

The Search For Jesus – Mt 2:1-18

Christmas Eve 2022

Jesus is a beautiful name. And it's quite a joy to sing of him together on Christmas Eve. Between sickness and the weather, I wasn't sure what to expect for our services. So I'm thankful you're able to be here, and thankful the rest of you can join us online. Welcome.

The name of Jesus is beautiful and powerful, but it wasn't *always* that way. And he certainly wasn't *known*. The people of old had to search for him. Seek him. Look for him. Part of the Christmas Story that speaks to us directly. Mt 2:1-18. (Ushers, App)

This part of the Christmas story took place sometime *after* Jesus was born, maybe a year or so, and speaks to us because there are 5 kinds of people represented here with 5 different responses. People and responses meant as a standard by which to assess *ourselves*. May God open the eyes of your heart to see and hear accordingly.

Mt 2:1 – *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king [or Herod the Great as he was known], 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.”* (ESV)

5 observations about 5 kinds of people and their responses.

Wise men still seek him (v1-2)

It's cliché, but no less true. In fact, that's *why* it's cliché. Wise men sought Jesus then, and they still seek him now.

Back then, it was *wise men from the east*. Magi from Persia. Modern day Iraq. Men of great learning, who studied everything from stars and folklore to dreams and prophecies. Making it likely that they were familiar with the prophecy of *Balaam* found in **Numbers 24:17**. Because he was one of their own. From their neck of the woods. And 1400 years before Christ, he said – *A star will arise out of Jacob, and a scepter [a ruler] shall rise out of Israel*. Jacob and Israel being synonymous. A king would come.

So when the wise men saw *the* star arise, it's possible they connected it with Numbers 24, and got on their horse. Or camel. To seek him, search for him, and find him. Even going to great lengths. Because 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. That he's *the way, the truth, and the life* (Jn 14:6). The way to *God*, the truth that *matters*, and the life that lasts.

That's the first observation. Are you wise? Do you seek him? On Christmas eve and every eve?

➤ The second observation comes from v3-6. [3] *When Herod the king heard this* [that the wise men were in town looking for *another* king], *he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people* [the guys who won Bible Trivia all the time], *he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born* [the Messiah, the promised one]. Because they thought the Messiah would *be* a king. And rightfully so.

[5] *They told him* [he would be born], *“In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: [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.’”* [That's what the religious leaders told him.]

Showing us that . . .

Foolish men still reject him (v4-6)

Like the chief priests and scribes themselves. They were smart and extremely knowledgeable, but foolish. That's what the rest of Matthew's Gospel shows. Because they didn't *apply* what they knew.

They were so caught up in their own thinking and preconceived *notions* about the Messiah, they completely missed him. Even though it was staring them in the face. Literally. In the text of Micah 5:2 that they quoted. They were so close to the trees they couldn't see the forest. Plus, they were full of pride. Thinking they knew better. All of which resulted in foolishness and rejection. They rejected Jesus.

How about you? Are you so wrapped up in yourself you can't see him? Are you blind to who he is and what he did, even though it's staring you in the face? Are you too proud to give him a second thought? Don't be foolish.

Third . . .

Weak men still fear him (v3,7-8)

Now, that could be taken two ways. Positively or negatively. Positively, in that broken men, men who see themselves *rightly* in light of Jesus, still revere him. Still submit to him and trust him. That's the positive side. We're *all* weak, and some fear the Lord in the *best* sense of the phrase.

But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the kind of weakness exhibited by Herod. Weakness of heart. Fear of losing control. V7.

[7] *Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them* [determined 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.”* This was after his initial reaction in v3, of being *troubled*. Do you see it? [3] *When Herod the king heard this* [heard that the wise men were looking for another king], *he was troubled*.

Troubled because he felt threatened. And threatened because he was weak. All of which led to fear. Thinking his job was stake, his livelihood at risk, and his position in jeopardy.

And the people were no different. It says in v3 – *All Jerusalem* [was troubled] *with him* (3). So instead of *celebrating* a new king, they feared him. Who knew *what* he would require? Who knew *what* he would do? Who knew *what*he would ask of them?

Is that you? Are you afraid of what Jesus might require of *you* if you give your life to him? Are you worried about what he'll *change* in you? Because you kind of *like* you. Are you concerned about what he might *ask* of you?

If so, there's only one solution. Trust him. Step out in faith and trust him.

Because you can't *run* from him, and you can't *hide* from him. He'll *always* trouble you. His presence will *always* threaten you.

Why not let him change you inside out and top to bottom? Change you to live forever? Why not let him replace your fear, with peace? And blessing. And faithfulness.

Don't be fearful. Jesus knows you and loves you.

Fourth, from v9-12 . . .

Humble men still worship him (v9-12)

Men like the magi; the wise men. V9 – *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.* Pretty much sealing the deal that this wasn't some astronomical phenomena, but something supernatural; specific to the location of baby. The first GPS. And most accurate.

[10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [Because that's what happens when you find something you've been searching for so long and so hard. Not to mention some-one. The One.] *[11] And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

They *fell down*, v11, and *worshiped him*. Not because Jesus was exhibiting great power and miracles at that point. But because they *believed* he would. They *believed* he was the king. They *believed* what was prophesied. They *believed* the signs. They *believed* the Word.

So they worshipped him. They bent the knee, and exalted Jesus. Lowered themselves, and lifted him high. Gave him gifts, and withheld nothing. No hesitation and no shame.

That's humility. Where you worship the king no matter what. No matter who's around or what they might think. Inside these walls *and* out. Is it risky? Increasingly. Might it ruin your reputation? Yes. Is it worth it? Infinitely.

Don't be proud. Humble men still worship him.

And last . . .

Evil men still hate him (v13-18)

[13] Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." [14] And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt [15] and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [the prophet Hosea], "Out of Egypt I called my son."

[16] Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were

two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men [the time of the star and birth of Jesus]. Pure evil.

[17] Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: [18] "A voice was heard in Ramah [an area near Jerusalem], weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Rachel was one of the matriarchs of Israel from old. Jacob's wife. And just like those of her lineage wept in Jeremiah's day, 600 years *before* Christ, when the sons of Israel were taken into captivity; so too they wept in Jesus' day when Herod killed them. Killed the sons of Israel. Pure hate.

And it still exists. Evil men *still* hate him. Still hate Jesus. Persecuting and killing those of his *body*; the church. From Hindu extremists in India, to Islamic radicals in Nigeria. They kill the *people* of Jesus, because they hate *Jesus*.

➤ I don't imagine that kind of evil describes any of you, but I'm pretty sure some of you don't *like* him. Can't stand him. Hate his morals and ethic. Hate the conviction you feel because of him.

If that's you, I want you to know something. While you *hate* him, he *loves* you. He's not pleased with you in your thinking and rebellion, but he loves you. So much, that he gave his life for you; died for you. In your place, for your sins. Including your hatred, bitterness, and rebellion.

So if there's the least bit of conviction in your heart this Christmas, the least bit of softness, by all means turn to him. Seek him with the wisdom of wise men, and worship with the humility of humble men.

Prayer

God, we're so thankful for Jesus. Born to save the sons of earth, born to give us second birth. Life to the full and life forever. So we say with the angels, glory to the newborn king. Glory for the forgiveness he offers, the hope he brings, and the *light* he gives.

Candle Lighting

700 years before Christ (**Is 60:1**), the prophet Isaiah said – *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

As we light our candles and relive his birth, I hope your heart is aglow, and that you too rejoice *exceedingly with great joy*. Because the light of the world has come. So that we wouldn't have to remain in darkness, but have the light of *life*.

Merry Christmas