

Wise Men Still Seek Him

(Reading for January 5, Matthew 2)

I. Introduction

- A. This week, we began the effort to read through the New Testament in 2010
1. We say that we believe the Bible is the word of God (**Heb 4:12**)
The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
 - a. If we really believe that, then we will seek to study and know it
 - b. To stress this effort, sermon & group lesson will come from our reading
 2. What is rather different about our plan is that we're reading only the NT
 - a. **Benefits:** Readings are short (chapter long), focus on Jesus, no Leviticus
 - b. **Problems:** It means that we're not reading a big part of Bible (*next year?*)
 - 1) It meant we started our effort with Matthew's genealogy (thrilling)
 - 2) It also meant we start with Jesus birth— just past Christmas season
 - c. The sermon text I've chosen (*Tuesday reading*) is about the wise men
- B. This isn't a Christmas sermon—we'll end up in a different place (**Matt 2:1-4**)
1. The word *magi* (Gk *magoi*) is from a Persian word for “*priest*” (*root of magic*)
 - a. Most of what we think we know about them is from church tradition
 - 1) Usually there are three, from the gifts (*the Eastern tradition has 12*)
 - 2) By the 3rd century, the magi were seen as kings (“*We Three Kings*”)
 - b. But the Magi were originally a class of Median priests (*today the Kurds*)
 - 1) Daniel was “*chief of magicians, enchanters, astrologers*” (**5:11**)
 - 2) Jeremiah refers to one as the “*Rab-Mag*” or “*Chief Magi*” (**Jer 39:3**)
 2. **Point:** So the Magi were a well-known ancient class of wise men
 - a. They saw the Bethlehem star in east because they were looking at sky
 - b. They saw it as a sign because that is also what they did—looked for signs
 - c. They reported to King Herod because that is also what the Magi did
 - 1) Herod and all of Jerusalem were disturbed by Magi's visit (**Matt 2:3**)
 - 2) Why? Because kings took the reports of Magi very seriously
 3. If Magi were Persian (*as generally thought*), they travelled over 1000 miles and it took them more than a year (*Herod killed babies under 2 years old*)

II. Why Call the Magi?

A. **Question:** Why did God announce birth of Jesus to these Magi from the Orient?

1. I think we can get the point of why the angels appeared to the shepherd
 - a. Shepherds in the first century were very much social outcasts
 - 1) They were dirty, smelly, low-class loners excluded from polite society
 - 2) They were seen as gypsies who would rob you blind in had chance
 - b. Including shepherds at the nativity shows that God accepts outcasts
 - c. These were the folks Jesus preached to; it makes sense they were at birth
2. But does it make sense that God called pagan stargazers to His Son's birth?
 - a. Generic term divination, seeking signs, is condemned (**Deut 18:10-11**)
"Let no one be found among you... who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead"
 - b. Searching for signs in sky was for pagans, not God's people (**Jer 10:2**)
Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them
 - c. So why did God announce the birth of Jesus to Magi from the east?

B. Was the invitation to Magi making a similar point about the Messiah?

1. Isaiah said that the Messiah would be a light to Gentiles (**Isa 42:6**)
I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison
 - a. God's promise all along was to bring Gentiles into the covenant
 - b. Messiah would not only restore Israel, he would include Gentiles
2. Luke tells us of something that happened before the Magi came
 - a. Jesus was circumcised (8th day); after 33 days, Mary was purified
 - b. While offering sacrifice of purification, they met the old man Simeon
 - c. God had told him He wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah
3. He was led to Mary and Joseph by the spirit and held Messiah (**Lk 2:30-32**)
Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel
 - a. Mary and Joseph hear Simeon proclaim their Son a light to Gentiles
 - b. Then sometime later, Magi from the east come bearing gifts of a king
 - 1) And they were led to worship the infant Messiah by the light of Star
 - 2) God announced the birth of Jewish Messiah to pagans? *Go figure!*

