

The Story of the Wise Men
Matt 2:1-12

Friends when you read through the Christmas story, what is it that connects most with you?

Can you relate to the traveling that Mary and Joseph had to do? Or perhaps it's their search for a place to stay in a crowded town when they finally arrived?

Or maybe you can relate to the shepherds working the night shift? Or their looking after animals?

What about having a supernatural experience of seeing an angel and have that angel speak to you? Followed by hearing an angel choir singing?

Or is it the part where baby Jesus is born?

What part of the Christmas story do you connect with most?

Friends it's a good question to reflect for a moment – especially on the Sunday after Christmas is over, because it's easy for us to blow right through the Christmas story as just one more item in our holiday celebration checklist.

- Set-up the tree, put out the lights,
- buy the gifts, wrap the gifts, hide the gifts,
- play the Christmas music, go to Christmas parties,
- send off Christmas cards,
- buy the food for Christmas dinner,
- go to the Christmas Eve service – sing carols,
- light candles, watch the Christmas pageant....
- then get together with family for Christmas eve....
- And finally open the presents!

Ok, done – I've celebrated Christmas!

But let's pause for a moment and remember that the Christmas story is central to our holiday celebrations and everything else is or should be, peripheral.

Because friends, this whole season is all about God's amazing love. God's Love is the "why" behind all the celebrations, right?

The bible proclaims to us that "*God so loved the world, He sent his one and only son...*" (John 3:16) and the Christmas story give us the details about how that one and only son was sent into this world... for us.

So, which part of the Christmas story connects with you the most?

Well friends, whatever you might be considering for an answer - I'd like to suggest that it's the Wise Men, whom we read about this morning, who we actually connect with the most.

Because friends, **the Wise Men were non-Israelite, highly-educated, wealthy, leaders** from the ruling class of the nations that surrounded Israel.

And friends, I'm fairly certain that most of us here this morning are also non-Israelite, and I know for certain that many of us are from some nationality that does not have the historical distinction of being "God's Chosen People."

So, we have that in common with the wise Men...

And if we asked around the room this morning we'd discover that for the most part - we are a group of well-educated people, and our jobs for the most part also reflect that.

So, we also have that in common with the Wise Men...

And you will probably find that in our jobs, and in the companies we work for many of us are assistants, or managers, supervisors, partners, VP's, CEO's or business owners and we are responsible for and oversee many people.

So, we also have that in common with the Wise Men...

Additionally we live on the Westside of Calgary AB, and that gives us the distinction of having some of the highest average household incomes in all of Canada, and being Canadian means we live in a country that has fared better than most through these economically unsettled times.

So you see friends, we – and our neighbors in the community around us - actually **have quite a bit in common with the Wise Men.**

We too are part of the wealthy, highly educated, ruling class of the non-Israelite nations – and we are preparing our children and young people to follow in the same path are we not?

And even if we are not the wealthiest or most educated individuals in our community or city... we are certainly among the top in the world – and so we thank God for His blessings. Amen!

And we would do well to keep the Wise Men as examples of privileged people using their wealth and knowledge to seek out, and worship, and give offerings to the Lord Jesus Christ – so that we are also examples for those who live around us, demonstrating the proper way to respond to Christ and use the blessings we have been given.

But friends, the main reason we should recognize our commonalities with the Wise Men and see our connection with them is because they remind of the reality that we have all come into God’s family from the outside, and that there are still more people on the outside who need to come in!

When Mathew wrote the story of Jesus birth in his gospel, he included events which occurred that demonstrated how God had wanted and promised to reach out to **all** the nations – through Israel – but not exclusively for Israel... and the visit of the Wise Men proves this.

As God had promised in Isaiah 60:3 ***“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”***

And as Psalmist prays in 72:10-11 *“May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to the him. May the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts. May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.”*

So, as we celebrate Christmas as the Church, as Christians... it’s important to be reminded of God’s intention to reach out to unbelievers, to those outside His family.

