

Christmas Eve 2017 – The Big Visit – Mt 2:1-12

(After first song) Welcome to our **Christmas Eve** service. What a special time to come together, reflect on the birth of Jesus, and worship him as Christ the Lord.

B/c this is a different *kind* of service, we're not going to pass an offering, but instead, have placed boxes at the *doors* for that purpose.

So if this is your church home, please feel free to use those accordingly.

If it's not, please feel no obligation. We're glad you're here.

That said, in the spirit of the season why don't you turn to someone and tell them "Merry Christmas." (Music)

If you brought your Bible, turn with me to Mt 2:1-12.

[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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

[3] *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet [the prophet Micah]: [6] "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

[7] *Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."*

[9] *After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh [money, incense, and perfume]. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (ESV)*

I want to make 3 observations from this text, and encourage you to observe your heart and life in light of it. The first is this:

Wise men still seek him. (v1-2) (Wise man enters and stands to my right.)

It's the oldest Christmas card cliché around, but it's true. Wise men still seek him.

Including the wise men who visited Jesus. Sometimes called *magi*.

Either way, it refers to men of great learning who most likely came from Persia (spotlight on), modern day Iraq. Exhibit A.

Not that there was only one of them, but that they might have *looked* like him.

More importantly, they were men who studied everything from stars and folklore, to dreams, prophecies, and religious writings.

B/c of which, they could have been familiar with the prophecy in Numbers 24:17 spoken by Balaam; somebody from their neck of the woods. A prophecy that said . . .

A star will arise out of Jacob, and a scepter [a ruler] shall rise out of Israel.

So when they saw *the* star arise, it's possible they connected it with Numbers 24, and got on their horse. Or camel.

- Whatever the case, when the indicators pointed to Jesus as a new king, they *sought* him. And went to great *lengths*. B/c that's what wise men *did* in those days. And *still* do. Wise men *still* seek him.

Especially so, when you consider what the Bible goes on to *say* about Jesus.

Namely, that he's *the way, the truth, and the life*. (Jn 14:6)

The way to *God* that is, the truth that *matters*, and the life that *satisfies*. Forever.

And you can't access those things *apart* from Jesus.

No wonder wise men still seek him.

- I read a book 10 or 15 years ago (**Shadow Divers**) about two treasure divers named John Chatterton and Richie Kohler, who devoted 10 years of their life . . . To explore and identify a WWII German submarine they discovered, off the eastern seaboard of the United States.

And as I began reading that book, I learned there are more dangers of diving in 250 feet of water than I thought.

Things like shifting currents, the right mix of oxygen and nitrogen in their tanks, the risks of staying down too long, and suffering the bends if they came *up* too quickly. That painful and sometimes life-threatening condition of nitrogen bubbles forming in your bloodstream after being under great pressure. It was danger all around.

But according to them, the biggest danger of all was the *darkness*.

At 250 feet down, it's pitch black. And even more so *inside* the sub.

And to make matters worse, when you disturb the fine silt that settled on things over the decades, your *light* doesn't even do any good. It's utter darkness.

Which, if you're not confident of your way, can bring on a life-threatening *panic* in the *best* of divers.

So to offset such debilitating darkness, John flew to Chicago to visit the Museum of Science and Industry.

Not b/c he wanted to walk around with a bunch of 8th graders, like I was when I first went there. But b/c they have a German submarine on display . . .

Similar to the one they were exploring.

And when he got there, he didn't just saunter through and then leave right away.

From the moment he stepped in, he began memorizing the position of every doorway, cabinet, hatch, bulkhead, room, and instrument.

If it was there, he burned it into his memory. Most of the time standing in one place, one section at a time, while everybody else squeezed by him.

And he didn't just go through *once*, but 20 times. So much so that the security guards questioned him.

He studied, and studied, and studied – *in the light* . . .

