

Sermon for January 4, 2025 - Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-12 (NASB 2020)

Theme: **Behold, the World's Saviour,**

- 1) Who His own people failed to seek;
- 2) To whom the LORD will lead all His chosen.

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw 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 gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

*⁶ 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR FROM YOU WILL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' "*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." ⁹ After hearing the king, they went on their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over the place where the Child was to be found. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And after being warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

Do you know where to find Jesus? I ask because people around the world seek him but rarely know where to look. But maybe I should ask another question first: Are you still seeking Jesus, sparing no time, effort, or treasure to be with Him?

Sadly, Satan often tries to lull us into complacency, convincing us that since we have found Jesus, we're good and can move on to other things. It is tragic when we fall into this trap because the devil uses this false sense of security to lead us further away from Jesus to where we may lose sight of Him entirely.

Thankfully, the LORD does not want us to lose sight of His Son and what He has done to save us. He constantly directs our attention to Him, using the people He places in our lives to invite us to seek Him together with them. With the example of the magi as our guide, let us consider the marvellous ways God works in human history to draw attention to His Son through the light of His Word. We will explore this under the theme: **Behold, the World's Saviour.** 1) Who His own people failed to seek, and 2) to whom the LORD will lead his chosen.

Part One: Behold, the world's Saviour, who His own people failed to seek.

Before we continue with our sermon, I want you to forget everything you think you know about the “magi” who came to visit Jesus, including the term “wise men.” Why? Because much of what is said about them is speculative. The only certain information about them is what is written in our sermon text. I believe that by focusing on the simplicity of what Matthew wrote, the more remarkably beautiful God's work in our text becomes.

Matthew writes: ¹ *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,* ² *“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”*

“Behold,” Matthew writes, calling our attention to the astonishing event that occurred sometime after Jesus was born (not on the same night). Magi came from the east to inquire about the birth of the King of the Jews. Why was that astonishing? For many reasons!

First, the Greek word behind “magi” is where we derive our English word “magic.” It described a class of people who often served Eastern kings as fortune-tellers and advisors. They combined the science of astronomy with superstition, usually emphasizing the latter. That is not to say that all magi were bad; the prophet Daniel was made a magus by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and used his position to glorify God while avoiding superstition. Still, magi were generally viewed as foreign experts in the magical arts rather than as individuals anticipating the Lord's promise to send a Saviour.

How astonishing, then, that these magi from a distant eastern land were in Jerusalem searching for a newborn king! Even more incredible is that God permitted this, given the fact that Herod was acting as king.

Here are a few things to know about Herod: he was intensely jealous of the throne—so much so that he killed his beloved wife and two of his sons out of fear they might conspire against him. Herod was Idumean, not Jewish. Despite making massive renovations to the temple to win Jewish favour, many viewed him as a usurper of David's throne.

Therefore, news of foreign, fortune-telling dignitaries asking about the newly born King of the Jews filled Herod with jealousy. It is no wonder Matthew adds, ³ *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.* Why? Because the people knew what atrocities Herod was capable of performing.

⁴ *And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.* ⁵ *They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:* ⁶ *‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR FROM YOU WILL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’ ”* ⁷ *Then Herod secretly called for the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.* ⁸ *And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for*

the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”

Herod lied to the magi. Instead of wanting to worship Jesus, Herod planned to kill the boy, whom he viewed as a threat to his legacy. Herod hoped the unwitting magi would lead him directly to the Messiah for a targeted assassination. If that did not succeed, he made a contingency plan as how to eliminate the boy by learning his relative age and location.

Before we continue with our sermon text, I would like to highlight some applications for us. First, let us be amazed and praise God for the different people He brings into His Kingdom. Who would have thought that magi would seek Jesus? The same holds true today. Who would have imagined that former psychics, adult entertainment workers, LGBTQ advocates, Muslims, atheists, Buddhists, occult practitioners, violent gang members, and even murderers would ever seek Christ? Yet, miracles like these happen every day around the world! And what joy these people find in Christ! They experience profound happiness because God led them to Jesus, who forgave their sins through His cross and rescued them from their empty way of life. Instead of seeking to gratify their sinful desires, they now strive to glorify Jesus by living in the peace of God’s forgiveness, in accordance with His Word. Yes, we should praise God for His work of leading the most unlikely sinners, including you and me, to His Son for salvation.

