

In a Moment

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The wisemen came looking for Jesus even at the inconvenience of the journey. How about YOU?

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."

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. (Matt 2-NIV)

Of all the holidays in a given year, Christmas more than any other holiday brings what some people call an "**Intensifying Dynamic**" into play. Somehow the Christmas season tends to make our highs higher and our lows lower.

Highs Really High

(1) There are young married couples in our church, who have newborn babies, and this will be the first Christmas that they will actually experience Christmas as a family.

With a little 10-month-old baby. It is going to make their Christmas high even higher. It will be the very best Christmas ever. **Emotions tend to multiply at Christmas.**

(2) Some of you are experiencing a joy filled Christmas because you have a job this Christmas. And you didn't last.

(3) You are married this Christmas; you were miserable last Christmas-I mean single.

(4) A loved one is home from military service and will be opening gifts as they have come back from the middle east. Having them is just off the chart.

(5) Some of you are Christians this Christmas and you really know what the deal is this time. And you are really looking forward to all the experiences associated with Christmas.

Lows Really Low

For others, this **intensifying dynamic** has worked the other way.

(1) When I hear of a couple having problems in a marriage, I think not during the holidays. Those kids are going to be robbed of the full experience because mom and dad can't get along.

(2) Some people meet me at the alter this time of the year and tell me they just got laid off. They go really, now, at Christmas.

(3) Others are having surgeries, so they are hanging around hospitals and waiting rooms, elevators, cafeteria and sitting in little family lounges with small TVs and small Christmas trees.

Nobody wants to spend Christmas in hospital. Out of work. Or wondering how surgery will go in the New Year.

For so many it is hard to believe that this stuff is just going to go down during Christmas. The Worry. The Fear. The Anger.

The more I have thought about this **dynamic of intensification** I have wondered does God have an answer somewhere in the Christmas story?

As I have been reading about Mary and Joseph I thought, everything about their Christmas produced higher highs and lower lows.

As we finish out 2024, it is a surprise visit from some Kings that arrest my attention. Now, the account of the Wiseman from the east is more than just a side bar story in the Christmas narrative. I think we could all agree on that.

Magi are prompted by God to go and see this baby born that will be the king of the Jews. Off they go and they soon find a baby wrapped in mom's arms and they worship the child king.

And it is these Wise Men that packed their bags and traveled from the east to Bethlehem to confirm what was spoken by the prophet Micah in Micah 5:2,

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans^[a] of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel, (Micah 5:2)*

How quickly the world changes as a star vectors some Wisemen to go on a journey for a KING.

I love that word. Vector. It sounds like Victor. Victory. It comes from the world of mathematics and physics. It has a dual purpose as a **quantity having direction** as well as **magnitude**, especially as determining the position of one point in space relative to another.

It is a strong word for describing the activity of God. In a moment God placed a star in the heavens that provided a special prophetic message. But that message was not scene, at first by the holy men or priests in Israel. It was seen by some Magi, kings in Babylon.

Reading the story as told by Matthew the tax collector, I can't help but notice how much **Matthew loves the magi**.

Now, observe this with me...**Matthew gives the Magi more space of text than he gives the birth of Jesus. Wow! What a head popper.**

That's not a slight. In fact, I think it is by God's design since he is the author of these recordings of Jesus birth.

Matthew never mentions the shepherds or the manger setting. Why are the magi so important to Matthew? Remember, he is the one that made sure that his friends met Jesus.

¹⁰ As^[a] Jesus^[b] was having a meal^[c] in Matthew's^[d] house, many tax collectors^[e] and sinners came and ate with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees^[f] saw this they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"^[g] ¹² When^[h] Jesus heard this he said, "Those who are healthy don't need a physician, but those who are sick do. (Matt 9-NET)

Let me make this blindingly clear-**Matthew is the disciple that is always thinking about those who are looking for Jesus.**

Is that true of you?

Can I suggest how quickly a person's world would change if Jesus were in their lives? Everyone's life would be better if Christ were in the center.

Let's read the text.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose^[b] and have come to worship him."

The first century journey that the magi took to find the king closely parallels the 21st century journey that I see people taking around Bethel and in my ministry in the city and around the world.

The wisemen from the east were counseling kings, offering interpretations of the stars and doing quite a bit of historical research to see if history had any hints or clues as to the unfolding of life's events for their nation.