Since our society is no longer Christian, we have developed a tendency to reserve Christmas for just the believers, for the Christians, for those who follow the one whose birth we are celebrating.

I know that I’m certainly guilty of this - as a minister who gets frustrated that the only time some of our friends and neighbors in the community will come out to church is at Christmas!

And I become very cynical about why they only come out then and not during the rest of the year, so I feel like saying *“forget*

about them! Let’s just focus on the ones who are truly interested and reciprocate our ministry efforts!”

But - the story of the Wise Men reminds me that **Christmas isn’t just for Christians**, or for those who follow Christ, or for those who were expecting and longing for a Messiah.

The Wise Men were not looking for or expecting a Messiah – but yet they were invited and were drawn to be a part of the Christmas story.

So friends, as this Christmas season draws to a close let us make a promise, and hold each other to that promise when December comes around again in 2015.

Let us commit to intentionally extending an invitation to those who are outside the family of God; people of other faiths, followers of other religions, secular humanists, and atheists, even our Jewish friends.

Let's invite them, one and all, to come and celebrate Christmas with us - just as God invited the Wise Men when His Son was born.

And we won't be worried about offending them – instead we'll be worried about offending God - because He wants everyone to come and celebrate the birth of His Son.

And we wouldn't want to be the one who didn't pass on that invitation, would we!

Now that's not an excuse to make the invitation offensive or insulting to people, and belittle what they believe in – and in fact that would not reflect the manner in which God invited and drew the Wise Men to come and worship Christ at his birth either.

So, let's take a moment to look at how God did that to see what we might learn about how we can extend the invitation in a winsome and respectful manner.

Now we've noted that **the Wise Men were highly educated**, and that is where God met them to extend the invitation to them.

Let me explain – the Wise Men were educated as astrologers, which meant that they believed they could understand what was going on in the world around them, and derive meaning and purpose and direction for their lives by observing and studying what was happening in the stars.

Now, before we dismiss that as silly and foolish, remember - our form of education isn't all that different.

Many people today believe that we can understand what's going on in the world around us, and derive meaning and purpose and direction because we observe and study what happens in the natural world via the scientific method.

So the Wise Men were constantly studying and observing the heavens – and one night they happened to observe some

unusual or significant astrological event, as Matthew describes it they *"saw a star in the East."*

So, in other words they observed something in nature, and deduced from the occurrence of this phenomenon that something significant had occurred and needed them to respond to it.

More specifically they determined that this start in the east meant that an important King had been born to the Jews.

So they travelled to the capital of Israel, Jerusalem and began to ask *"Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews"*

Friends, do you see how God extended the invitation to them in a way that they understood – or at least got their attention and piqued their curiosity, and made them want to respond in a way that was appropriate.

Friends, let us pray that God will give us the wisdom to work with Him as he is extending that same kind of invitation to

those who are currently outside of His family, and that the Holy Spirit will *draw the people God is using us* to invite in the same way as He did through the Christmas Star...

Now He might work out that something like this...

It might start with you noticing or learning what is particularly important to those people as part of their belief system – for the Wise Men it was diving messages from the gods through the observation of the stars...

For Secular Humanists it might be things like social justice, inclusivity, tolerance, environmental issues...

For Muslims it would be reverence for the "office" of God, obedience to moral laws, respect for God's prophets and so on...

For atheists it might be the knowledge gained from scientific inquiry, philosophy or other courses of study...

Of course you won't really know what they value and believe in until you've spent some time conversing with them and building a relationship with them and earning their trust by **treating what they value with some respect...**

And friends, if you find it difficult to respect what they believe, remind yourself of what we learning in the 5 Sola's of Discipleship series; Sola Gratia – by Grace Alone.

Remember that but for the Grace of God, we would not know His truth – so show some respect for what people have put together to make sense out of this world and how to live decently in it – from their own wisdom.

Without God's intervention in your life, you'd be in the same situation.

