

Show of hands, how many of you are bad at losing belongings? Keys, wallet, ear phones, money, kids, clothes, reading glasses for all the people with bad eyes, phones, tv remote... How much time do you think you spend a week, or month seeking for lost belongings? Interestingly, pixie research reveals that the average american spends around 2.5 days a year seeking for lost belongings, and that we spend about 1-10 minutes looking for those belongings which doesn't seem so bad at first, but that adds up to almost 6.5 months of our lives which is equivalent to 5,000 hours of us seeking what we have lost.

Outside of personal possessions, most of us spend a lot of time seeking things that we think will better our lives. We spend time seeking better jobs, relationships, netflix shows, places to eat, fulfillment, purpose, pleasure, and to be honest not all of those things are bad for our lives, but if we would examine our lives this morning; I'm sure we could all agree that we seek other things more than we seek our Heavenly Father!

Welcome to the Christmas season here at Vertical Church! In the next 3 weeks, we are going to take a biblical look at the wisemen/magi of scripture. We're not just going to take a look at their story though, we're also going to examine our lives in reflection of their story as well. Over the next 3 weeks, we're going to ask these 3 questions:

What does it look like to seek Him?

What are you bringing?

And What do you do when you've found him?

Christmas time is a time we are all familiar with what it feels like to seek things. We seek presents for our loved ones, we seek the presents we purchased and forget where we put them, we seek batteries at 3 in the morning, we seek the perfect lights displays, we seek to avoid hearing "Last Christmas" by Wham. We seek a lot of things, and so often we say things like we need to "put the Christ back in Christmas" or some other semi passive aggressive statement that we need to love Jesus more, but the reality is that is only going to happen if we individually make that decision in our hearts. You determine what you are seeking. It's a choice you have to make, and it's one we see the Magi make with great effort. Today, we wanna give you 3 takeaways that reflect that great effort that the magi made that we can also make in our own lives, lets pray!

Just for your information and understanding, the only scripture about the Magi/Wise Men is found in 18 small verses in Matthew chapter 2. There are more verses about bathroom usage in the Bible than there are about these icons of Christmas. But there is still a lot we can learn.

Matthew 2 (NIV)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem **2** 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."

We see that they are from "the East," most likely Persia, or modern-day Iran. This means the wise men traveled 800 to 900 miles to see the Christ child. Tradition (NOT THE BIBLE) has these Magi as representing Arabia/Ethiopia, Persia, & India. We often label them as the three wise men, or the three kings, but there's nothing in the Bible that actually indicates that other than the number of gifts given. There could have been two, or there could have been a dozen, but we don't actually have that detail. Tradition says that there were three and that their names were Gaspar/Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar/Balthazar. We don't actually know any of the details about the men, but there are impressive things scripture does show us.

These men traveled hundreds of miles based on a star. Let me just ask yall, how many of you are really good with directions? Like you don't need to use a GPS to travel city to city and state to state? You just have a solid knack for following instructions? Some of us won't travel to Wal-Mart without a gps. Some of you probably used your GPS to get here this morning out of sheer habit. These men followed a star for 800 miles and managed to arrive within a 10 mile radius of where the Messiah was born. That's impressive. You know what I'll get if I try to use a star to navigate with? 2 things: A: Lost B: A crick in my neck. These men chose to seek the Messiah. With a harrowing journey ahead of them and not much guidance to follow. On foot that's 280+ hours, 12 days of non stop motion. Most of us don't go 100 miles in a car without taking a break. And since in most of our cultural depictions of the wisemen we see that camels are usually part of the story. Camels can usually travel 25 miles per day with a full load. So if the Magi used camels for this journey it would have been roughly a 35 day trip. These men set out after seeing a sign, and set off on a month-long journey at least after gathering preparations, gifts, planning, charting, mapping, and all the efforts to make the trip a success. Which gives us our first takeaway:

#1: If we are truly seeking after Jesus, we have to be willing to follow beyond our comfort zone

Scripture shows us what it looks like for people to turn from following Jesus when their comfort zone is threatened.

Matthew 8:18-22, "18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." 21 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Jesus warns these people that if they are going to follow him, their home and security has to be something they must be willing to let go of. He also warns the disciple that if you aren't willing to prioritize Him over family and familial obligations, you are going to find following Him incredibly difficult. There is nothing wrong with having a home or taking care of your family, but as many of us can attest, if you are waiting to have your home completely in order, or your family be at peace and rest before you actually decide to act and follow through with seeking Jesus, you aren't going to go very far. If you are waiting for everything to be "just right" before faithfully

following Jesus, then you will probably end up never following Jesus; which is why most of us are seeking other things over Him....

Matthew 19:16-22, “**16** Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” **17** “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” **18** “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, **19** honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” **20** “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” **21** Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **22** When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

The rich young ruler hit a line he was no longer willing to follow Jesus, and finances may not be it for some of us, but there is usually a line nonetheless. It may be a certain relationship or relationships that really aren't relationships, it may be your finances, your pride, your status, your pleasures, but if there is something in your life, is it really worth more than Jesus to you?

