

Sermon Title: “**Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light**”

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Matthew 2:1-18

## Introduction

*“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19*

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Standing Firm** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an **upward, consistent, contagious, and outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



*“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”*

**-Matthew 4:19**

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

### **I. Seeking Troubles the Complacent (Matthew 2:1-3)**

*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 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.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” -Matthew 2:1-3*

*Troubled.* In the Greek this means *to become restless, losing sleep with fear or dread.* What an odd reaction for the king of the Jews and the heart of the Jewish community. This chapter begins with wise men from the east having undertaken a long journey into the very heart of the

Jewish world seeking their newborn king. They came looking for someone no one else was aware of or even expected to arrive. How were they not aware Jesus was coming? I believe it is for the same reason the church today misses the leading of the Holy Spirit. We have been hurt by the past, given up on God's promises, and accepting this present life is the best there is, so make the best of it. Stop being a witness to the world around us and instead partner together for mutual benefit.

Today's message is about much more than wise men from the east or kings and kingdoms.

Today's message is a call to be the living church- filled, empowered, and led of the Spirit of the Living God for the Glory of the true Messiah and King, Jesus.

Today's message invites us to look at our own hearts and make the decision to pursue Jesus with all that we have! *So, hold on, here we go!*

## **II. Path of the Complacent Church (Matthew 2:3-9a;16-18)**

*“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘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.’” **-Matthew 2:3-6***

Herod was not a true king; he was a political puppet of Rome put in place to manage the Jewish people who were presently a part of the Roman Empire. Everything about their way of life- from community structure to religious conviction and worship was under the umbrella of Roman Peace. As long as they submitted to the tune of Rome, they were blessed with liberties by Rome. And under Rome, there was no room for a Messiah and a Kingdom not of this world.

Herod and Jerusalem do not represent the whole of the Nation of Israel, but they represent the leadership and religious influence among the Nation. The Temple resided in Jerusalem and leveraged control and influence beyond the city walls. Herod the king bridged the Temple and Rome in ways that flowed money to make the Temple beautiful in the eyes of the world and gave Rome allegiance and taxes to support their militant endeavors. In today's world, this would be a church in partnership with the government under the guidance of political opinion and direction. As it was for Herod and Jerusalem then, it is for any church today- such partnerships come at a cost that brings sin into their doors and becomes the their influence.

*How did it get this way?* I believe the text offers us three reasons that contribute to this state.

1) *A wounded heart.*

**A painful yesterday guides them *today* into a *tomorrow* away from God.**

Two kings from Israel's past would set the course for the Nation in two very different directions. Beginning with *King David*, we have the birth of the promise of leadership for the Nation that would lead into worship of the living God and life abundant. Ending with *King*

*Jehoiachin* we have the promise of the lack of leadership, leaving the nation to drift away from God into worship of themselves. One would lead to *life*, the other to *death*.

*“The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” -Psalm 132:11-12*

It was on this platform of great promise the Nation would struggle with ups and downs that seemed to see kings lead the nation a little bit lower each time they turned their hearts from God. Ultimately this led into the reign of *Jehoiachin* who was so bent on the direction of his dad before him he only reigned for three months and ten days. His father, *Jehoiakim* did much evil in God’s eyes and acted selfishly toward the people he was leading. This included taxing them beyond what they could pay and forcing them to build his palace without pay (slavery for taxes they couldn’t pay). God broke the Nation through Babylon where *Jehoiakim* (*Jehovah raises up*) was put in chains and died horribly along with Temple treasures being taken back to Babylon to cover the costs of war, and his son King *Jehoiachin* (*Jehovah establishes*) soon after.

