

## **Epiphany January 10, 2010**

Scripture Text: 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

**Wise men today still look odd as they continue to serve their Savior-King!**

**Searching nine miles off to find their King**

**Presenting kingly gifts to their peasant born baby**

**Following a different way home to serve their Savior-King**

Introduction: Do you have your Christmas decorations put away? Putting away the nativity set I looked again at the pieces and something caught my eye. It or should I say they just didn't seem to fit the scene. The shepherds and their sheep, the animals at the manger, Mary and Joseph and the baby with the shepherds from Bethlehem all are Jews. It is the Magi, the Wise men; they are dark skinned, foreigners with colorful fancy robes and fancy presents. They just well, are odd. They don't fit or belong-- their clothes, their skin color, their gifts. Truth be told they really don't belong at the manger with the shepherds. They weren't there when the baby was born on that first Christmas night anyway. And the baby is born a Jew and they are from some far away land anyway. What are they doing there? Thank the Lord for the miraculous story of the Magi from the East who were led by God to find the Savior King born for all nations, races and sinners, 9 miles off the beaten path in Bethlehem. Thank the Lord for the Magi's faith, enabling them to see past the earthly trappings and moving them to present kingly gifts to the baby born for them. Thank the Lord for His wisdom leading the Wise men home a different way to serve their Savior King. Wise men today still look odd as they continue to serve their Savior King!

**Searching nine miles off to find their King**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Don't you find it a little funny that we call these men Wise, yet they actually came to the wrong city to find the King foretold in the scriptures? When they arrived in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, what did they expect to find? Did they expect that the newborn King would be the talk of the town and on the front page and headline news? Did they expect to come in to town in the midst of a city wide celebration with parades floats, palm branches and music in the streets? I have always figured that the Wiseman studied the scriptures in advance of that great star, so that they were in the know about the prophecies of the coming Messiah, the one who would be born King of the Jews. So why did they go to Jerusalem? Herod asked the teachers of Jewish law, who studied OT forwards and backwards and they responded with a passage from Micah 5

NIV 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."

Obviously not Jerusalem but Bethlehem, right? But just maybe, maybe the Wise men got caught up in passages of the glory of Israel prophesied in Isaiah 60 from our reading this morning that they used their reasoning and logic and said to themselves, "Of course, the King to be born would be born into royalty, in a palace with riches, power, might, armies and fortified cities." I think that's why they ended up 9 miles off. Jerusalem is 9 miles off from the birthplace of our Savior King.

What a great reminder to all of us that no one in their right mind would look for their Savior from sin, death, and this evil world in Bethlehem in a peasant born baby. The Wise men didn't find their Savior because of their degrees in Astrology or Astronomy but by the grace of God. Out of God's great mercy somehow, some way, He sent His Word through some say, the Babylonian captivity by faithful men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego that they heard and believed the scriptures that promised a Savior King to be born King of the

Jews. And even in their foolishness of logic and human reason to look 9 miles off, God sent His Word again to them this time through a wicked man, to send them to look 9 miles away in Bethlehem. And if that wasn't enough he even gave them back their star to lead them to the very house that Joseph and Mary were staying in since that fateful first Christmas night. Now you see why the Wiseman were overjoyed when they saw that star again! They needed it. Without it they were lost in their logic and reason, their sinful nature. They were looking in all the wrong places for what they truly needed: Forgiveness, peace, joy, hope! What tremendous grace and patience the Lord has for us poor sinners who can't get out of our own way to find our Savior and be saved. He gives us exactly what we need and leads us to the exact place to find: the baby born for us – Christ Jesus, true God and true Man. May we remember throughout the year that the Lord's tremendous grace and patience save us from ruining everything, especially our own salvation, finding Jesus and holding to him so that we might receive, forgiveness, peace, hope and joy!

NIV Matthew 16:17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

### **Presenting kingly gifts for their peasant born baby**

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Tradition has invented the number three for the Magi from the East. Tradition has given them three names which I forget. It is probably because of the three gifts that they bring. I imagine many more people than three, following that star and coming to the house and presenting the peasant born baby and his parents with those three gifts fit for a king and a royal family.

I wonder if the servant and camel drivers with the Wiseman raised an eye brow and mumbled under their breath, "We came all this way, traveling for months with all this expense for this family and a baby born in a backwater shepherding town? Come on. The baby doesn't even want gold, perfume and incense. They need diapers, food and shelter. What a waste of our time, our abilities and our treasures!"

Those gifts are odd for a baby born in Bethlehem to a peasant couple from Nazareth. But the Wisemen show us true faith in God's Word. Nothing in this story would speak to our logic and reason as to why the baby with Mary, its mother and Joseph, its father should receive any gifts from these foreigners from some far away land. As the group of wisemen along with their servants looked on at the peasant home and surroundings of the family there was no halo around baby Jesus signifying his divinity or glow from his mother to show that she is a virgin! Only through the eyes of faith does the group of wisemen see the truth. Only through faith in God's Word does it all make sense. The baby in front of them is the loving Son of God, the Word of God made flesh. Through Faith the Wiseman know that the baby in front of them is the King of the Universe and also the King of Salvation who was born for them, born to live for them, born to die for them, born to rise from the dead for them, born to ascend into heaven and rule the universe for them. Then with the eyes of faith truly seeing the baby for what He is – the gifts fit for a king are expected, are only a token and can never match what he has done for them. What a great reminder to us that faith in God's Word enables us to see the truth about our Savior Jesus. WE know the truth as we look past the trappings of this world, our own sins and guilt, even death itself. By Faith we know the truth that God loves us, dies for us, rose for us and is ascended into heaven for us. By Faith then, seeing and knowing the truth, we respond by presenting to him our best. The best of our time, talents and treasures and we are not ashamed or ever think of wasting anything on him and for his family.

### **Following a different way home to serve their Savior-King**

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

What happened to the Wisemen? Well.. they became wise, truly wise. Now that they had been given faith to see the Savior-King as he truly is, they obeyed God's Word and took an alternate path home. They trusted God

and lived to serve His Will and His Family. Yes they left the home of Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus in Bethlehem lighter in the wallet but also lighter in their lives without guilt worry, shame and fear. They could live by faith now in the Savior King.

I wonder how their families and friends treated them when they returned? Did they question their change of lifestyle, their use of their time, talents and treasure? Did they accuse them of wasting their time hunting down a king that turned out to be a poor peasant baby? Maybe. But no matter, they were truly wise now and followed a different way home – not an earthly trip to an earthly home but a spiritual journey to an eternal home in heaven.

Today we too look strange to the unbelieving world as we live to serve our King following His Way home to heaven. No matter we are lighter in our wallet, because where we are going we need no gold frankincense or myrrh for our Savior King takes care of all our needs spiritual and physical. Live as Wiseman and woman today a little odd to the people of this world as you found the Savior King by the grace of God, present your generous gifts fit for a king to the baby Jesus and follow His Way to your heavenly Home.