

## The Christmas Questions

### Where Is The Child?

Matthew 2:1-12

The last four weeks, we have pondered on the Christmas questions. We have looked at the questions Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth, and the people of the hill country of Judea asked. So far, we have examined the following questions:

1. How can I be sure?
2. How can this be?
3. Why has this happened to me?
4. What will this child become?

Throughout this journey of enquiries, we have seen how the people involved in the Christmas narrative moved from mistrust to conviction, from tragedy to resilience, and from confusion to gratitude. Those who fearfully and doubtfully asked questions were empowered to choose faith over fear, gratitude over despair, and joy over bitterness.

Asking questions is not a bad thing. Actually, the Christmas story reminds us that asking questions and wrestling with God is a healthy exercise, especially if we are willing to open ourselves to the wonders and mysteries of God. Asking questions is good, particularly if we do it with genuine curiosity, not a predetermined mindset.

Through the Christmas account, we have seen that those who asked questions were infused with courage and hope as they received the good news that:

- Our prayers never expire.
- No word from God will ever fail.
- God breaks into our reality to transform our lament into praise, and our disgrace into blessings. God breaks into our reality to help us move past disappointments in a healthy way.
- Jesus Christ came into the world to save us not only *from* sin, but also to save us *for* us to become children of God who clearly shine the Divine image at all times.

The Biblical characters were the first ones who received what we know as the Christmas good news. But, they were not meant to be the only recipients. You and I are heirs of such a good news. God's Word became flesh to give us sight, freedom, and abundance of life. That's good news for you and me, and for all.

For some people, Christmas is over. According to the chronology of our celebration, Mary and Elizabeth already had their babies. The shepherds enjoyed the company of the angelic choir,

visited baby Jesus, and then went on to spread the word of the Savior's birth all around Bethlehem. The story seems to be over, but it's not.

Today, we are going to look at the last question we encounter in the Christmas narrative. It is a question that speaks of our needs, longings, and pursuits. It is a question that reminds us that we need to constantly check and challenge our assumptions as we journey through life. It is a question that reminds us that changing routes is something wise people do. I am talking about the question the wise men asked when they arrived in Jerusalem, "*Where is the child born to be king of the Jews?*" (**Matthew 2:2 Phillips**).

We don't know much about the mysterious travelers mentioned in the gospel of Matthew. "Tradition" states they were kings and that there were three of them. However, other "traditions" say these travelers were people who study the heavens. Others say they were both: prominent political figures who were stargazers. The truth is that we know very little about the wise men.

Even though we know very little about the Magi, we know they were people with feelings, needs, and desires. They were people who needed and were looking for meaning and direction in their lives. So, after seeing and being captivated by a star, they embarked on their quest.

We can say that, for the wise men, this was not just a trip of leisure to a foreign land. The fact that these travelers invested a great amount of time, strength, and material resources on this journey is a sign that these people were looking for something more than having a good time. I believe that such a long and dangerous journey is not undertaken only for fun.

In my opinion, the wise men were looking for the same thing all people look for, fulfillment. After all, that's the reason we also have our stars. Whether it's a career, financial security, an achievement, or a person, we go after our dreams because we believe that reaching goals will fill the void deep in our souls. We chase stars because we want and need fulfillment.

Today's question reminds us that "all human quests are variations on the same theme: the relentless drive to satisfy the inexplicable hunger in our souls."<sup>1</sup> So, here are a couple of questions for your consideration. What motivates you? What is (are) your star(s)? What has captivated you and is leading you through life? Money? Being in control? A spouse? Possessions? Work? Pleasures? What would happen if your star disappears? These are questions worth examining with regularity.

Perhaps unknowingly, the wise men embarked on a journey to satisfy the longing only God can satiate. To their benefit, they were not following a star of their own making. The Magi were chasing the star of the Savior, which reminds us that true fulfillment is found nowhere else but in God. French mathematician, physicist, and theologian, Blaise Pascal, put it like this.

