

Scripture Reading:

Mathew 2: “1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' " 7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." 9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." 14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."”

'The Faithful Wise Men'

Last week I began a series of messages for the New Year using some very familiar characters in the Christmas accounts to illustrate how God uses His faithful Saints to accomplish His purposes!

- My prayer continues to be that we can learn how they are important examples for us today.

Last week we considered Mary; today we look at the Wise men and Lord-willing we will study Simeon at the Temple next week. All are strong examples of Biblical faith: Faith that comes with the right attitude, faith that takes the right actions and faith that is always based on a sound understanding of God's will.

- These are simple standards by which we can judge whether we are bearing fruit in the Kingdom

The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith and that even this faith is a gift from God...

- As Jesus proclaimed: No one can come to Him unless the Father draws them

We are also told that we walk in faith as well, carrying out the works we were created in Christ Jesus to do...

- Or as Paul instructed the Saints at Colossi, 'as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.'

We are warned to avoid the philosophy and empty deceit that the world offers and called to walk in faith...

It is from Mary, the Wise Men and Simeon that we can learn what this walk of faith should look like:

- **The right attitude of faith is one of submission, always willing to obey God**
- **The faithful are always obedient: Not just believing something to be true, but walking in that truth**
- **And finally the faithful are always striving to be established in the faith or as we might say today, holding on to the right doctrine.**

If you want to know if your faith is a healthy Biblical faith then these are the tests: Are you submitting to God, are you taking the right actions and are you holding to what is true? This is what we saw with Mary last week and what we will again see with the Wise men this week. The Christmas account also gives us examples of those who fall short to provide us with warnings along the way... Last week we briefly considered how Zacharias was not submissive to the Angel which caused him to endure nine months of silence, when he was struck deaf.

- **This brought proper repentance in his life which reminds us that God is merciful when we humbly confess where we have gone wrong.**

This week we will have a more sobering example in King Herod as one who hardened his heart to the point of eternal damnation. Before we consider the account of the Wise Men, I want to say just a bit about the order of events that follows the birth of Jesus. As I mentioned last week, it is only Matthew and Luke who give us the details about the birth and early years of the life of Jesus, One could say that Matthew tells the story from the perspective of Joseph and Luke from the perspective of Mary. Both accounts are clearly driven by the proclamations of the Angel Gabriel. As with the four Gospels, God has given us a richer picture of what happened with multiple accounts.

- **Of course the liberals again want to attack the Bible by saying that you cannot fit all that is given in the two accounts together.**

Part of our modern problem is that we have bunched everything together with our manger scenes...

Now we have a manger scene in our home and always have as a reminder of the events that took place. However, we have always been careful to explain what type of symbol it is and to tell and teach the actual events from the Scriptures. For example, the Wise Men were not at the manger, nor were they there the night Jesus was born.

Another thing that is tough to escape and must be corrected are all those angels! We have such cute little angels as ornaments and decorations... If you cast them out of your house they will show up on the Christmas cards and packages and certainly at the mall!

- **Now why would anyone want to cast them out you ask?**

They don't just run different parts of the Christmas story together like the manger scene, they are actually a very bad presentation of angels... What do we see in ALL of the accounts where Gabriel or other angels appear? The first thing the Angel has to say is "fear not" or don't be afraid.

- **Now let's be honest: Would any angels who looked like those we have with us today need to say anything like that??**
- **More likely they would have to say "snicker not in the presence of God's messenger!"**

I don't think we can escape all of these false angels so we just need make sure our children are SO familiar with the actual historical Christmas account that they are a little shocked by how the angels are presented and reminded about the real power of their presence.

Sorry about that little rabbit trail, but I can help but cringe a bit when I see those sweet-smiling little angels...

Reconciling the two accounts we are given is not tough if we allow the text to guide our understanding. Only Luke gives us the announcements of Gabriel to Zacchaeus and Mary. Luke goes on to give the details of the birth of Jesus, the visit of the shepherds, the circumcision of Jesus, His presentation at the temple 41 days after His birth and the final trip to Nazareth. There is no mention of Herod, the Wise Men or a trip to Egypt.

Matthew presents the announcement of the birth of Jesus through an angel's visit to Joseph and how he called the baby Jesus after the birth. Matthew then gives us the details of the Wise Men we read this morning and the reaction of King Herod we will consider in two weeks. It is the account of the flight to Egypt that often causes some confusion. As usual, the simple solution is usually the best and most in line with what the Bible gives us:

Jesus is born in Bethlehem and visited by the Shepherds at the manger the night He is born.