So that when he was all alone in the darkness, he could find what he was seeking and get out alive. About as wise as it gets.*****

➤ How about you? Do you go to such lengths to seek *Jesus*? The *ultimate* treasure? The one who can get *you* out alive?
Do you seek him to *know* him, and follow him? As the way to God, the truth that matters, and the life he is?
I hope so. B/c that's what wise men *do* – they seek him. (Spotlight down; Wise man off)

2nd . . .

Sinful men still hate him. (v3-8) (Enter Herod to stand on my left.)

Just like Herod. The evil puppet king appointed by Rome.

A man who stopped at *nothing* to protect his rule and preserve his power. Even killing members of his own *family* on occasion. Including his wife (spotlight on).
He was a sinful man. Through and through.

And when he heard that Jesus was referred to as *king of the Jews* (2a), the *Christ* (4b), the Messiah – he felt threatened.

He was their king. *He* was their ruler. As would be his sons and grandsons.
Not some two-bit baby from the backwaters of Bethlehem.

So he immediately began conniving to kill him.

That's why he asked the wise men when the star had appeared, and later on murdered all the babies in Bethlehem under 2 years of age. (16)
He was a sinful man, who *hated* Jesus. He hated him.

➤ Hatred that continues to this day. Sinful men *still* hate him. All over.

Like some of the radical Islamic groups in the Middle East, who kill those who follow him. Christians.

But that hatred *pales* in comparison to the masses who don't want anything to *do* with him. The hatred of those who actively *reject* him.

Or the *passive* hatred of those who aren't *for* him. Like Jesus said. *Whoever is not with me is against me.* (Mt 12:30). It's passive, but it's still hatred.

Or how about the hatred of *avoiding* him b/c you can't stand the *conviction* he brings.

Conviction due to your sin – doing what's wrong, not doing what's right, or hating your neighbor. Like the Apostle John says in **1 John 4:20**

[20] *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

It's hate by default.

Or maybe your hatred is more the *aversion* you feel at the thought of *living* for Jesus; submitting to his lordship; surrendering to his kingship.*****

Whatever the case, whether it's violent, secret, passive, or active – hatred is hatred.
And sinful men still do it. They *still* hate Jesus.

➤ The question is, are you one of them? Are you?

Do you reject him outright? Avoid him like the plague? Oppose him in your heart?

If so, can I encourage you, even urge you, to repent? To admit your hatred, ask forgiveness, and follow him? Do it. Admit, ask, and follow.

You'll never be happier, and never be freer. (Spotlight down; Herod off stage.)

Wise men still seek him. Sinful men still hate him. And . . .

Humble men still worship him. (v9-12) (Enter wise man, kneel on my right.)

V11 says – *And going into the house, they [the wise men] saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him (spotlight on). Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

They worshipped with their posture, and they worshipped with their treasure. Their posture and their treasure.

Not b/c Jesus was some awesome presence at that point, exhibiting great power and miracles. But b/c they believed what he would become – a king.

They *believed* what they had been told. They *believed* what they had seen, star and all.

So they worshipped him. They *adored* him. Focusing their mind's attention, their heart's affection, and their will's submission.

With no shame to show it by their posture, and no reluctance to express it by their giving. No shame and no reluctance.

That's humility.

Where you worship freely without fear of judgment, and give generously without fear of need. Inside these walls, *and* out. Just like the wise men.

(Summary; Spotlight off; Wise man off stage)

➤ Are you humble to worship him?

Do you *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven?* (Mt 5:16) Or hide it under a bushel?

Do you sing and praise and express your worship without reservation?

Do you give *generously* to God's work?

I hope so. B/c he's worthy, and there's no greater joy.

So come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. O come let us adore him . . .

Pray (Worship Team on stage) – Lord, find us wise, find us repentant, and find us humble. And receive our worship with that of the angels on this Christmas Eve. We sing in exultation as they do, proclaiming Glory to God in the highest . . . (No amen.)
(Worship starts – "O come let us . . .")