Back to the magi

When they arrived in Jerusalem they were incredibly close to where the Messiah had been. (only 10 miles away, name a town nearby your location). They arrived there, but didn't know what to do next. So what did they do? They asked around. They asked so much that it affected the people they were asking and even reached the 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.’” *Prophecy from Micah 5:2*

They asked questions to the point that people had questions themselves. The magi were open about what they were seeking after, and that caused an impact.

If people were to judge what you are seeking with your life, solely based on what you talk, ask, or post about what would they assume you are seeking? Based on some of what we share, people would think we are looking for Validation, relationships, healing, vengeance, material possessions, or to just provoke others. Most of our conversation doesn't tell the world we are seeking after Jesus, most of our conversations tells the world we are seeking after things that please ourselves, elevate ourselves, hype up our own names, build our own brands, compete with others, and justify our sins..

In **Matthew 12:34** Jesus tells the Pharisees that what comes from their mouth, is an indication of what is already in their hearts.

34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Which leads us to our second takeaway...

#2: Our communication shows what we are seeking

The Magi's pursuit reached all the way to the King and even had him call in all the chief priests and teachers of the law. The way they were seeking reached the highest levels of leadership in the region. This wasn't an overnight instance. Their seeking infiltrated through the area and created change. **Is the way our church seeking Jesus impacting anything beyond these walls? Is the way you are seeking Jesus impacting your community and circle of influence?** Can you imagine how frustrating that must have been for these men to travel this far, and not find what they thought they'd see. They arrived at this town, asking questions, getting no answers, and the people's response was a disturbed one.

Their initial response would have told them that they were in the wrong place, the wrong time, that their journey wasn't a success. How many of us would have given up at this point? **But we see that it is important to keep seeking even when it doesn't seem like it's going to be immediately fruitful.** Jesus teaches us that seeking is an ongoing process,

Luke 11:9 "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you." - NLT

Their persistence paid off, and ours will too! Do not give up on what you're seeking from The Lord this morning! The Magi's persistence brought them before the King of Kings, our persistence brings us before the King of Kings as well!

Back to Matthew 2.

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."

They got called before a King and handed over the piece of information they were missing and given instructions on how to proceed. We don't have a ton of knowledge on the Magi, but they were wise enough to follow a star across 800 miles and come close to their destination. They were wise in their own right, but they were also wise enough to listen. King Herod wasn't a good or godly man, but he had resources and access to information that they didn't possess, and information they hadn't acquired in their pursuits. They took that information and were willing to change their search based on the new information they acquired, and it shows us a valuable lesson which is our third takeaway

#3: Seeking means being willing to learn and change direction

What would the story have played out like if the magi had said “Forget the king and his chief priests and scholars, we’re the wise ones, this is where our search brought us, why should we go where he’s suggesting?”

How many of us have refused to listen to instructions in what we were seeking because it came from a different source?

They are from a different church, we can’t listen to them. They are from a different political party, we can’t listen to them. They posted something on social media I didn’t like, we can’t listen to them. They weren’t raised like we were, we can’t listen to them. They are not from our community, so we can’t listen to them.

If we had all the answers and information, we wouldn’t be seeking, we would have arrived, there is humility required to let others guide us when we are seeking, to let our directions change from their original course.

Proverbs 12:15, “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.”

Proverbs 19:20, Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

Being willing to change direction is a sign of wisdom & maturity and that you are serious about what you are seeking. Not being willing to change direction is like a phrase doomed churches have uttered for generations “That’s not how we’ve done it before.” That means you’d rather be comfortable and lost, than uncomfortable and actually find what you seek. The magi were willing to change direction and look where that brought them.

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.

Worship Team Comes Back Up

What would’ve happened if the Magi would have stayed in Jerusalem waiting for Jesus to show up where they were? Btw, we all have a tendency to wait on Jesus to show up where we are and change things when Jesus is waiting on us to take that next step of obedience. The Magi came to realize they weren’t where they belonged and it would take a step of faith to continue on in their journey. When they started out towards Bethlehem the star they once followed rose again. Some of us are waiting for Jesus to show us the way before we take our next step when Jesus has already given us the answers! It takes the step to actually start the journey and Jesus can’t lead us if we’re not actually following Him.

As we close today,

Invitation:

Are you as an individual willing to leave your comfort zone to seek after Jesus? What is God calling you to do?

How about as a church? Where do we need to abandon our comfort zones?

What are you sharing with the world? Are you showing that you are seeking Jesus or just that you want people to notice what you are doing so you can get applauded?

Are we willing to learn and change to be able to actually arrive at our destination or are we condemned to do what we've always done in a purgatory or repeated dead end spiritual cycles?

Pray