

“Where is he who is born King of the Jews?” (Mt 2:1-12) (BCF, 2010.12.19)

Do you have a nativity scene at home? My children when they were younger liked to arrange them like Christmas action figures. Usually they all ended up in a circle around the manger. Along with the animals and shepherds, and Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, are three figures representing the Magi, or wise men. The Bible story does not say that they were kings or that there were just three of them, nor their names, but this very interesting story tells us a lot about seeking Jesus.

Where is he who is born King of the Jews?

- Who should seek him?
- How do we seek him?
- Why should we seek him?

1. Who should seek him? (the world)

What do we know about the Magi? Not very much really. They came from the east probably from the land of Persia, which today is the country of Iran. This group is mentioned in the OT book of Daniel as a group of wise men who studied many things including the stars. These are people who respected Daniel and the people of Israel and knew about the God of the bible. Now these “magi” or wise men knew that long before Daniel had told people that God was sending a king into the world, who would come to the Jewish people but he would be a king for the world. He would be truly righteous and good, and would come from God.

One day, these wise men saw something very remarkable in the sky. This may have been something natural, or it may have been a miracle, but somehow they knew that this sign was about the King coming into the world, and so they began a long journey which took many months, perhaps a year or more.

Sometimes people say that being a Christian is not for everybody. Or that Christianity is a “western religion”, just a way for people in the west like Europe and America to worship God. They might say being a follower of Jesus Christ is just for some people as a way to God, but there are other ways for other people.

But Jesus was sent to the world. Here among the first to see and worship Christ are people from Asia. The earliest church was Jewish, and the earliest church building that has been found is not in the west, like Rome, but in Syria in the middle east. The New Testament was translated into African languages like Coptic and Ethiopic many centuries before it was ever translated into English. There has been a church in India for nearly 2000 years. There were

Christians in China a thousand years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in America.

Our country has been blessed by God and there are many Christians here, but there were, and are, Christians all around the world and most people coming to Christ today live in South America and in Africa and in Asia.

Only Jesus can meet our deepest need, to bear our sin, take away our guilt, and restore us to God. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) And if only he can take away the sin of the world, then the world needs him, and the world should seek him. "For God so loved the world that he sent his Son..." (John 3:16)

The Lord Jesus draws all kinds of people to himself and his good news is for the whole world! So don't believe people when they say this is only for you or me or only for one group of people.

Who should seek him? Everyone, the world!

2. How do we seek him? (through the Word)

How did God guide these men to come to Bethlehem? He used nature (a star), traditions and teaching (from Daniel), but what got them to Bethlehem was a prophecy in the Scripture. What they saw in the sky, or nature, got them to the land of Israel. But it was the Bible that got them to the right village. Even though the star appeared again, it only appeared after they believed and acted upon what the Bible said.

God has spoken to us in words. In fact his words are true and precise. There were two Bethlehems in Israel, one in the north (Zebulun) and one in the south (in Judah), and Micah the prophet tells us it is the one in the south. God's word is inspired (breathed out) by God. And it is his desire that we have very accurate knowledge about his way of salvation. Peter wrote,

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Do you send or receive Christmas cards? Here is one we received and it is amazing that it can get to me with three lines of information. There is a state, and a town, and a street, and a house number, and our family name. Did you know that long ago God gave us his Son's address? Through his OT prophets God was giving us directions on how to find his Son. He said that he would be

born as a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That he would come from the Israelite tribe of Judah. That he would be a descendent of King David. Isaiah tells us he would teach in the region of Galilee, and tells us about his miracles, and about how he would die for our sins and yet see the light of life. Daniel tells us that God's Son would come before the middle of the first century. And Micah said he would be born in the very little town of Bethlehem. What an amazing address! How many people do you know who was a Jew and a descendent of David, who lived in the first century and would be born in Bethlehem and do amazing miracles and minister in Galilee and die for the guilty and yet rise again? Not many! Only one that I know of.

