

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Matthew 2 – <sup>1</sup>After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, when Herod was king, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, <sup>2</sup>“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>He gathered together all the people’s chief priests and experts in the law. He asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, because this was written through the prophet: <sup>6</sup>You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are certainly not least among the rulers of Judah: because out of you will come a ruler, who will shepherd my people, Israel.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly summoned the Wise Men and found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report to me, so that I may also go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup>After listening to the king, they went on their way. Then the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stood still over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. <sup>11</sup>After they went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>Since they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.



I opened the mail one day at church to discover an envelope from a family.

- Inside was a nice letter with pictures of a loving mother and father, neat and signed.
- It had been sent out to several churches in the St. Louis area where I was serving.
- They wanted to know if anyone was giving up a child.

I had to wonder if the journey to having a child for them was a long and stressful one.

- Doctor visits, procedures, fertility medication.
- They were doing what it takes to have a little one close to them.

The wise men also took many pains to come to this Son.

- The deserts and valleys and mountains.
- The peer pressure of being content with local gods and deities. But ...

### The Wise Do What It Takes To Be Near The Lord Jesus

1. Who the wise were not
2. What the wise gave up

#### 1. Who the wise were not ...

These were not local citizens.

- These were foreign men. They came from a distant land.
- They were not Jews, but Gentiles.
- These were not kings (contrary to popular opinion), but scholars and likely teachers of princes.
- They were not poor, but seem to have possessed much with many connections.
- They were not foolish, but the wisest people in their time.
- They were from afar, expecting to find the most important King of kings.

These were not locals.

- They were not scribes or teachers of the local Jewish law.
- They were not the Herodian king who enjoyed Jewish culture.
- These wise men were **not the worshipers we expect**.

No, in fact the local ones were rather unwise.

- Herod and all the people were frightened by this news that a King was born.
- It had happened right under their noses and it was not in the newspapers.
- No local channels carried the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of fulfillment.
- Herod was searching the Scriptures, but only so that he could wipe out the Christ.
- The people of Jesus’ day new something important had arrived, but they already rejected God’s plan.
- So it is true that the darkness did not desire the light.

What about the high priests and scholars of Jerusalem, who knew where Jesus would be born?

- They had found the Truth! How could they not wish to go with the wise men from afar?
- How could they not be waiting in the Judean town of Bethlehem?
- It goes to show they either did not really believe the Old Testament on the matter,
- Or they did not have actual and appropriate joy for God’s plan of saving them.

LAW: If you could travel into this time period, who would you be?

- The wise traveling far and wide? or the close who would not go?
  - Would you do what it takes to be near Jesus?
  - Or would you leave the Light of the Gospel alone?

God has reignited His Light whenever a word of Jesus is preached and taught in its truth and purity.

- The wise men were handed a dusty old prophecy, perhaps from the time of Daniel in their midst. But to these wise men, it was a valuable treasure.
  - They followed the Scriptures without any regard for danger.
  - They followed God's star no matter the insults they might hear.
- Maybe church at times seems to be a dusty old vestige of the past.
- But when disbelief in Jesus and darkness sets in, our faith should ground itself on this Word:
  - *They saw His star.*
  - *They rejoiced with an overwhelming joy.*
  - *They bowed down and worshiped Him.*

GOSPEL: This is our day. This is our treasure. This is His Word.

- Your life is extended beyond the chasm of disbelief and unbelief.
- What a great distance you have come!

In your baptism and in the forgiveness of sins,

- You have traversed across death.
- By the death and burial of Jesus, you walked into new life.
- Your God has bridged the separation.

The Lord has brought you here, to **faith**, where your sins are now dust in the past.

- The Light shines **faith** into us with every word from the mouth of God.
  - Isaiah 8:20, "*To the Law and to the Prophets. If they do not speak according to this Word, they have no light of dawn.*"
  - 1 Peter 1:19, "*We also have the completely reliable prophetic Word. You do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts.*"
  - Psalm 36:10, "*And in your light we see light,*" i.e., in the light of the divine Word we come to the true Light, to Christ.
- So God's Word is the same Light which we must follow if the day of divine knowledge would break in our hearts.