And it might very well be that God will use what they value and consider important to draw them.

For instance, there can be no denying the current push in our society to be more inclusive, to be more tolerant, to be less judgmental, to advocate for the oppressed and give rights to those who are vulnerable – and wrap this all up and call it “love.”

Now I use this example because I'm the first one who will balk at this worldview, and critique it, and try to show how it does not accurately reflect God's truth and so on – especially as a minister.

But in spite of how this may get all twisted up and misused – much the way the Wise Men misused studying the stars to hear the divine – can **God not be doing something good** underneath it all?

Of course He can! Through the good things that are happening in this world He can draw people to come and celebrate the birth of His Son, because Jesus is the source of justice, and peace, and inclusiveness and so on.

Friends, it is a horrible evil that Taliban terrorists would murder school children and their teachers in cold blood, and yet friends - look at the good that God has brought out of the evil from the last time the Pakistani Taliban tried shooting a girl for getting an education... Malala Yousefzai.

There is good news in our world friends, and we need to be pointing it out to people, and telling people that God is behind it so that it might be the light that shines in the darkness for them and draws them to source.

Now, that's the easy part – I admit that. It's much harder to get the Wise Men to leave their countries, travel across the desert on their camels and go to Jerusalem to inquire about the King that has been born.

But this is why we work with God. Friends we need to be praying and interceding for those outside of God's family, asking **God to make His grace, His invitation irresistible to them.**

So that they respond to the invitation, they come seeking the one who draws them, but whom they do not yet know...

And that seeking means God will lead them to us here at Valleyview, just as He led the Wise Men to Jerusalem – and friends it is through us, through the ministry of making disciples that we have been given that those outside of God's family come to know the one who is drawing them, whom they are seeking.

And friends, the answer we give them comes from the Bible as we share the Christmas story with them – in the same way that the Wise Men received the **answer to their question from the scriptures.**

And in both instances we hear the scriptures say “go to Bethlehem” there you will find whom you seek.

The Wise Men found the King they knew had been born, and those whom God has brought to us will discover the Christmas

story in its entirety – the reason why there are still good things happening in this world, why good can come out of evil.

Because the Son of God was born into this world in order to save it and its inhabitants from the consequences of our ignorance and disobedience of God’s ways – to bring good out of the evil that has twisted our human nature.

All those years ago, in Bethlehem – the King of the Jews, Jesus Christ was born – so that educated, wealthy, outsiders like the Wise Men and ourselves, and our friends and neighbors in our community... might be re-born today.

So friends, what we experience around this time of year which we call the Christmas Spirit – that feeling of peace on earth, good will and generosity towards all men, can become a reality that lives with-in us all year long.

Because friends all the education, the wealth and the career opportunities can’t change us on the inside where we know

the exact opposite of the Christmas spirit – The Grinch, all too often shows itself during the rest of the year.

And friends, while the decorations, the lights, the carols and candles might stir the Christmas Spirit in our hearts for a few weeks... but the Christmas story which leads us and those who are seeking the King to Bethlehem to encounter God in the flesh is the means by which Holy Spirit renews our hearts.

Hearing about the birth and life of the baby **Jesus and believing in it leads to our rebirth and new life** in Him, and the rebirth and new life for those outside of God’s family, which then makes them a part of God’s family.

In the case of the Wise Men, encountering God in the flesh – even just as a baby was enough to change them – so that when they left – they went home by a different route.

Not just because an angel warned them about King Herod’s evil intentions – but because they had met God in the flesh – Jesus; and that changes you.

Friends, this is why the Christmas story, and the story of the Wise Men is so important.

This is why we can't allow it to be just one more thing on the list of holiday items that we need to check off.

It's the center of the celebration, and it's a demonstration of the heart of God and the great commission which Jesus has given to us...

Go – make disciples of all nations!

Let's make it a Christmas invitation and a Christmas celebration for everyone – all year round! Amen.