A short time later we find the Wise Men visiting Jesus in a house that Joseph and Mary had found in Bethlehem and their gifts are presented.

After this visit Joseph is warned to leave and flees with Mary and child to Egypt, probably by sea.

Not long after, the angel reveals to Joseph that Herod is dead and that it is safe to return. They return to Judea because it is nearly time to take Jesus to the Temple as their first born and consider settling in Judea.

They take Jesus to the Temple where we see the visit of Simeon that we will study next week.

In the course of these events they learn that Herod's son Archelaus was the new King so they decided to return to Galilee and settle in Nazareth.

- **The two things that often confuse people are the appearance of the star to the wise men in the east and Herod's killing all the male children under the age of 2.**

The question is simply when did that star appear to them in the east? We are not told specifically so we must not be dogmatic about a specific time.

However, the fact that the visit had to take place not long after the birth and that Herod thought it was somewhat earlier, I would argue we can safely say it was some months before the birth of Jesus. In fact, since they tell Herod they saw His star when it arose I would argue it was at the conception of Jesus nine months before

- **But again we can't be dogmatic.**

We also don't know how long it took them to make the journey because we are simply not told.

All of this should lead us NOT to a bunch of technical arguments, but to the simple lessons that these wise men can teach us about our own obedience. As with Mary we must avoid the mistake of thinking these are somehow exceptional people who God did dramatic things for, so it has no application to us.

Again there has to be a history of obedience and faithfulness for them to come in the first place!

How did they know to come? How did they know about the sign itself? How did they know the new King would be born in Israel?

These wise men came from the region of Babylon and they had not been without a faithful witness. We know from Daniel and Ester that the Jews had had a tremendous impact on this area and the surrounding and conquering Kingdoms. In fact, an important contrast we see in our account this morning is how much MORE faithfully the Gentiles treated God's Word & instructions.

- **They were expecting the Messiah and joyfully came when summoned.**
- **The Jewish leaders also knew intellectually that the Messiah would come AND that He would come in Bethlehem but they were troubled by His coming and even sought to kill Him.**

As with Mary's parents and grandparents, we know nothing of the faithful Saints who went before the Wise Men preserving the Scriptures and prophesies about the coming of the Messiah. We don't know what the specific sign was, but they certainly did and quickly came to Jerusalem when they saw the sign.

It is important to note that the sign told them that the King of the Jews was born, not where He was born. This they came to Jerusalem to ask and it was only after they were told to go to Bethlehem that the star appeared again, leading them to the house where Jesus was: This caused them "to rejoice with exceedingly great joy!"

Why did God not simply use this star to take them directly to Bethlehem?

- **It was the beginning of many reminders and warnings that the Jewish leaders and people would be given.**

The Messiah was to come as a light to the Gentiles, which we will study again next week. Here are Gentile Wise Men appearing to visit the new King...

- **It troubled Herod and all of Jerusalem**
- **They had forgotten they were to minister God's Grace to the nations of the earth!**

The visit also required King Herod to turn to the religious leaders to confirm that they indeed would know where the King of the Jews, the Messiah would be born. There is no question that the Bible is clear on this point and those religious leaders come back to Herod with the simple answer: Bethlehem of Judea. A small village just six miles away... Not even a day's journey!

- **So why did King Herod, if he wanted to destroy the new rival, not rush over to find the baby Jesus and kill him?**

Whether it was his pride or thinking he had a cunning plan that would work just as well...

- **The Father was providentially protecting His Son.**

Here we need to learn to trust God and His plans: From a human perspective we would never have taken the Wise Men to Jerusalem where the enemies of Jesus were so close and so powerful. We will see this many times as we continue our study of Acts this year: Where God puts His Saints in what seem to be very dangerous situations, sometimes ones that bring about their death...

- **And yet we know that He works together all things for the good of those called according to His purposes.**

Rather than rejoicing with these Gentiles who had seen God's great light, King Herod and the Jewish leaders hardened their hearts against God's grace. We see just the opposite with the Wise Men and it is their example that we should strive to follow.