Second, let us reflect on how God’s chosen nation did not share in the joy of the magi. Instead, they feared the earthly hardships that the news of Christ’s birth might bring. Are we not tempted to do the same? We possess the pure Gospel that sets people free, yet we often hesitate to share it because of how the world might react. To avoid stirring up trouble, we may choose to remain silent, waiting for “just the right time” to share Jesus with someone, not realizing that the right time is always now. May the LORD forgive us for allowing such fear to hinder our faith! May the peace of forgiveness that Jesus won for us set us free from our fears. He promises to be with us and to use our simple, loving testimony of His Gospel for His glory, regardless of how people respond.

And that leads to the third thing I want to point out: God’s will is for his salvation to be proclaimed as a testimony to all, regardless of how people respond to the news. God could have kept guiding the magi with his special star to Bethlehem, avoiding Herod altogether, but He didn’t. Why? Because He wanted Herod and all of Jerusalem to know about the Messiah’s birth – even if their reaction would only serve as a testimony to their impenitence and unbelief.

Yes, Behold, the World’s Saviour, who His own people failed to seek, but to whom the LORD will lead all His chosen.

Part Two: Behold, the world’s Saviour, to whom the LORD will lead all His chosen.

Our sermon text continues: ⁹ *After hearing the king, they went on their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over the place where the Child was to be found.* ¹⁰ *When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

“Behold,” Matthew writes for the second time in our text. Look! The special star was there to lead the magi. Oh, how happy they were! God did not abandon them but returned to guide them to the promised Messiah, who would reconcile the world to God and establish His everlasting kingdom of peace over us.

Behold the star! But that invites the question, what was that star, and why did the magi follow it? We don’t know. The fact that it could move in a way that no other star could - even to the point of stopping over a particular house – indicates that it was not an ordinary star, planet, comet, or any other known object in the universe. No, this star was special, called into existence by God for one specific purpose: to lead the magi to Jesus.

But how did the magi know about this star? We don’t know. Perhaps God gave the magi a special revelation about it, just as He would warn them in a dream not to return to Herod. All that matters is that it was the LORD himself who led the magi to the very place the Bible said the Messiah would be.

¹¹ And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And after being warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

The worship and gifts the magi offered Jesus reveal that they didn’t consider him an ordinary child. No, they worshipped him as their King! Even though we cannot say with precision what each gift was meant to represent, they nevertheless declare that they believed Jesus was the Messiah promised in Old Testament Scripture.

But how did the magi get such faith when they were not Israelites and lived in a distant land? That’s simple: they received their faith in Jesus the same way we all do - God revealed these things to them. How? The Bible doesn’t tell us specifically how he revealed these things to the magi. It simply allows their actions to testify that the LORD mercifully showed them the truth about their sins and His grace in some way – all in accordance with His Word.

Now, dear Christian, here is the answer to a hypothetical question often asked: “Can people who live in remote areas with no access to the Gospel be saved?” First, we must remember that God only promises salvation through His Word and sacraments, which is why He wants us to urgently share His Gospel with all people. However, as our sermon text demonstrates, regardless of where people live on this earth, God always leads His chosen ones to Jesus. God has always loved all people, desiring everyone’s salvation. How do we know? The proof is in the baby that Mary held, the very one the magi came to worship. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”ⁱ*

As demonstrated by the coming to faith of many Gentiles in the Bible, God acts on His love. He guides history, often using unknown people to share the light of His Gospel in unknown areas and in unknown ways. The point is that God is in such control of everything that we don’t need to worry about how people can be saved. The answer is simple: God will lead them to Jesus; and

He wants you to share in that work. He wants you to be His guiding star to the people He places in your life—leading them to discover in the pages of Scripture the Jesus they seek.

May this truth encourage us to be bold witnesses of the Gospel – every bit as excited to see Jesus as the magi were. May the Holy Spirit move us to worship Him as our divine Saviour and King as we look for ways to confess Him to everyone God puts in our lives. Amen.

ⁱ John 3:16 EHV