*“Thus says the Lord: ‘Write this man (Jehoiachin) down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.’” -Jeremiah 22:30*

Israel’s conquerors put in their own king, *Jehoiachin*’s brother *Zedekiah* (*Jehovah is Righteous*) to rule until he failed to obey Babylon, and that was the end of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Throne of Israel. What could have been with God, was not because of hearts unwilling to embrace Him. Even in our *sin*, in our *rebellion*, we see God who is Sovereign by raising up kings, establishing their time in office, and ultimately sees their acts and efforts honor His will. Jesus was still going to come; but for many this was the painful end they could not heal from. Even fourteen generations later in Herod’s day this wound guides their hearts.

## **2) A complacent heart.** *A Present Comfort lost sight of Eternal Joy*

When people embrace the enemy’s lies that this life is all there is, when we choose to disregard God’s Word we no longer hear His Voice. We miss His invitation and lose out on the work He is doing. Herod was Rome’s appointed king, and this relationship financially provided for the Temple religious leadership. This relationship governed by politics benefited their power and influence. They were complacent with how things were, and not open to any change that may jeopardize what it is they have and value.

This brings us to our text; Herod asks the religious leaders to look into the same manuscripts the Wise Men had read to determine where this king was to be born. Dear saint, please note they had the Word of God, just like the Wise Men. A living and dying church can both stand upon the Word of God. Both can lay claim to its message and promises. *Yet without faith it is impossible to hear His voice or be led by His Spirit.* They rightly determine Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. But that is the extent of it- the Spirit does not speak beyond the words they

read. (Note: I wonder if this is how the devil can read and know scripture so well yet still be blindsided by its life through us?)

### 3. A *deaf* and *blind* heart.

*“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.” -Matthew 2:7*

Herod nor the religious leaders could hear God beyond the text. Realizing that they are both deaf and blind to what the Spirit is speaking and showing the wisemen Herod privately inquires from them what God is not giving to him. (Share story of dad if time)

*“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. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.’” -Matthew 16:16-18*

One cannot know the joy of the Lord without being in the Lord. Herod learned this quickly at the absence of the wise men. Leadership not plugged into God but depending on another's relationship with God is like the pastor who preaches another's sermons. It lacks life. Echoed in Matthew's narrative are the words of the prophet Ezekiel,

*“The word of the Lord came to me (Ezekiel): ‘Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.’” -Ezekiel 12:1-2*

In this troubled place, Herod who is pursuing death can only bring forth the fruit of death. In rage he wields the sword blindly at all the boys near this prophecy being fulfilled in order to stop what God is doing. As failed Pharaoh so long ago, so fails Herod. Like the god they serve, they share in his defeat. ***This is the path of the complacent church. A wounded heart that does not heal accepts this and from this place of pain hurts others.*** Lives are hurt. Children are murdered, families torn apart. By the very political king and religious leadership on the tab of Rome, those complacent got a taste of the eternal death- the pain and anguish that awaits those who place their trust in anything but the true King of Kings, and Lord of Lords!

### **III. Path of the Seeking Church (Matthew 2:7-12)**

*“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 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.’” -Matthew 2:7-8*

Against the dark backdrop the light of God's love shines with incredible invitation. This light which began with God's promise to Adam, continued through to Abraham, and was confirmed

in David would eventually arrive the country these wise men were from. Amidst the broken experiences Israel as a Nation had with God due to their sin, and the resulting destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, this was far from the end of God's love. This wound Israel experienced brought healing to the Nations. God's Word would go to Babylon with His people and through the faithfulness of Daniel, Jeremiah, and others generations later would be able to read of God's promises and believe in them for themselves!

What I love about God, His Word, and this story is that it doesn't matter the color of our skin, the background of our lives, or even how dirty and disqualified we may be. What matters is if we are willing to believe what we read and humble ourselves before the God of all. If we are, His Spirit will press into us with a desire to seek more of Him. This seeking will always be in sync with the will of God toward life eternal in His Son. Like these wise men, a seeking church is one that possesses:

1) *A **listening** heart.*

*“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” **-Proverbs 2:1-5***

While David's son Solomon compiled these Proverbs, having probably authored many of them himself, he pleads with his son with the heart of a father to do more than just read these words. *Hear them-* means to incline our ear or bend it toward the direction these words are sourced from. Do not just listen but hear- *take hold and feast on them.* Wisdom is living these words out- being transformed by them. *This is the work God's Spirit does in us!*