- **They responded to the appearance of the star in the western sky coming to the land of Israel seeking the new King.**
- **They set out for Bethlehem believing the Scriptures that were shared and had their faith confirmed by the reappearance of the star that took them to the very house where Jesus was!**

We should think of this every time some new 'intellectual' within or without the church thinks they have come up with some new "natural" way to explain what the wise men saw! The birth of Jesus was no normal birth: This was the Son of God coming in the flesh and the star that showed the way was no normal star! These wise men come and are not put off by the humble surroundings of the town or house.

- **They have come to worship the new King and they know it is the child before them.**

No second guessing or wondering if they had the right house or family! God has led them here and they simply believe Him. They fall down and worship the child [not Mary nor Joseph] They present gifts to the child that are royal gifts to be sure, but also gifts for this newborn King:

- **The one who is to be proclaimed by John as the Lamb of God**

There have been many suggestions and interpretations given over the years as to what they signify, but most have not improved on the early Church Fathers who saw them proclaiming that this baby was the King of Kings, the Son of God and the one who would be the sacrifice for sin.

The central focus is that Jesus comes to save His people from their sins:

Where do we see gold in the Bible?

In the Holy of Holies: EVERYTHING there was covered by gold including the mercy seat!

Where do we see frankincense in the Bible?

Frankincense is referenced most often with the sacrifices made to God: The most occurrences come in that book we often neglect Leviticus!

And finally where do we find Myrrh in the Bible?

It is a rich perfume that is often a part of lavish gifts, but most importantly it is the perfume of burial where in John 19 we read: "Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds."

Myrrh that would have filled the garden scene on the morning of the Resurrection when Mary, representing the Bride of Jesus met her Savior as pictured beautifully for us in the Song of Solomon [the book by the way with the most references to myrrh.]

So these wise men come with their gifts and worship the new born king. Their final act of obedience comes when they heed the warning of a dream and return home without going back to King Herod protecting the young child.

So as some do with Mary, we could say this is an extraordinary account and has no application to my life.

- **Or we can see again an example that shows use how Biblical faith is manifested in our lives...**

A faith that submits to God's leading, a faith that takes action and a faith based on God's truth.

➤ **Surely you might be thinking, if God gave me a sign like that star I would certainly respond!**

But remember, this star did not come with instructions detailing what was to be done. These wise men knew the King would come to Israel and they had learned what the sign would be so they could recognize it when it appeared.

This should be a challenge to all of our young people: If you believe that God is calling you to marriage, how will you know when the right one comes along? Hollywood says it will be something like the appearance of this star, with music building to a crescendo and warm fuzzy feelings overcoming both of you!

The Bible says the right person will come along after you have faithfully obeyed your parents and learned the ways of wisdom so you can rightly discern the person God has brought to you. IF you neglect the former, you will no more be able to see the right person then these wise men would have known how to interpret the star if they had spent all their time playing video games instead of becoming Wise Men!

There is also a challenge here for you men and women who are married: Are you seeking God's guidance in your family and your vocation? OF COURSE we are you would likely say, but the question we must ask is whether we hear and do what God so clearly teaches us. Are we in danger of being those Scribes who knew exactly how to tell the King where Jesus would be born but not willing or able to make a six mile journey to worship Him?

We know all the verses about how our children are to be properly disciplined, but do we actually carry out what is commanded?

Husbands are to love their wives and wives are to submit to their husbands, but how often can we quote the verses and yet wait to obey until the other party gets their act together!?

We know that we are to tithe the first fruits of all the blessings that God brings into our lives, and yet how often do we decide that this part of the budget has to wait until we have enough money to cover it!?

➤ **Those Scribes in Jerusalem knew their Bibles, but it was the Wise Men who took the journey to Bethlehem!**

And finally do we bring right worship to the King of Kings?

We certainly strive to do things Biblically here at Church of the King, but even here we must be sure that our actions follow all that God has commanded.

➤ **It is so easy to fall back into the American mindset of 'what is in it for me.'**

That journey to Bethlehem was not an easy one for the Wise Men to make.

Turning aside from someone like King Herod was not without great risk and yet they endured all of this to come before the King of Kings, seeing Him as the only Savior with gifts to highlight His sacrifice and rejoicing with exceedingly great joy.

We see in these Wise Men, as we did with Mary, faithful Saints who joyfully submitted to God's will, took the proper steps they were called to take and rightly understood what they were doing in the will of God.

As we prepare to serve the King of Kings in this New Year, may we humbly submit to Him, choose to walk in His ways and strive to never stray from the path of truth!