them just following a star. No biggie, right? The star is in the lead and we just ride along behind until we get there.

Only they "have seen" His star and they currently are in the wrong place asking.....hmmm

Have you ever read this story and thought "why doesn't God make things that easy for me? Just lead me by something I can see. Make it clear. No wondering or thinking on my part"

He didn't make it that easy for the wise men. I don't know what this phenomenon was that God created to lead them, but at some point it wasn't there, and then later it's back! I can't help but imagine that God wanted to test their faith.

"Will they seek me if it's not easy the entire path? How much do they desire my presence?"

Why do we always think it will be or should be easy to seek God?

Hebrews 11:6 (HCSB)

6 Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.

Sometimes God gives you something to get you started and from there you are required to exercise faith and seek Him. This is where the wise men find themselves.....about 6 miles off the mark in Jerusalem which makes sense if they lost the star.... This was the Jewish capital and they were looking for the King of the Jews.

This scene was probably pretty intimidating to the locals. Unlike our cute little nativity sets, it was just the wise men on foot or even just them on camels. These were people of status, probably traveling with an entourage, extra camels loaded with luggage and food and they come to the capital of the Jewish people looking for a "new king".

Do you understand why it says that King Herod was troubled and all of Jerusalem was too? Everyone was worried!

Obviously Herod had some idea of the expectation of the Messiah. Ruling in this area and now the words of the prophets are coming true.....he gathered the chief priests and scribes (all the people that would know and understand the prophecies) and asks where this child was to be born.

Matthew 2:5-6 (NKJV)

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

Here is where we see a king who rules with fear, had a history of killing people who threatened his position as king.....and he knows his position is being threatened. He gets the consensus on the prophetic word found in Micah 5.

Then he calls the wise men, tells them to go find the child and then let Herod know so he can go and worship Him also. Now we know this was a lie, Herod wanted the threat to his throne to be eliminated and throughout this story we see God's protection over Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

The wise men head out.....

The question I have is where were all of the religious experts? Remember the chief priests and scribes that told Herod where Jesus would be born? How is it that these people did not go with the wise men to see this Messiah that they supposedly had been waiting for????

Did they not have the hope and faith that these gentiles had? What could have possibly held them back from going? Were they so stuck in religion that they were spiritually blind?

Church we have to be careful to not be like these religious people. We too can be so stuck in religion that we are busy doing what we think we should be doing instead of seeking Jesus. It's easy to recognize that in others and point it out but are you missing what God has for you?

Sometimes we see people come into the church who don't know the bible. The Holy Spirit reveals the truth to them, they seek Jesus with fervency and hunger, all the while the people that have been around are spiritually blinded by their religion.

Listen you can say "it's not about religion, it's about relationship" but SAYING that is actually still religion, DOING that is relationship. Actually seeking Jesus is what sets His people apart.

We see this with the wise men and the religious leaders. Which one are you?

Isaiah 55:6-7 (HCSB)

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while He is near.
7 Let the wicked one abandon his way and the sinful one his thoughts;
let him return to the Lord, so He may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for He will freely forgive.

It's never too late to seek Jesus. Whether you never have before, or you are seeking again. Let today be that day for you!

Matthew 2:9 (NKJV)

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and **behold**, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.

When the wise men got back on the path searching for Jesus.....the star returned and led them straight to Him.

Here is what they didn't do.....complain, wine, get angry, lose heart, give up.....when that star had disappeared, they went with what they knew, and kept seeking Him.....and as they sought Him the star reappeared and lead them to Jesus.

How often do we want to throw in the towel when the path is not clear? Does your hope keep you going? Do you keep searching? Because I don't see many testimonies that say "when I finally gave up and quit seeking Him, God showed me the way".

Matthew 7:7-8 (NKJV)

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

These wise men asked, seeked, and knocked. And their diligence was rewarded because they found the long awaited Messiah!

Matthew 2:10 (NKJV)

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

This is where their faith was rewarded. The had clear direction, something happens, it fades, God took it away for a while, something.....they end up in Jerusalem based on what they do know (God's promises), and they see the star again. They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy!

Contrary to how we read this story, it was NOT a short little journey. There were times of direction and there were times of wandering. But the wise men did not lose hope, they continued on. And

when they seemed lost, they kept looking, and what did they find? More direction.....and when they did, they were pumped! They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy! The Greek word for rejoice means be glad but it also means to be well, and thrive!

They thrived in their rejoicing and joy of the Lord. In Nehemiah 8, he says the joy of the Lord is your strength. This is where you thrive, in His joy. In Psalm 30 we are told that we may have pain or weeping in the night but joy comes in the morning.

I don't know when the last time you felt that God was not giving you direction, maybe He was but doesn't seem to be now. Maybe you have been going by what you know (God's promises).....stay faithful and direction will return. If you have lost hope, it's time to seek out Jesus again! When you find Him there will be joy again

Matthew 2:11 (NKJV)

11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

When they found Jesus, they fell down and worshiped Him. They kneeled and bowed to this Child, showing Him honor and respect. GROWN MEN, advisors to kings, rich, well known, educated, bowing before a Child.....these men had an encounter with the King of Kings....Jesus.

When is the last time you sought Him? When is the last time you kneeled in His presence? Some of you think it looks foolish or feels strange. These men didn't care, they just wanted an encounter with Jesus.....

And when they found Him they gave Him gifts

The three gifts the Magi brought foreshadowed the person and ministry of Jesus.

Gold for His royalty. In the Scriptures gold was a symbol for royalty and also signified the glory and deity of God. It and was thus an appropriate gift to give to God the Son.

Frankincense for His deity. This was a sweet incense that was used in connection with some of the offerings in the Temple, its aroma rising to God as a prayer.

Myrrh for his humanity. Myrrh was an embalming ointment which would be wrapped in the garments of the deceased. It signified the fact that Jesus was born to die.

What a wonderful display of genuine worship....they find the Messiah, they bow before Him and then they give to Him the valuable gifts they had carried for this long journey.

They got it....it wasn't just about what Jesus could do for them, but they also gave Him what they had. It's the same for us today, do we only seek Him so He will do something for us, or do we follow that up with giving Him whatever we have that is of value.....our gifts, talents, time, finances.....our lives?

We may not have a star in the sky that leads us to Jesus today. But we have something much greater....the Holy Spirit. As happy I am that Jesus came, I'm even more happy that He left so He could send His Spirit, and I'll be even more happy when He comes back!

I don't know what part of this lesson from the wise men speaks to you this morning, but I know the Holy Spirit is working on hearts right now.

I know that some have hope but have lost direction.

I know that others have lost hope and need it desperately.

I know the answer is Jesus.

Will you seek Him today? Will you kneel at His feet? Will you give Him the best of you?