

## Matthew 2:1-12

How far did you travel to worship? A few miles? Perhaps many miles? A friend of mine back in high school lived in Kansas. His family attended a church an hour-and-a-half away from their home because the local church had become very liberal. I thought that was far. But the Wise men have that beat. They traveled for many days, perhaps many weeks to worship. Roads were not paved back then. There were no rest stops, no Quick Trip stations. There were no road atlases or GPS systems. They followed a star. But not just any star. God put it there. It was a sign for them that the King of the Jews had been born, and it led them on their journey.

Now isn't it interesting that these Wise Men search for the King of the Jews, but they are not Jews? Why would these Gentiles seek a newborn king who was the king of a different nation? Ah! But they knew enough of the Old Testament--perhaps passed down to them from the prophet Daniel, who centuries earlier was himself a magi, one of the king's wise men--they knew enough to know that this newborn king was not just for the Jews; He was also born for them. And so they went to find Him and worship Him.

And this explains, as well, why you are here. You, like the Wise Men, have come to worship Jesus because you believe that He was born for you. He is not just the King of the Jews; He is your King. He is not just the Savior of others; He is your Savior. And so you have come, you have traveled, maybe not from afar, but you have come with your gifts--and more importantly, you have come with your listening ears, with your eager hearts; you have come to welcome and receive your King.

Now when the Wise Men worshiped Jesus, what did they get out of it? I'm not being critical here. I'm just asking. Jesus was a tiny baby. These Wise Men would not have been able to strike up a conversation with Him. They may have patted Him on the head, or even held Him in their arms. But it seems to me that Jesus was the one who was doing the receiving here more than the Wise Men were. They brought Him gifts--gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They came all this way, found a baby, gave their treasures, and then went back home. Was it worth it?

That's what we sometimes wonder. We consider what we have to give up if we come to worship Jesus, and we weigh that against what we get out of it. But the Wise Men did not count the cost. They knew it would take much of their time. They were willing to part with their treasures. Yet, St. Matthew speaks of these Wise Men as "rejoicing exceedingly with great joy." Why? Just to come and kneel down before a baby? Even with that baby being God in the flesh, we may wonder why they were willing to come so far and sacrifice so much just to worship.

Two days before Christmas our Gospel text was the story of John leaping with joy in his mother's womb. I see a parallel here with the Wise Men. John had joy, not just because he was in the presence of the Baby Jesus. He leaped for joy because Mary, who was with Child, spoke a word of greeting. St. Matthew is careful to point out to us that the Wise Men did not just find the Baby Jesus. They "saw the Child with Mary, His mother." And what would Mary have done? She would have greeted the Wise Men as they entered her home. Not only that...Mary, who had treasured up all these things in her heart--all the wondrous events of Christmas--would have spoken to the Wise Men and related not only what took place in Bethlehem, but why it took place, and what it meant for her and for them. These Wise Men would not have simply come into the house, knelt down to worship, offered their gifts, and then hopped back on their camels to head home. For one thing, God warned them about Herod in a dream. This means they stayed there overnight, perhaps even for a number of nights. They would have heard Joseph telling the story of the angel appearing to him in a dream. They would have

heard Mary telling of Gabriel's visit to her. They would have listened to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth and how John was born. They would have heard the story of Simeon and Anna in the temple from the mouths of Mary and Joseph. They might have sought out the shepherds and listened to their story--the message of the angel and the song by the heavenly chorus.

When these Wise Men returned home, they did not just go back with eyes that had seen a child. They returned with their ears full of the Word of God, their hearts full of faith. Through Mary and Joseph, and perhaps through the shepherds, God would have spoken the message of the good news of Christ--the very Gospel--into the ears and hearts of these Wise Men. If you had asked them, upon their arrival back home, "Was it worth it? Was it worth it to go all that way and sacrifice so much to worship?" they would have answered with a resounding, "Yes! Yes, for now we are different men. Now we know and believe for a certainty that this King, whose name is Jesus, was born for us to be our Savior!"

It's not that often that January 6 falls on a Sunday. Every six years perhaps, unless a leap year causes it to skip over Sunday. Then it may be thirteen years before we hear this Gospel text in Matthew 2. I'm glad that it is before us today. This story brings the Christmas event home to us, for we, like these Wise Men, are Gentiles. After verse thirteen in our text, we never hear about these Gentile Wise Men again. They suddenly appear in verse one, and eleven verses later they disappear from sight. We never hear about them again.

Until now, that is. The Wise Men have returned. They have come back to worship Jesus, not riding on camels this time, but riding in Fords, and Chevy's, and pickups, and other vehicles. They have not returned to Bethlehem--to the town in Judea, but they have come to the Bethlehem in Missouri, to the House of Bread (for that is what Bethlehem means) to kneel down before the Lord and eat the Bread of Life, to hear His gracious words, to sing His praises and offer their gifts, and go on their way rejoicing. Perhaps only three Wise Men came to Bethlehem at first, but today God has increased their number. Today I am looking at many wise men before me. Wise, not in their own minds, but wise for coming to worship. You are not here simply to cradle a baby. As God brought the Wise Men to Bethlehem, so He has brought you here because your Savior, in Word and Sacrament, is here for you.

The Wise Men in our text were surely tired when they arrived. They were dirty from their travels, they were in need of cleansing and rest. There isn't one of us who is not like them in this way. Our travels through life have wearied us. We travel through difficult times. Some of you have traveled through sorrow and sadness. Some of you have traveled through pain and suffering. All of us have come here in need of cleansing. All of us have sinned greatly and sinned much over the past week. Sin is a disease that lives within us. It affects our thinking so that we think highly of ourself, and poorly of others. It affects our speaking so that we say what we should not, and do not say what we should. It affects our doing so that we live as rebellious people before God.

How wonderful for us, therefore, that God has drawn us to His Bethlehem, for here He gives you His word of promise that your sins are all forgiven. You are cleansed, you are pardoned--for no other reason than this--the Babe of Bethlehem became the One crucified for you. Jesus has saved you, not just by being born for you, but by living, suffering, dying, and rising again for you. Hearing this, believing this...you, like the Wise Men in our text, can do as they did. You can go home today rejoicing. You can offer your gifts and go in peace, for He who has been born King of the Jews, is your King, your Lord, your Savior. Amen.