Where is he now? He is not in the manger at Bethlehem as a baby any more. I know, I have visited Bethlehem and the place where many think Jesus was born. The bible goes on and tells us a lot about Jesus. It tells us about his very good and powerful life, about his teaching, about his miracles and healings, and how he was rejected and crucified, and then he rose from the dead with glory. And that he ascended back to heaven and now rules forever and will come back one day one day to receive us and to judge the world for its evil.

3. Why do we seek him? (to worship him)

“Where is he...? ...we have come to worship him.” (2:2, 11) Why did the wise men come? Did they come to be healed? Did they come to receive anything? They came to give worship.

The Magi really did not know much about Jesus. You've probably heard the song, “Mary did you know...”

*Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God.*

Like Mary and Joseph, the wise men did not know very much of what Jesus would do.... That he would heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cause the lame to walk, heal leprosy, calm a storm, walk on water, to feed a multitude. They came to worship a person before he had done anything. Jesus was God's son and the great King even at his birth.

Also, the Magi didn't come to receive anything, except the privilege to see Jesus and worship him! It does not say they were healed or were fed miraculously or that they saw halos or angels or anything. What they saw was sort of “plain”... a poor young couple living in a house in Bethlehem and a baby about a year old. This does not mean the worship is to be glum, or boring, or only a duty. The wise men rejoiced with great joy because they found him whom they were seeking. There is great joy in worshipping Jesus.

What is worship? Why do we come together to worship? It means that we see the great, great value of God's Son and we want to honor and love him. The wise men fell down and worshiped. Do you as a family ever pray on your knees? That's a great way to remind ourselves how great God is and how we should be submitted totally to him. I love the part in "O Holy Night" where we sing, "fall on your knees!"

We worship the person of Jesus. Many believe Jesus should be respected or his example followed, but not that he should be worshiped as God. Many people believe Jesus was a good teacher with many good things we should try to imitate, but that there are others like him.

Jesus said to Thomas after the resurrection (John 20:27-28) *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."* Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

We him apart from things we might receive from him. To thank him for things he provides for us is good, but worship goes beyond that to give thanks and to praise him for who he is. So here is Jesus as a baby in Mary's arms -- but he is also God and is worthy of worship, even as a child. He is already Lord even before he had done anything special. As we sing in "Silent Night": *Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.*

Worship is also giving, giving of our best back to the Lord. Worship is a *worthy* response to his *worth*. The Magi gave more than gifts... they gave long and difficult travel, two years of their time, and treasures worthy of a great king. Worship involves giving our best, of ourselves, our time and our money. We naturally spend money on that which is important to us. If we love the Lord Jesus then we will invest whatever we can to see that his word is promoted and proclaimed.

The wise men also took a great risk by identifying themselves with Jesus. Herod was not keen to hear of any other kings in his territory. The Roman and Parthian (the empire of Persia) empires were not in good relation with each other, and the visit of the Magi could have resulted in an international conflict. Certainly, they themselves faced danger from either government, whether Rome or their own. They made more than just a personal choice to worship, they made in public and known that they came to worship the king of the Jews.

What do we give in worship? Romans 12:1 says, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* And Hebrews 13:15-16 *"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."*

Sometimes people say, “I didn’t get anything out of worship.” And I think, is it really about you? Worship is not something we do or experience in order to get something back, like a good feeling or answered prayer. And thankfully, God often does give us strength and answer our prayers. But if we feel bored or unexcited, we need to remind ourselves that worship is mainly about us giving honor and praise and obedience to the Lord because he is worth it!

Right here at the very beginning of Jesus earthly ministry, right here in the Christmas story, we are shown why we were created and called into a relationship with God -- it is so that we might know him and worship him as God.

So let’s review...

- Who should seek him? (the world, everyone!)
- How do we seek him? (by his word)
- Why should we seek him? (to worship)

Another card I sometimes see at Christmas has these words on it, “wise men still seek him.” What does this mean? It means that if you don’t know and love Jesus, then find out all about him and believe in him. And if you are already a Christian it means to keep trusting him and to learn more about him by studying his Word, praying and obeying, and wanting to know him better and to love him more. By his Spirit he lives within us, and wherever we are he is too.