

Message Series: Preparing for the Savior.
Message 8: Seeking for the Savior. Matthew 2:1-12
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Wisdom, it comes in many different packages doesn't it. For some, it comes in the form of age. For others, it is gained from years of experience. And for others, it comes through much learning. Because of this there are many people remembered for their wisdom.

Having just been through the Christmas season, the men often remembered for their wisdom are the wise men who came to visit the Christ Child. I would like us to think about what made them wise.

This topic may seem out of place to you, with us being beyond Christmas, but it actually occurred close to two years after the birth of Christ and should be considered separately from His nativity.

And so we ask, what caused them to be considered wise? Was it their age? In the Far East, wisdom is often associated with age. Was it their experience? Many believe they were kings, if so; such men would have gained much wisdom in ruling their kingdoms. Or, was it their learning? Many believe they were philosophers and stargazers from Persia or Babylon, men esteemed in their day for their great wisdom.

It might surprise some that the Bible mentions none of these things; their age, occupation, or academic training. Instead, the Bible places the emphasis on an entirely different area: their actions. The actions they took in response to Jesus. And now, over 2000 years since the birth of Christ, it is still the same actions that turn fools into wise, and the seemingly wise into fools.

Open your Bible with me to Matthew 2:1-12...

In this passage there are **three actions** performed by these men from the east which will still transform people of our day into wise men, women, and children.

I. They Sought the Savior

We notice first that these men were wise because they diligently sought after Jesus. See verses 1-2...

Can you imagine being out on a clear night gazing into the heavens at the many different stars and upon seeing one brighter than all the rest, leaving behind all that you were doing up to that time in your life to follow after that star? What would people think of you? Certainly they would not identify you with the wise but rather the foolish. Today they might say you were chasing rainbows. Have you ever done that? They look so big and bright, close enough to walk to but with every step you take they get no closer. For most, following a star would offer no better prospect. But these men were convinced of its value.

Why?

Well, apparently, even in their distant land there were Jews that taught them about Israel's coming Messiah. In verse 2 when they came into Jerusalem, they kept asking, "*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*" So they had an understanding of the Messiah, the one coming to deliver His people.

Apparently they were also star gazers. They studied the heavens to determine time, seasons, changes in the weather, and whenever something unique happened in the sky they associated it with something God was doing.

Now some may laugh at that but the Apostle Paul said that even the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen in creation (Romans 1:20). And David said the heavens declare His glory (Psalm 19:1). And so, when this star appeared in the heavens it was so unique and different from all the rest they understood it as God's announcement of Messiah's birth. In verse 2, when they came into Jerusalem they said, "*We have seen his star in the east and have come.*" They left behind everything; their families, their positions in life, their homeland, to seek after Christ.

That would have meant traveling a very great distance. Some believe up to 2000 miles. Even in our day we don't enjoy traveling 2000 miles; it is expensive and tiring. But for them it meant months of traveling over rough terrain by foot or camel with a large caravan to carry all the supplies they

would need, at the risk of being overtaken by thieves and robbers who hid in the rocks along the way.

It took great diligence on the part of these men to even begin the journey. It was not going to be easy, it would be expensive, and can't you imagine the ridicule as they prepared to leave. *You guys are going to go look for a baby born king of the Jews! Why waste your time?* But they were convinced of the value of searching.

I wonder how they felt once they got to Jerusalem and started asking person after person, *"Where is he born king of the Jews?"* And every answer they got was negative, *"We don't know what you're talking about, leave us alone!* Don't you think they were disheartened? They came all that way, to His own people, and His own people knew nothing about Him. It took diligence to keep on asking and searching. What was it that drove them? I believe it was faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him."*

These men believed in God, they believed that the Christ was born, they believed he was sent from God, they believed God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, and so they came.

If this had been the birth of a normal king they would not have gone through the trouble. Kings are born all the time, but this was the King of kings, and they were convinced of the value of coming to Him.

Now, let me ask you, were they wise men or fools?

By the standards of their own day they were fools. Sure people were talking about the coming Christ, it was a good thing to do, and it brought comfort when their hearts were troubled. But surely it would be foolish to leave behind your family, job, and homeland to go to Him.

I remember shortly after receiving Christ as my Savior someone asked me where I had been. I told them I had received Christ as my Savior. They said, *"That's great but don't be a fanatic!"* It's great to know He is there but to be carried away by Him is foolish and fanatical.

By the standards of our day they would still be considered fools.

By the standards of their day and ours, those men from the east would not be considered wise but fools.

But by God's standards they were wise. In John 6, Jesus says, *He who comes to me will never hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst.* He was talking about that spiritual hunger and thirst that is only satisfied in coming to Him. Then He says, *He who comes to me I will by no means cast out, and he who believes in me shall have everlasting life.*

That is wisdom!

The men from the east were wise because they diligently sought after Jesus. People are still wise for doing so today.

II. They Worshipped the Savior

These men were also wise because they came to worship Jesus. Look at verse 2...

These men, whoever they were and wherever they came from, came to worship the Messiah. The word *worship* used here is only used throughout the New Testament for worshipping God. In the few places where men sought to worship other men they were strongly rebuked. These men had not come to simply pay homage to a new king, or to adore a young child, they came to worship the King of kings. And so, take a look in verse 11 at what happened when they found Him...

They fell down and worshipped Him, not simply as a man, but as someone much greater. And notice, there is no rebuke; Matthew's implication by the way he records this incident is that it was entirely appropriate since this child was Immanuel, God with us, God in flesh.

