

- This is the fourth week of our Christmas Re-imagined series.
 - This series is a look into what might have happened if those that experienced the events back then had responded differently. A blend of “what if” and looking at what actually happened.
 - Many times in my life, I have been in places where the actions of someone made a huge difference in my life.
 - Where the words they said were just what was needed in my spirit at the time.
 - Where the money they gave was perfectly timed to provide for a need.
 - Where the help they gave was disproportionately encouraging or supportive.
 - I try to always be thankful, but I wonder how many of those people will ever know the tremendous impact they had or the part they played in the story of my life.
- Most, if not all, of us have experienced this kind of thing.
 - Many of us have been the provider of that kind of support to others.
 - If you’ve experienced this, you know how amazing it is. It can lift spirits, take us over the hump, or grow us.
 - In it, God is glorified, because we know he orchestrated this amazing “coincidence.”
- What’s cool to me is that this is available to every single person, regardless of age, ability, wealth or talent. You can make more of a difference than you will ever know.
 - **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS.**
 - And if you have not made a practice of this, you can always start now and still have an amazing influence in the years ahead.

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- It had been the better part of a year after Jesus had been born.
- Being good Jewish parents, Jesus had been circumcised and had gone through child dedication.
- But after all this time, they were still in Bethlehem. They had not yet moved back to Nazareth. The accusing stares and whispered gossip was perhaps still too fresh.
- But life was not easy. Trying to stay employed, make a living and begin their life as a new family was difficult for them.
- All the promises of the angel to Mary and Joseph seemed a long way past. It did not seem like the life of the Messiah, the Savior, was supposed to go like this. They had thought that maybe somehow it would be . . . different.
- Perhaps they were beginning to wonder about the whole point and process that God was leading them on.
- Jesus was toddling around, on the verge of walking or perhaps taking wobbly steps when one day there was a knock at the door.
- Not really expecting anyone, Joseph went to answer the door and there saw a sight that would never have entered his wildest imaginations.
- In front of him stood men. They were clearly not local as you could see from their rich clothing and ethnicity. When they spoke it became even more clear that they were not from nearby.
- As the men inquired if this was the place where Jesus lived, he could see that these were learned and intelligent men. As he invited them in, he could see a whole entourage a ways away that seemed to be with these men.
- As he brought these men into the little house, it was crowded and they came into the room where Mary was with Jesus.

- Then they did something no one expected. They saw Mary, and then their attention turned to Jesus. As soon as they saw Jesus, every one of them knelt on the floor. Then they all bowed their faces to the floor in front of Jesus. Some of them had tears in their eyes. Some were murmuring about a Messiah, a Savior, the king of the Jews. But all of them appeared to be giving worship and honor to their son, Jesus.
- Just when they thought it couldn't get any stranger, a couple of them got up and went outside for a moment and came back. They set down some beautiful boxes in front of Jesus and opened them. They gasped as they saw gold coins in one. There appeared to be some very expensive fragrances and incense, the kind they had seen but never been able to afford.
- What followed was a night of stories, visiting, eating and celebrating, and when these men left the next day, it was as if everything they had been told had been confirmed and God had seen to their needs in abundance more than they could have ever imagined.
- In fact, they would need it the next day as Joseph had a dream that they had to take Jesus and run for their lives to Egypt to escape the vengeance of king Herod.
- As they were traveling to Egypt, more than once they looked at each other and said, "Can you imagine what would have happened if those men had ignored the star?"

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- God made a huge difference in the life of young Jesus and on his parents through these wise men.
- And lest you think that they are different because they had power and money, let's walk through what happened to see that **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS.**

Matthew 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

- The wise men burst onto the pages of the Christmas story without any introduction. No background. Just some men who showed up in Jerusalem looking for the Savior.
- What is a Magi? It was a term given to wise men, teachers and physicians, typically those who were astrologers, interpreters of dreams, seers. Some were charlatans but some, like these men, were the academicians of their time, professionals who were brilliant and highly educated.
- Why were astrologers and magicians from a land far away there to see Jesus. How did they even know to make a difference?

I. They were listening and watching for God's activity.

- Notice that they told Herod that they saw "his star." How did they know?
- The answer may take us back more than 500 years to a man named Daniel. He rose to preeminence in the Babylonian empire. We read that King Nebuchadnezzar assigned Daniel to the high office of "chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners." In other words, Daniel was appointed chief of the Magi.
- The Magi of the first century would have most certainly studied the writing of Daniel and possibly other Jewish writings with which Daniel would have been associated, such as the book of Isaiah.
- The star they saw was something out of the ordinary. It was not a normal part of the course of events or things they studied.

