

Three Stories from the Birth of Jesus, Part 3, The Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, December 24, 2020

Hello, and welcome to our third annual children's Christmas Eve program here at Grace Fellowship Church. It's the third time that our children have served us in this way. And I just want to begin by saying the kids did a wonderful job, didn't they? They did an amazing job. I know that they worked hard to put all this together along with their families and our volunteers as well. We want to say a special thank you to them for what they did. We really appreciate it. And I have the privilege this evening to say a few words to bring all of this together and draw it to a close. I would like to do that by looking at a story that we've not gotten to yet in our series on the Stories from the Birth of Jesus. And so if you would please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, which is the passage we are in tonight. That's what we're looking at this evening. Please turn to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter two. And as you're turning there, we've talked about a lot of stories. Tonight, we've looked at a lot of events from the Old Testament such as the Garden of Eden, and the Exodus, and David and Goliath, which was great. I mean, all those stories were wonderful. They were very well told and illustrated by our children and volunteers. But one story that we've not gotten to yet is the wise men. Tonight, I would like to talk to you about the story of the wise men because it's one that we all can relate to. This is one that we all can identify with. And if you would read in your Bibles with me in Matthew chapter two, starting in verse one. There we read:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time his star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshipped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

I just want to say a few words about that. The New Testament doesn't tell us much about the birth of Christ. It doesn't tell us much about that event, but it does give us a few details. And one of them is what we read here; it tells us about the magi, or the *magos* in Greek from which we get the word magic, or magician. These guys were magicians in the ancient world. They were sorcerers or astronomers who look to the stars for guidance, kind of like an ancient version of our modern horoscope readers, or palm readers, or something like that. It's not the kind of guys you typically talk about at Christmas time, not the kind of men you typically associate with this holiday. And we might add that due to their popularity throughout the years, there's been a lot of legends that have sprung

up about them. There's been a lot of tales that have been told. For example, one of them is that there were three of them in number probably because they brought three gifts, probably because they presented Jesus with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And because of that, a lot of people have said that there were three guys to go along with those gifts and correspond with that. But in reality, we don't know if that is the case. We don't really know how many there were. The Bible doesn't say.

Another legend about these men is that they visited Jesus in the manger. The legend says they visited Him in the stable after the shepherds did, which is not true either. And in fact, if you look down in verse 11, there it says that they visited Jesus in a house. It says that they came to him after Joseph and Mary left the manger because as you can imagine, it would not be very comfortable living in a stable. Nobody would want to stay there for long and so after Jesus was born, they move into a house. And that's where the magi came to see the little baby. And we can mention other stories about these men. We can mention other tales that have been told. One man in the 12th century said he knew where their bones were. Another one said he knew what their names were. But all that's conjecture, it's not necessary because what matters about these guys is what they stood for. What matters about the magi is what they represented because they represented the Gentiles. That's why they are here in the Bible. That's why they are in the story. They represented those who were outside of the nation of Israel. I don't know if you realize this, but everybody that we've talked about so far tonight has been Jewish. Everybody that we've talked about so far tonight has come from the race of Israel except these men. Abraham, Jacob, Esau, David, Nehemiah...those are all Jews. Those are all Israelites. These guys are not. They came from someplace else. And yet look at how they responded to Jesus. I mean, just look at what these foreigners did. If you look back in verse one again, there it says, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who was born King of the Jews, for we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.'"

When you see it through our 21st century eyes, it doesn't come across well, but it would have meant a lot to the original audience because it was very difficult to travel back then. It was very hard to go anywhere because these were the days before planes, trains and automobiles; before modern machinery. And it was especially hard to travel if you were coming from the east because it was nothing but sand. There was nothing but desert and a wasteland out there. Matter of fact, we've often seen pictures of the magi traveling on camels through the desert which is a pretty decent depiction of what it would have been like. But what we read in these verses that is that didn't stop these guys. The difficulty of the travel didn't slow them down. They just kept coming to Jesus. Verse three also says they did it in amidst opposition; they came to Jesus in spite of resistance, because verses three through five say that their presence troubled Herod and all Jerusalem. In other words, the fact that they were there caused an uproar in the country. Everybody was in a tizzy. Why? Because another king had been born and Herod thought someone had come to take his place and everybody knew how murderous Herod was. Everybody knew that spelled trouble. So verse seven says that he examined the wise men, put them to the test, questioned them and queried them. In verse 12, at the end of the story says they tried to kill them or it implies that because an angel appeared to them and warned them not to go back to Herod. Angels appeared to the shepherds. Now an angel appears to these guys and tells them to flee for their lives. But that didn't stop them either. They didn't turn them away, not did it even dampen their spirits, because if you look in verse 10, it says that they came to Jesus with joy; they came to Him with great joy or exceedingly great joy. I don't know about you, but when I'm at the end of a trip, I don't have a lot of joy in my heart. If I've been traveling for days and days and days through the desert through the wasteland, I'm not very happy about that. These guys were very different. They had exceedingly great joy. Verse 11 says they worshipped Him when they saw Him. They weren't just on a sightseeing tour. They were