A seeking church is wise- hearing and receiving, feasting, and being transformed by God's Word. *The wise men from the East read these words of Jeremiah like Herod and the Temple leaders, yet they could **hear** God's voice in and through them whereas they could not.*

2) *A **guided** heart.*

*“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. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” **-Matthew 2:9-10***

Unlike a regular star or comet, this appears to be a supernatural occurrence similar to that of the **Shekinah Glory**, meaning *he caused to dwell.* A supernatural appearance of God's Glory in the natural world. Like Israel of Old when they were newly delivered from Egyptian Bondage,

*“And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by*

*night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.” -Exodus 13:20-22*

Regardless of what motivated Herod, whether his interest was genuine or not, the wise men did not allow his lack of wanting to go with them or lack of even awareness of Jesus’ birth slow their endeavor. They were seeking this king with or without Herod or the Temple leadership. When they arrived, when the star rested and they reached their destination they were overwhelmed with joy!

3) *A seeing heart.*

*“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. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.” -Matthew 2:11-12*

Seeing the star rest over the home, entering and seeing Jesus with Mary they fell down and worshiped him. **Fell down and worshiped** means they literally *lost the strength to stand before Him and naturally fell in worship of Jesus!* No one can stand in His Presence- all will bow and confess He is Lord! Oh, to do this now in this life before Him as our Savior rather than at that moment as the Judge of all!

*“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” -Job 42:5*

The offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were items fit for royalty. This whole scenario Matthew narrates is the vision Isaiah received of this incredible moment of light piercing the darkness:

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.” -Isaiah 60:1-6*

These wise men were the beginning of the Gentile Nations coming to this Jewish King who would become the Messiah of the world bringing His Kingdom with salvation and healing for all who will come to Him by faith! In Christ Alone, in His Kingdom Alone is true healing for all of people of all nations.

*“through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” **-Revelation 22:2***

Further, God intervened and directed these wise men through a dream to navigate the deceptive heart and intention of Herod. The enemy can read God’s Word like you and me, he may even be able to quote it better than you and me, *yet he cannot hear God’s voice and be led by Him!*

A seeking church is one that possesses a **listening** heart to hear God’s voice in His Word, is humble enough to be **guided** by Him, and able by faith to **see** Him in overflow of worship!

#### **IV. A Seeking or Complacent Church?**

**Wisdom** is **seeking** after Jesus toward life. Like the wise men, the healing of their Nation began with their own healing in seeking Jesus for themselves. We cannot be a seeking church without seeking Jesus daily for our own lives. Being in God’s Word to hear Him, be guided by Him, and seeing Him in worship and adoration.

To the seeking church God’s Spirit speaks through His Word along with His Creation and direct vision and dreams. All of our life can be guided by Him for His Glory.

**Foolishness** is being **complacent** with what we have and choosing to continue in our wounds rather than being healed. From this place of surrender we are already defeated, hurting in our own lives we can do little but bring hurt to others. We rely on those who are running after Jesus, hire and desire to have what they have with Him without the intention of walking with Him ourselves.

While I presented this message as a comparison between a seeking and complacent church, for the most part every church is made up of seekers and complacent. What differs is the voice and influence one has over the other. My prayer is that the influence of those seeking Jesus- experiencing the voice, guidance, and vision of the Spirit sparks desire for your own lives to have. This is not a gift to the few, but an offer for all.

*“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.” **-Jeremiah 29:13-14***

You say, Pastor I feel like I am just lost. I want to seek the Lord, to know His salvation, healing, deliverance- to be a part of His family and Kingdom. I just feel like I am too lost to seek Him. Dear one, I have incredible news for you from the lips of He who loves you,

*“And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’” **-Luke 19:9-10***

***Today, the Spirit is guiding you to Jesus, the perfect light!***