III. Wise Men Still Seek Him

- A. A survey was done in 2008 by *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*
1. Survey focused on those identifying themselves as Evangelical Christians
 - a. More than half (52%) said that world religions can lead people to God
 - b. 35% said Islam can bring eternal life; 26% said atheism can do the same
 - 1) So half of Christians believe that the Magi wasted their trip
 - 2) They could have remained star-gazers in the comfort of their home
 2. We live in a multicultural, pluralistic, religiously diverse culture
 - a. In that world, making exclusive claims about Jesus is terribly uncool!
 - b. More Christians are coming agree with George Burns' God in *Oh God!*
 - 1) John Denver asks George Burns (God) if Jesus was really his son
 - 2) George Burns has God answer, "*Yes, Jesus was my son, Buddha was my son, Mohammed was my son, you all are my sons and daughters*"
 - c. Many, even many Christians, see Jesus as important, but not exclusive
 3. The Magi could have visited any baby— because we're all God's children!
- B. Bible presents Jesus as the exclusive revelation of God and the only way to God
1. As Jesus faces the cross, he makes this exclusive self-disclosure (**Jn 14:6**)
I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me
 - a. Jesus is the **WAY** (Greek- "*road*" or "*route*"), not one way among many
 - b. Jesus is the **TRUTH**— not just one truth among many different truths
 - c. Jesus is the **LIFE**—shows us how God would live if God were human
 2. Such a claim would be arrogant if Jesus were merely human (**John 1:14**)
"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth
 - a. Notice the contrast John makes between Jesus and Moses (**John 1:17-18**)
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known
 - 1) The only One who can reveal God is the only one who has seen God
 - 2) In Jesus, God has "*moved into our neighborhood*" (**Jn 1:14**, MESSAGE)
 - b. And that makes Jesus' truth different from any other human teacher
 - 1) We can learn profound things from Moses, Buddha and Mohammed
 - 2) The **way to God**, the **truth of God** and **life in God** is ONLY in Jesus

- C. Most people in the world have no problem with Jesus as a person, a man
1. Most non-Christian world religions have a very high view of Jesus
 - a. In fact, many of the world's religions claim Jesus for themselves
 - 1) Islam sees Jesus as greatest prophet outside of Mohammed himself
 - 2) Hindus see Jesus as a great holy man; Jews respect him as a rabbi
 - 3) In Baha'i, he is divine manifestation; in Buddhism, he is wise teacher
 - b. Jesus is the most compelling person of history; many are drawn to Him
 2. At the same time, Jesus is a stumbling block and foolishness (**1 Cor 1:23**) *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles*
 - a. Peter says that it is Jesus is the stumbling stone some trip on (**1 Peter 2:8**) *"stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall"*
 - b. How can Jesus both draw people and at the same time trip them up?
 3. Because ultimately, Jesus claims to be the only way, truth and life
 - a. He claims God's identity, "I and the Father are one" (**John 10:30**)
 - b. He claims God's existence, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (**Jn 8:58**)
 - c. He claims God's prerogative and power to forgive sin (**Mark 2:10**) *So that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...*
 4. This is how Jesus saw himself; this is how Jesus reveals Himself to us

IV. Conclusion

- A. Sometimes Christians are portrayed as judgmental, arrogant & narrow-minded
1. And all too often, this has been slander of the worst kind—true slander!
 2. But when we suggest Jesus as only way, truth and life— **just quoting Him!**
 - a. Can God save people of other religions who don't know Jesus?
 - b. Prerogative of being God— can do what you want and not explain why!
 - c. If God does save other faiths, then it will somehow be through Jesus
 3. Our job isn't to judge; our job is point people to Jesus and live like Jesus
- B. God worked through the Magi, probably Persian and probably pagan stargazers
1. In Bible, God often honors honest truth-seekers who are outside covenant
 - a. These were pagans who saw the sign in the sky and came seeking Christ
 - b. But that may be the point— the light drew these wise men to Christ
 2. Wise men still seek him— are you seeking Him? Have you found Him yet?