

Magi and Star
December 28, 2008
Matthew 2:1-12
Mark Chapman

We tell the actual Christmas story only once a year at church- Four weeks or so through Advent. I was curious how much my 4 year old has gleaned from her 4 Christmases here at Geneva where she has been hearing the story.....(Grace quote) so when I asked her who the wisemen were, she said, “Well, Herrick was the mean King and the wisemen came after the shepards because you have to bring gifts to Jesus”

Yes we need to make sure she is in church EVERY Christmas her entire life so she gets the story right....

Today our scripture looks at the magi...how many of you remember the story of some other ‘wise’ men 40 years ago?

On December 24th, 1968, the Apollo 8 lunar shuttle orbited the earth... Three very wise men, who were traveling far, chasing a celestial body, and searching for answers. After many years of studying and preparing for their trip astronauts Col. Frank Borman, Capt. James A. Lovell, Jr., and Major William A. Anders were finally completing a life long goal..... Not too different from our scripture this morning. Three “wisemen”, traveling far, following a star to see if ,what they had studied all these years would pay off.

In preparing for a sermon; you acquire way more information than you ever need, then you try and shrink it down into a 25 minute sermon. Then you realize you haven’t put any personal stories in it, so you re-write it and re-write it. When you are done, it looks nothing like it did when you started and you have piles of papers with information you will never use....

I feel bad for the youth because I have so much information that they will be hearing nothing but Magi for the next 6 months in the youth room....

The Magi were mysterious. A couple things research shows us we know for sure.

1. They were gentiles, not Jews. Did you know that? (Pause) The Jewish people of that time didn’t think so highly of Magi, because they were gentiles who taught

others to look to heavenly shapes and creatures, rather than to the Creator and the Torah, to deliver the meanings of things.

The second thing we know is that they were wise in their profession. Which was Star Gazing.

So were they astronomers or astrologers?

Astronomy – the study of laws or movements of the stars

Astrology – was the study of the message of the stars’ movements for directing human life.

Today these two disciplines of Astronomy and Astrology are very different, but back in the ancient world both studies were combined. Because of their skill in deciphering both the stars’ laws and (what they thought were) messages, the Magi were considered very wise men in the Gentile world.

These were men whose lives were spent studying celestial bodies. The Magi heard about the prophecy from the Jewish people, they heard that there would be a King born and a great star would mark the birth.

In studying for this sermon I came across a lawyer who, in his quest to find the perfect star for his nativity set in the front yard, began to study the ‘heavenly star’ (as my 4 yr old would call it). Through the advances of technology, he has developed a theory that can trace THE star back to the precise place that scripture places it. The Magi followed this star to Jerusalem, which is 5 miles north of Bethlehem. Now did the star stop above Jerusalem? Or was this just the largest city in the area that was assumed to be the birthplace of a king? When arriving at Jerusalem and meeting with King Herod, Herod asked the Jewish leaders to look at their scripture and find where the King of the Jews was to be born?

They looked at Micah 5:2,

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times. "

Follow this, “After opening and reading the word of the Lord,” Herod told the Magi to return and tell him where he could go and visit and worship the new king, obviously plotting to kill him. I found out that this jealous and evil King Herod had

previously killed his 2 sons and favorite wife in fear that they were trying to overthrow his kingdom.

From Jerusalem the Magi continue to Bethlehem, where the star has seemed to stop, AGAIN.

Bethlehem in Judea was different than other cities name Bethlehem mentioned in the Bible or in ancient times. This Bethlehem was the same Bethlehem where Jacob buried his beloved wife Rachel, where Ruth and Boaz first met, where Jesse brought up his youngest son, David, who would become one of the greatest Kings to ever live. This Bethlehem was the real deal. Fulfilling the prophecy of the Old Testament.

Looking at verse 10 in Matthew chapter 2, it says when the star stopped they were overwhelmed with joy. Why were they overwhelmed with joy? Was it because they had come to the end of a long journey? Was it because they had arrived at the place where they would meet the King of Kings? Some commentaries say that this phrase “overwhelmed with joy” describes Matthew’s passion for evangelism. The excitement in his gospel shows how enthusiastic he was about Jesus coming to save the entire world.

After arriving at Bethlehem, the Magi had to probably ask around, and eventually they find Mary, Joseph and Jesus living in a house and they worshiped Him and presented gifts.

Now remember, the Jewish people weren’t real keen on magi, but Matthew doesn’t give us too much about how he feels about them, good or bad. What he does say is that, “They bowed down and worshipped him (Jesus). Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts...”

Turn to Hosea 2:23 on page ____ in the Old Testament of your pew Bible. Some think that Matthew put the Magi in his Christmas story to tell us that God disregards racial and moral barriers to his saving work by calling to Jesus those that were considered unworthy. The Magi are walking illustrations of God’s grace for everyone: “I will show love to those who were called ‘Unloved,’ and to those who were called “not my people” I will say, “you are my people”, and they will answer “you are our God.”Hos.2:23”

When preparing for today’s sermon I asked many of my friends what they remember from the story of the Magi or the Wisemen. Some of us grew up

thinking that the wisemen were at the birth, but they probably showed up close to two years later.

Many remembered the long journey they took, or how because of the nativity scenes we're all accustomed to, that the shepherds and the THREE Magi were all there at the actual birth of Jesus, telling Mary to "breathe, breathe." Then for some reason we all have it pictured in our mind that after baby Jesus was born, they wrapped him in gold cloth and passed him around the circle. I can see it now, no crying, everyone speaking English and cooing and awing at the King of Kings. The one thing I remember is how everyone (even the star and the sheep) froze and posed for the photograph.

What we know for sure is that the people who were least deserving to attend the birthday party of the Christ are the Magi (non-jews or gentiles who were in a line of work that had them looking to the stars for direction). Matthew seems to be saying that Jesus is for everyone, especially the undeserving.

Take your Bibles again and turn to Ephesians 2:12. Page _____ in New Testament of your pew Bible.

The significance of the Magi's journey is summed up in Ephesians 2:12-13, Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

What we have learned is that the first people Matthew mentions who came and worshiped Christ were Gentiles.

The Star (God's Creation) brought the Magi to Jerusalem, but only after the scriptures were opened and studied did the Magi come to worship Christ. Remember that these Magi and King Herod had to open the word of the Lord to find where the King of Kings was born. The Bible showed the way for these people and it can show the way for us.

When we search for Jesus, we may find Him in unusual places, but we will find Him and after meeting Him, like the Magi, we will go home a different way.

I feel we should always be asking ourselves....

When was that last time I searched for Jesus?

Or where was the last place I found Jesus?

How has Jesus made me go a different way?

Sometimes God's amazing creation can be the reason for a person to attend church, but only after the scripture is opened and taught can one come to Jesus.

Me – If I wasn't a youth director at a church, I would still come to church... for my own children... so that every December they would hear the TRUTH about Christmas, and the wisemen.

I want them to know the same God I know, but unless scripture is opened and taught, my children won't come to know Christ.

I have a more recording I'd like you to listen to, of 3 wise men from Christmas eve in 1968 who were chasing a star, they pointed to the TRUTH , Glory of God in the Highest.