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Burkhart, *Five Questions of Christmas: Unlocking the Mystery*, Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end... And yet, after such a great number of years, no one without faith has reached the point to which all continually look... because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable Object, that is to say, only by God Himself.”<sup>2</sup>

The wise men were on a fruitful path. They were about to meet the only One who can fill and quench our hunger and thirst. Yet, after a long and exhausting journey, the Magi arrived at Herod’s palace. This was the place they assumed marked the end of their search. This was the place where they expected to find what they were looking for. But as we all know, this was not the destination they really wanted to reach.

What made the Magi to go the Herod’s palace? Certainly, it wasn’t the star. The force that drove the wise men to Herod’s palace was their assumptions. All of a sudden, they began to respond to the pressure of some expectations instead of following the leading of the star.

The Magi drifted off course because of a supposition that the newborn king was to be found in a palace. Most likely, this assumption was implanted in them by the world in which they lived. And because they fixed their attention on worldly assumptions and not on the star, their first destination did not meet their real expectations. All of a sudden, the wise men found themselves in a place of emptiness. In Herod’s palace, there was no child; there was only disappointment.

How many times do we follow the assumptions the world plants in our hearts and minds, and consequently, we arrive at destinations full of emptiness and disappointments? Usually, when this happens we ask the question the Magi asked but in different ways. We ask ourselves, “Where is the purpose this journey promised?”, which is another way of saying, “Where is the child?” We ask ourselves, “Is this all there is?”, which is another way of saying, “Where is the child?” Usually, after the excitement and pride of arriving evaporates, we are left with the question, “Where is the child?”

Church, we need to constantly check and challenge our assumptions as we journey through life. Are you following Godly goals? Or, are you drifting off because of worldly assumptions that deceptively promise fulfillment?

In the struggles of life, it is easy to lose our way. But, there is good news. We can recalibrate our trajectory at any time. It’s never too late to get rid of those assumptions that leave us wanting. It’s never too late to turn our eyes upon Jesus and get back on track for a real and purpose-driven life. That’s exactly what the wise men did. They left the palace and sought the star once more. Then, their disappointment disappeared. The Bible says that “*when they saw the star, they were*

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<sup>2</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), 113.

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*overjoyed*” (Matthew 2:10). That’s exactly what happens when we are in line with God’s leading. We are filled with joy.

The wise men arrived at the house where Mary and Jesus were staying. Contrasting Herod’s palace, a place of emptiness and disappointments, we see that the new destination of the Magi is full of purpose. In Mary’s house, the Magi worshiped Jesus as they offered their gifts. In the presence of Jesus, the Magi were able to fulfill the purpose of their journey. There they found what they wanted and needed. They found meaning, connection, and a sense of worth and belonging.

The meeting of the Magi with Jesus was not a transactional encounter. This moment was not about the Magi offering gifts in exchange for fulfillment. The Magi’s encounter with the Savior of the world was all about transformation. Actually, the whole journey was about transformation.

Matthew emphasizes the idea of transformation by saying that the Magi “returned to their country by another route” (Matthew 2:12). Yes, they returned to their country using a different route in order to avoid evil. But, isn’t that what Christian transformation is all about? Being placed in a path where we don’t participate in evil? Isn’t that what an encounter with Christ does? It transforms us in a way that as we continue our journey through life, we cannot march on in the same old way. We start walking the way of holiness. We begin to travel the road of perfection.

Today’s question reminds us that we all want and need fulfillment and that it is only through God that we receive what we want most: “a home where we belong, relationships that heal our loneliness, assurance that good wins over evil, success that is fulfilling, and a reason to live that gives us meaning, significance, and a lasting legacy.” Today’s question reminds us that transformation is the natural outcome of having a real encounter with Jesus. Today’s question reminds us that our faith journey as disciples of Jesus Christ is not measured in miles, nor in years, but in the transformation of our lives.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> Rob Burkhardt.