I want to suggest to you that these wisemen were more familiar with ancient Israel and their history than most preachers give them credit.

While the nation of Israel lived in exile for 70 years, God was using a wisemen like Daniel to not only honor God and interpret some dreams but establish a heritage of history that would be passed on for many generations to come.

A school of magi under Daniel guidance grew up in the exile of Babylon. Jews had lived in the east for many years and Torah schools were educating Jews and those interested in Daniel's faith.

And many were interested since Daniel had just become the number 2 guy to the king.

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. (Dan 2-NIV)

Now, hundreds of years later, out of the middle east comes 3 magi that carry a call to see the King of the Jews. Why? Because these narratives and prophecies of the baby born in Bethlehem were a part of their scholarly learning.

This is what defined them as magi.

The learning of history and the connection of prophecy from one generation to the next is foundational to wisemen knowledge. And the prophecy that inspired them to be ready for the call from above. A call from God and an astrological call by a star is found in Psalm 72:10-11.

The magi had been pondering for some time that a star would rise indicating a king was to be born. Wow! What a thought.

How else could the Magi know to ask the question when they arrive in Jerusalem?

"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose^[b] and have come to worship him."

Well, they knew to ask it because their own destiny had been predicted in Psalm 72:10-11.

*May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
bring tribute to him.
May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him gifts.*

*11 May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him. (Psalm 72)*

Daniel was their jedi magi master. And the impact of his life was still being felt even in the Christmas narrative. As the magi travel, they talk about how fortunate they are to have access to the prophecies from long ago.

Ok, back to the application for today. Enough historical background for one sermon. God doesn't want us to miss the star and the seekers. It is easy to see why. Their story is our story. We are all travelers. We are all seekers. In order to find Jesus, every one of us **needs some help from a star**.

The story of the wisemen show us how God gives us direction, so we end in the same proximity and place of Jesus. The same room as Jesus. Doing what Jesus is worthy of- he should be receiving-worship from each of us.

Let's go back to that journey of the Wiseman, their path intersected a pathological earthly king named Herod. A paranoid guy that many know about. Herod blows a gasket, hearing that a new king is somewhere in the vicinity.

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. ^[a]"*

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."

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. (Matt. 2-NIV)

The Wiseman wisely exit the side door of the palace, and relocate the star, the star vectors them to the precise location where Mary, Joseph and Jesus were staying.

Herod was a crazed world leader that felt threatened with any rivalries and would stop at nothing until he was satisfied his throne and leadership was left unchallenged. He is responsible for one of the bible's greatest baby genocides and all of this happened at the time of the birth of the king.

Quick time out here: Just as king Herod complicated the Wiseman's journey; my experience is that everyone's spiritual journey and quest for a king gets **complicated** somewhere along the path. **Another way to say it:**

Everyone's quest for a KING gets blocked briefly.

(1)A smart businesswomen gets dragged to church by a colleague, and she says, "I am only going one time and then I want you off my back about the church thing."

She is not expecting anything to happen but in that Christmas Eve service, God touches her life. It is just enough of a spark that she decides that she is going to start a faith journey on her own.

But when she tells the guy she is dating that she is starting a faith journey, he freaks out:

Wow, you are drinking the religious Kool-Aid. You graduated top of your class at Stanford, and you are buying all this religious garbage and gobble-di-gook. Are you going to start sending money to televangelists too? Is that the path you are on? He becomes the cynic, he becomes the complicator, he becomes the Herod that blocks her path.

If this businesswoman is going to do a faith journey, she has to do it without him or maybe despite him. So here is a businesswoman that has to go it on her own, without a boyfriend's support.

Every serious Christ follower can describe in vivid terms, how there were barriers and obstacles to overcome on their journey toward the king.

Sometimes you get blocked by a cynical person.

Sometimes you get blocked by a set of difficult circumstances.

Sometimes you get blocked by a friend or family member.

Sometimes you get blocked by a teacher.

Sometimes you get blocked by doubt or pride.

You say wait a minute; I have been the king. I shouldn't go looking for another one. I like running my own program. And pride is a barrier.

My pastoral experience tells me that no one walks uninterrupted all the way to the king.

No one walks uninterrupted all the way to the KING.

