

Wise Men: Seeking

Matthew 2:1-12

Christmas has changed a lot over the years. But the basic reason and purpose of Christmas hasn't changed one single bit. The characters and the Character of Christmas as God's gift to the world will always stay the same. We may wrap it in shiny paper. We may try to store it away with all the Christmas decorations, but like the star in the East, it will always be there guiding us back to the central purpose of Christmas, Salvation through God's unconditional love wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. That's what the Wise Men were seeking. And through that innocent baby, one of us and yet one with God, God was seeking each of us.

Only Matthew has the story of the visit of the Magi, the Scholars, the Kings or the Wise Men from the east. These characters of the familiar Christmas story don't really seem to fit in anywhere else. Who were they? Where did they come from? How far did they travel? Why were they there? Those are the questions preachers have pondered for years. The Scholars don't really know. There's a lot of speculation and that's why the title for these characters always seem to get translated differently. The various titles, at least in part, sort of defines what that translation assumes about these visitors.

We may not know a whole lot about the wise men but, from the story, we can know some things about them. While there are a lot of things the Wise Men can teach us, there are two which I want to lift up.

First, The Wise Men Sought Jesus. That was their whole purpose in this part of the story of Christ. The Wise Men came seeking Jesus.

When my son, Ben, was little, about 3 or 4, we would put out a wooden nativity set he could play with without fear of it breaking. I'll never forget his wide-eyed wonder and amazement while I was telling the story with all the characters. Then the two of us set it all up in a very solemn manner.

We set up each of the characters: Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men, the animals and shepherds and played around until we got all the right angles so you could see all the characters. The next day I came in and it was all rearranged. And that was OK, I knew Ben was fascinated with the set.

So, I unconsciously straightened all the characters again, leaving them in the same order Ben had put them, but turning them so you could see the faces of the Wise Men. A day or two later I noticed that they were all grouped closer together and the Wise Men were turned around with their back to the room. So, I started straightening them out again when Ben told me he had put them like that.

I asked him why. He said, "The Wise Men came to see the baby Jesus, right? Then they'd be looking at him and not out at the room, wouldn't they?" I couldn't argue with that. So, I didn't mess with the characters again.

Ben was right, the Wise Men would have been looking at Jesus. Jesus was the reason they traveled so far and so long. Of course, they'd be facing Jesus. Of course they'd be looking at Jesus. Because the purpose of the Wise Men was to seek Jesus.

What they did with whom they found we don't know. Some say there were 12 of them and they scattered throughout the world, most going to Spain, spreading the Good News. But we don't know. What we do know is their mission, their purpose, their destiny was to find the baby Jesus, and they did. They sought the child, Jesus

That's not all we learn from them though. We also learn that while The Wise Men Sought Jesus, Through Jesus God Sought Us.

Christmas isn't just about a few days off from work and school and presents and parties and family gatherings. It's the story of the birth of Salvation and Grace. It's the story of our second chance.

From my perspective it's the only way we can ever really make sense out of all the unanswered questions floating around in the world. This isn't some fairy tale. This is the thing we hoped for and wanted every day of our lives. We just didn't know it until we saw Him, heard Him and met Him. This is the promise of God, in the flesh.

When the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, goodwill towards all people." It wasn't just words of praise. It was a pronouncement of the promise of God. God's promise that we can have each day.

Hallmark cards have been saying it for years...."IF YOU CARE, THEN SEND THE VERY BEST!" God cares. God sent us the very best, not for one day a year, not for a season or a particular time, but for every day of our lives.

How many of you or your brothers had one of the big Lionel Electric Train Sets? Yeah, that's what we all wanted when we were younger. Especially that steam engine where the headlight worked and steam actually came out of the smokestack. That was the coolest.

I remember my brother and I playing with our train one day. He ran the train around the curves too fast, and it derailed. He bent over the train and tried to put it back on the track but wasn't having any luck. Dad saw what was going on and came over to help. He said, "You can't do that from above; you have to get down beside it." Then Dad lay down on the floor beside the train and track so he could see how to place the wheels of the train back on the track.

I happen to think that's a great way to think about the incarnation. Because of our disobedience to God in our lives, humanity had derailed. Our lives needed to be put back on the track of life. It couldn't be done from above; God had to come down beside us. That's what God did in Jesus. God took off the robes of heaven and put on the rags of our earthly existence. God clothed Godself in our flesh and blood and came to live among us in the person of Jesus.

Through Jesus, God Sought Us to show us and share with us God's Unconditional Love and Grace, through forgiveness and resurrection. That promise came wrapped in swaddling clothes.

The Wise Men's Character revealed God's Character. The Wise Men Sought Jesus, and Through Jesus God Sought Us to fulfill God's promise in our lives.

For forty-three years, at one minute after midnight on Christmas Eve, Bert Holloway of Cambridge, England, has handed his wife, Ethel, a love letter. The gift is a tradition that they started when they were first married. Mrs. Holloway says she treasures all the love letters she's received from her husband.

Every year at this time we celebrate the greatest treasure ever given to humanity. It was a love letter from God in the form of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. That's the Character of Christmas.

The Wise Men Sought Jesus and through Jesus God Sought Us. I hope you'll take the time this year to read that love letter. And then take the time to read it every single day.