Numbers 24:17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth."

- We don't know for sure, but it might explain why they were expecting a Jewish king so many years later.
- What is fascinating about this whole scenario is what it teaches us about God.
- God used a language they understood. Stars. Even though they practiced astrology (which was seeking the divine in the stars and was prohibited), God spoke to them. He makes every effort to speak to us.
- We need to seek more of God, not just more knowledge about him.
- **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS**, but you need to be listening.
- **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS**, but you also need to be willing to act.

II. They acted.

- We don't know specifically where they were from. Most people though believe that they were from the area of Babylon or Persia. (This would be modern day Iraq)
 - This means they had traveled between 500 and 1000 miles across some pretty inhospitable country to get there. Most scholars estimate a trip like that would take 2-3 months.
 - Most of our pictures of the Magi show three guys riding three camels across the desert. There is no way these men traveled 1,000 miles across the desert by themselves. In those days, the only way you could travel in the desert was in a large caravan. We only see the three wise men because of three gifts. They were only named 400-500 AD.
 - The Magi would have swept into Jerusalem with pomp and circumstance. They very well might have had a full military escort along with servants and attendants.
 - No wonder all of Jerusalem was buzzing. The Magi apparently had no trouble gaining an audience with King Herod. What would make these men make that kind of trip? The king of the Jews wasn't even their king. These were non-Jews who were clearly expecting a king.
- 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' " 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."*
- These Magi took a large amount of effort simply to respond to what they believed they had heard and seen from God.
 - They must have expected Jerusalem to be filled with celebration and worship of this new king, but no one knew.
 - If the king was born, they could have waited to hear the news and take time to pay homage to him later.
 - They didn't wait for more clear direction. They did not wait for God to bring Jesus to them. They did not put their own comfort first. "We saw . . . we came." They acted. **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS** but only if when you hear him you act!
 - The response of the city is interesting – they were all troubled along with Herod. They did not want their lives upturned, made difficult or have to deal with problems. It would interfere with their lives. Herod was close to 70 years old and this child posed no threat to him, but he did not see it that way.
 - Our problem is that in order to make a difference, it is going to cost you. It is going to cost you energy. It is going to cost you time. It is going to cost you financially. It is going to be risky.
 - But when we do, look what happens.

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

- They followed the star – God continued to guide them all the way in.
- Their attitude was one of great joy (exceeding, great (megas) joy). I find it interesting that their joy is not in seeing Jesus but in the star.
- There was tremendous joy in knowing they had listened to God and he had not let them down. They had no confirmation until the end that they were on the right track. They were not deceived and the trip was worth it.

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

III. They experienced God.

- They saw Jesus and their response was to worship him.
- It was not the surroundings (simple house) or the people (peasant family) or the situation (a small town).
- They saw through the humble conditions and poor nature of his parents to see the true prince of peace.
- It was their recognition of who he really was that inspired their actions.
- The words for worship is to submit, to kiss the hand.
- We do not read that they gave this same honor to Herod, but they did to a child.
- They also gave gifts. This was a way to honor him. They probably had no idea about the impact of their gifts.
- Many have said there is symbolism in the gifts themselves. Gold, a treasure deserving of a king. Frankincense, a fragrant scent offered up during sacrificial worship, a gift for someone who was God. Myrrh, used as an oil to prepare a body for burial. It was a gift for a savior who would die for us all.
- They probably did not know how valuable this stuff was to the family.
- Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt. A place where they had no friends or family to help them. A place where there was no one to meet their needs or help them find shelter. A place where they would need money to pay for food and lodging and then something to help set up a home when they returned. They did not know because they left to go home.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

- **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS.**
- Hundreds of years earlier, Daniel faithfully answered God's call to work and engage in the culture – even in the most difficult of times.
- The Magi listened to God and acted. Their actions made a huge difference in the life of this family, and we have no idea the impact they also had by simply going home and talking about what they had seen and heard.
- Just like the Magi, we will never know the full impact of our actions on this side of heaven.
- **YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE FOR OTHERS.**
- You never know when you are God's "just in time" or "perfectly placed."
- God can use you regardless of your situation. You don't have to have it all together. He can use you in the midst of brokenness and pain. He can use you with whatever you have.

- All it takes is to listen and act. And when you do, you will experience God. You will experience joy. You will experience peace.