The Wiseman had to deal with an ego-maniacal king, they didn't cower, they didn't cave, they didn't turn tale and run to their credit.

They persevered. And courageously continued their quest for the KING until they found him in that little stable in that blanket, God in the flesh.

The long-promised king. I challenge those of you about to start a journey, I challenge you to not let **anything**, or **anybody** block your path as you do your journey.

1. Don't let a family member **deter** you.

2. Don't let a business colleague **dissuade** you.

3. Don't let a dysfunctional church **damage** you.

4. Don't let confusion about the paths to God, **disillusion** you.

This is your journey, and it matters immensely. This is the most important quest you can take in this life, and it has implications for the life to come.

If you don't have a bible, take one out of the pew and start reading it in the book of Luke,

If you want some support and are not sure where to begin, we have bible studies that start in January.

If you have some hurts, hang ups and habit, join us at Celebrate Recovery.

If you are not much of a praying person, **pray the beginner's prayer:**

God if you are real, would you please disclose yourself to me. If you are real, would you please make yourself known?

Hebrews 11:6, "those who diligently seek after God will surely find him, that is the reward for those who do an honest journey.

One final reason for my fascination with the story of the Wiseman, has to do with what happens when they finally encounter the king.

When you experience the grace of God that your KING gives, you want to fall on your knees.

The bible says, "the star hovered over the house where Mary and Jesus were staying, and when they encountered this long-promised King for the first time, the Holy Spirit revealed-this is the King, this is the King."

They didn't know what to do, so they **fell to their knees.**

God used all the forces of Heaven to guide and guard the wise men. What about you?

The response to seeing the king, they worshipped this king.

***11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matt 2-NIV)*

Over my decades of pastoring, I have had the pleasure of watching 1000's of people encounter Christ for the first time.

The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to them. They often come to church for many months. And they put the puzzle pieces together. And then there is that one time when all the puzzle pieces fit together. And the Holy Spirit gives them eyes to see.

They grasp the enormity of his love for the first time.

The heights of his holiness.

The depths of his grace.

The breath of his compassion

The fullness of his forgiveness.

Can I give you some advice, for those who have discovered the King?
Maybe just a reminder.

When God sends a sign as a star-BE OBEDIENT.

When God nudges you to read your Bible and spend 15 minutes in a chair-Be FAITHFUL.

When God gives you an opportunity to worship and give gifts-BE WORSHIPFUL AND GENEROUS.

When people start walking with the KING, they get quite emotional. It blows their minds. These same people as they walk with Jesus for a while start giving gifts to the king. They give their very lives for his service in the world.

Let me say it again: After people start walking with the KING, they ask God to use their lives to further His purposes.

They say, "use every day of my life and remaining time on this earth, to further your purposes in the world, my king."

Nothing will give me greater delight than the thrill of you using my life in some small way to fix something that is broken in this world. Or to bless someone that has fallen into need or despair.

Use my life for your purposes, my king. Nothing would give me greater pleasure. If you know the king, you have said those words. They just come out of you.

And Peter tells us this will happen as a part of walking with the KING-
¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10-NIV)

I want to show you the words to a favorite Christmas song, and a song that is used all year.

I offer the words as invitation to Christ followers and Christ seekers to bow, offer worship and present yourself and your gifts to Jesus the King.

For many of you, you choke back tears and fight with your emotions when you sing it because this is...

So real. So raw. So, redeeming.

And you sing-O Come Let Us Adore Him, Because you do adore Him.

And you sing-He Alone Is Worthy, intellectually that all makes sense to you, you go, he alone is worthy,

...if I fix my affections on anybody else, I will surely be disappointed. If I put my affections on the king, he is worthy.

And you sing-We Will Give Him All the Glory. And you think of all the kingdoms that have come and gone. All the empires that were supposed to last throughout history.

Now they are on histories scrap heap.

And You sing-O Praise His Name Forever. And you think, there has only been one king from eternity past. Eternity future. And he is your king. And you love your king. And your king has shown his goodness and kindness to you.

You want to fall on your knees and say what a king. If you have decided to start your journey, don't let anyone deter you.

Don't let anyone dissuade you. Do an honest journey.

Let's sing with the worship team and you can take any posture you want. Bonnie and the team will finish the worship set and then Bonnie will pray and dismisses.