**TRANSITION:** You dropped everything to be here.

- You have gladly come to insignificant Bethlehem,
- You have followed the Word of God, and
- You have set everything else from your view.
- You are here.

It didn't always seem so hard to do that.

- Some peoples in the past had almost nothing.
- We suffer from so much clutter, so much stuff.
  - When we set it aside, we realize it wasn't as hard as it sounds to give that up.
  - We find out it's very good for us to give things up to God.
- Can you really give up everything, even personal glory, to the One who has saved you?

2. Here is **What the wise gave up**.

- There weren't necessarily three wise men.
  - There could have been two wise men or two thousand wise men.
  - We are not told.
- But there were three gifts they brought. (This is why there are often three men in the manger scenes: Kaspar, Balthasar, and Melchior. It is convenient.)

But since the number of people wasn't important enough for God to tell us, let's focus on the gifts.

- We hear gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They sound right.
- They sound like expensive stuff that rich people used to have.
- Gold makes sense. With the gold they indicated they regard Jesus as the true King.
- With the frankincense, the wise men offered material used for burning in worship.
  - The rising smoke represented prayers rising to the true God.
  - So with the frankincense, they regarded Jesus as true God.
- Myrrh was a substance used for dressing the dead.
  - With the myrrh they indicated that they regard Jesus as a true Man
  - If they understood Jesus as true Man, they knew He would indeed die, and be laid in a grave.

So let's offer Jesus **gold**.

- For us, genuine faith is like gold, and it shall be found to be genuine and far more precious ...
- than "*perishable gold,*" a faith which "*endures amidst fire*" (1 Peter 1:7).

Next let's offer **frankincense**.

- For us, devoted prayer, like a spiritual perfume (Rev. 8:3).
  - After all, whoever speaks the Gospel of God sincerely is a sweet fragrance (2 Cor. 2:14).
- Finally, let's offer Jesus our **myrrh**, that is, the mortifying of our selfish sinful nature (Rom. 8:13).
- This is bitter and difficult,
  - but crucifying our sinful nature (telling it 'no') guards us against the stink of sin.

**GOSPEL;** This is the kind of worship God has equipped **THE WISE** to offer Jesus.

- *So you too can be wise.*
  - You too can offer Jesus rich things that matter.
  - You too can give God something to bless.
- *Nothing would ever be enough, but we strive for our Savior. We do whatever it takes to be near Him.*
- *Jesus did what it took to be near us. He was truly ours so that we could be truly His.*

**CONCLUSION:** Do you remember the ending of the movie Mulan?

- I couldn't help but think of it today.
- It's a cartoon movie, based on a certain "Ballad of Mulan," about a Chinese woman who helps defend China from invaders.
- She breaks all the rules for a Chinese woman of her time.
- After the bad guys are beaten, there is this poignant moment where Mulan thinks she's going to get into trouble.

The emperor sees the whole fiasco. Bad guys broke into the palace in secret, Mulan and her friends barely defeated them in the darkness, and some valuable things were damaged.

- She has again broken all the rules.
- The commander tries to explain, but the emperor brushes him off.
- He looks directly at Mulan and says, "I've heard a great deal about you, Mulan: You stole your father's armor; ran away from home; impersonated a soldier; deceived your commanding officer; deserted the Chinese army; destroyed my palace; AND ...
- ... you have saved us all."

Then the emperor bowed.

- Everyone was shocked.
  - The emperor wasn't supposed to bow!
  - He was giving up personal glory to the one who saved them.
- But if the emperor was bowing, everyone must bow.

That's true about the wise men.

- Everyone was shocked.
- They weren't supposed to bow to the baby.
- They weren't supposed to give up personal glory.

***But Jesus was there to save them.***

- If the wise bow and worship, we too will bow and worship.
- In the name of Jesus, Amen.