The thing which I find interesting is that no one else involved with this story sought to do so. The people of Jerusalem didn't even know what these men were talking about. *What do you mean, where is he born king of the Jews, Herod is our king!*

The chief priests and scribes, the religious leaders of the day, knew exactly where He was. See Verses 4-6...

We get the impression here that when Herod asked them where Christ was to be born they immediately had the answer. John 1:11 says, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*" They knew where He was but they didn't seek for Him, and they knew who He was but did not worship Him.

Why?

First, they were terribly afraid of Herod. He had a long history of putting people to death he suspected of trying to take his throne: members of the Sanhedrin, his wife, two sons, his mother-in-law, anybody he suspected, he put to death. And so when the wise men started asking about someone born king of the Jews, the whole community was troubled because they were frightened of Herod and what he might do.

Second, they did not worship Him because they were so absorbed in the letter of their religion that they lost the spirit of it. They knew the contents of Scripture. If you had a question they could give you an answer, but they did not discern the true meaning of Scripture. In Matthew 5-7 Jesus says repeatedly, "*You have heard (according to the letter of the law) ..., but I say to you (according to the spirit of the law).*" You see, they failed to apply Scripture to their lives personally.

In John 5:39-40 Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.*" They were too concerned with searching the written Word of God to notice Him who was the living Word of God.

Third, they were so taken in by the status quo they resisted any idea of change. Under the Romans these religious leaders had power and wealth, why risk that to worship a child. In fact, later when the ministry of Christ became a threat to their status quo their only concern was what it meant to their position and wealth. They were afraid that if people started following Jesus, the Romans would come and take their power away. To them religion was useful only when it served their purpose. In their quest for wealth and power they ignored Him born king of the Jews.

And then there was Herod; he was not at all indifferent. As soon as he heard of the question posed by the men from the east, he became extremely interested and wanted to get to the bottom of it. First he called in the chief priests and scribes to find out where the Christ was to be born. Then he secretly met with the wise men pretending that the desire of his heart was also to worship Him.

Now, let me ask you, out of all these different groups of people, who do you, think was the wisest?

The general population who had no idea what the wise men were talking about. They knew nothing of the things of God or what He was doing at that time. Were they wise? Apparently they thought so. Why waste your time with false hope? A lot of people today would agree. But willful ignorance of God is not wisdom, it is foolishness. In Romans 1 the Apostle Paul says, *“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness... so that they are without excuse because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, ... professing to be wise, they became fools.”*

How about the chief priests and scribes, were they wise? Again, they thought so. They had a good thing going. They were using religion to their advantage so that they enjoyed the best of both worlds. And as we look around at the religious world today, is there much difference? Even within our fundamentalist circles we talk a lot about what is right and wrong but let's face it, if it's not to our immediate advantage, we're not interested. That's not wisdom, that's foolishness. Hebrews 10:26 warns, *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment.”*

Well then, how about Herod, was he wise? I'm sure he thought so. His attitude was *if this is God's Messiah, I will kill Him*. Rather than wisdom, that seems like foolishness to me. But on a smaller scale we think the same way all the time. We set ourselves against what we know to be God's will and consciously seek to change it. But that's not the action of wisdom; it is the action of fools.

The men from the east were the only ones to demonstrate wisdom because when God sent forth His Son, they came to worship Him. There's a lot of talk about Jesus today. People talking about the real Jesus or the historic

Jesus, but very few will demonstrate the wisdom of the wise men from the east. Very few will worship Him.

III. They Gave Their Best to The Savior

There's one more action which illustrates their wisdom, they were wise because they gave Jesus their best. Look at verse 11...

Upon coming into the house and falling down and worshipping the Christ Child, they gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now, I believe that there's some symbolism to the gifts given, but I also think Matthew's primary lesson is this, upon our recognition of Christ there should be a surrender of our best.

Maybe some would say such gifts were impractical, much like Judas would later when Mary used a bottle of expensive perfume to anoint the head and feet of Jesus. But to God they were not only reasonable, they were expected. The unreasonable or foolish thing to do would be to think God should be satisfied with anything less. That was the problem people had in Malachi's day. They thought God should be pleased they offered anything at all. That was also the problem in Matthew's day. They thought their Jewish heritage, and possession of the Scriptures was enough. And so the people of Jerusalem and the chief priests and scribes, and Herod all had nothing to offer, because they failed to recognize Jesus for who he was.

That's the problem in our day too. We think God should be satisfied with anything we have to offer. A man once said to me, *"I suppose I should go to church this week that should satisfy God shouldn't it?"* We think God should be satisfied with whatever we give. We give less than 10% of our income because we need the rest. We give less than 10% of our time because we need the rest. And the time we do give is often not our best. Such actions demonstrate our failure to recognize just who Jesus is and the place He should have in our lives.

When we come into the presence of God, to fall down before Him, worship Him, and give him our best is the wise and reasonable thing to do. Anything less would be foolishness. In Romans 12:1 the Apostle Paul challenges us, *I beseech you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*

These men from the east, by their actions, demonstrated their wisdom. They presented gold as fitting for a king, frankincense as an offering to God, and myrrh in preparation for His death. They saw in the Christ Child their King, God, and Savior. They were wise men indeed, and today, over 2000 years since His incarnation, the old cliché stands true: wise men still seek Him, worship Him, and give Him their best.

By those actions, would you also be considered wise?

Have you sought out the Savior?

Have you worshipped Him?

Have you given Him your best?