there to worship and praise this Child because they knew He was the Son of God. It also says that they gave Him gifts, expensive gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh that would have cost a fortune. A lot of people wonder how Joseph and Mary, these poor kids, have enough money to flee to Egypt later on in the story? Well, they got the money from the gifts from the wise men. This funded their journey into Egypt. But the point is that these men did all this as Gentiles. The point is that they did all of this as those who are outside the nation of Israel. We don't know where they learned all their information about Christ, we don't even know really what they knew. Some have said they probably learned quite a bit from the Jewish exiles who left Israel and gone to different parts of the world. I probably would have learned some things from them. But the point is, by contrast, look at what the Jews did. By contrast, look at what King Herod and those who were inside the nation of Israel did, they did nothing, didn't they? They didn't lift a finger to serve Christ. They knew where the Messiah would be born. They knew where He would come from. In fact, they told the wise men; they informed them, but they didn't care. He had been nothing at all to them because they had grown apathetic. Their hearts had grown cold. And all this leads me to ask you the question: can you relate to that? Can you relate to the apathy of these people? Has your heart grown cold to Jesus today? Has your heart grown hard and different to this Savior? And as you read this story, as you look at this event, and you see these two responses, which one do you identify with: the Jews or the Magi? Which one do you say describes you: the Herod or these foreigners who gave everything and risked everything and laid it all on the line? I ask this, friends, because I think if we were honest about it, most of us would relate to the Jews or King Herod in this story. Because we hear all the stories this time of year; we hear all these wonderful things that the children told us about Abraham, and Moses and David, and Nehemiah and the birth of Jesus. And we don't care. We hear all these things. And it often means nothing to us, because we've heard it all before. This is all old news to us. And I just want to say if that if that describes you tonight, there's a solution to that. If that's where your heart is that this evening, there is an answer to that. And the answer is that you need to go back to this, you need to go back and remember what God has done for you. He took you in as an outcast. He took you in as a foreigner, because you were once just like the magi, where you are once an alien and a stranger and a nobody and you were cut off from the promises. You were cut off from salvation, but God saved you. He forgave you. And he did all this through Jesus. Our church, maybe more than some other churches know what it's like to be foreigners, don't we? We have so many people in our congregation from outside of Canada who have come in and you know, the struggle and challenges and all that that goes with that. You were once that way spiritually. You were once outside all of this. And God changed that for you through this sweet little baby in the manger. And you need to go back to that. You know, it's been said that Jesus died so that you might live. He was refused and rejected and treated like trash. So you might enjoy the opposite of that. So you might be accepted into His kingdom. And there's no better time of the year to remember that than Christmas time.

The story is told about the time a missionary visited some tribesmen in China and he gave them a copy of the Bible-first Bible they ever had, which they read. And they came to the passage which says, "If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." And they were so impressed by that they were so moved by that, that they literally made three crosses one for each of them, and they carried around them around everywhere they went. And I mean, everywhere: to their jobs, homes, marketplace, until the missionary came back and found out about it. And he explained to them that that was just figurative. But the point is that they care. They cared. They didn't know much, but they were moved by what they knew. They didn't understand much, but they were affected by it. And my friends, does all this stuff still affect you today? Does the Christmas Story still move you and move your children? That's why they put this program together. That's why they went through all the trouble. It moved these Wiseman; it had moved these foreigners from the east. That's why they went

through all the trouble they did. Will you let it move you today? Listen, brothers and sisters, you can't follow Christ and sit still. You can't follow Him and not be moved.

So let me pray that the Lord would use it in that way. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for what we have seen and heard tonight, for the words of the children, from the lips of babes. We've heard the Gospel story of how we were lost in sin. We were dead in sin. All we did was sin. The human race has done that from the very beginning. And so in light of Your mercy and grace and kindness, you have sent us a Saviour. The Saviour was born like us. He grew up like us. He was treated, tempted, tried like us, yet, unlike us, He never sinned. on You have used that Saviour to give us forgiveness of sins and Lord I I pray that we would never forget that. I pray that our hearts would never grow cold to that message. I thank you for the chance to worship in this unique way. Even though it's challenging this time of year, not being able to be with our loved ones and our church family face to face because of the the Coronavirus, Lord, we're still grateful to be able to worship in this way. Would you use this in our lives? Would we be drawn back to Christ? We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, that concludes our service and our program for this evening. May the Lord bless you until we meet again.