

The Scientists Find Christmas Joy!

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Well, for our Christmas Eve message we're going to conclude our series on "Rejoice, It's Christmas," as we've been looking at primarily the Gospel narrative of Luke as he outlines the coming of Christ and how in every part of the coming of Christ, the participants are filled with great joy and great praise. We come to the last section, though, and we'll go to Matthew this time, Matthew 2, and I've entitled this "The Scientists Find Christmas Joy!" The scientists find Christmas joy. Of course, this is the story of the magi or the wise men following the star and finding the Christ child. Matthew 2, beginning in verse 1 and going down through verse 12.

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, 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 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 out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called 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 their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star [here it is again], they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

One of the times when we were doing the conference in London, Pam and I took a side trip over to visit Cambridge University and we had a tour guide that took us around

Cambridge and told us of the esteemed history of that university, one of the earliest universities in the world, I presume, centuries and centuries old. Do you know how Cambridge University began? Originally there was only one school of higher learning and I don't know how many centuries ago but a long time ago, and that was Oxford, we all know about Oxford in London or in England, and the problem was the wealthy would send their children or their boys to these schools and they were spoiled and they drank too much and they partied too much. Now, these were religious schools of the day because in that day there was no concept of learning except it being centered around God and the Scriptures, and one day these guys were out there drinking and partying and messing with their bows and arrows and one of them shot a person, and the magistrates of the city of Oxford ran those guys out of town. They said, "We're not having any more of this rabble rousing around here," and they went to a little place called Cambridge. Do you know why Cambridge is called Cambridge? Because there is a little river there, the Cam River, and they put a bridge over it. That's it. Have all these sophisticated ideas of these great bastions of higher education and when you learn about how they were discovered or how they began and all, it's kind of comical at times. But anyway, Cambridge, the Cam River and the little bridge over it, and these boys went there and they found refuge with some of the church leadership of that area and they thought, "Well, we might as well start teaching these boys here," and then Cambridge University developed out of that whole scenario, out of boys getting drunk and playing with their bows and shooting someone and running to Cambridge.

But I'm saying all of that to say this: as we were touring Cambridge, our guide took us to an area where he was discussing the beginning of modern science, now not modern modern science, modern modern science is a different thing because modern modern science is mostly committed to atheism, but originally science was very God-centered and he talked about all the different scientific disciplines and how they began and he outlined the men of that age who began these discoveries and these inquiries and how they were so centered in God and God's word and trying to discover how this God of order and meaning had put everything together. Albert Einstein, for example, probably the most honored and revered scientist of the modern era believed in God. He said that even with man's limited means, man could see that there was something behind the laws and the connections of the universe. Today, of course, that would be a minority opinion in the scientific community.

One man, his name is Lee Dye, he surveyed scientists in the 21 top rated research universities in the world and he found that 52% had no religious affiliation compared to only 14% in the general public. He found that 62% of these scientists were either atheists or agnostic. Only 9.7% said that they were certain that God exists. And interestingly, the survey found that it was not necessarily science that drove these researchers away from God. In the survey, he found that scientists who were raised in a home where religion was important and were affiliated and organized and active, rather, in an organized religion, these scientists grew up and believed in God. Most so-called super-achieving scientists were raised in homes where religion was not important. Interestingly, more younger scientists believed in God than the older scientists which is just opposite of the community at large, and a higher percentage of men scientists believe in God than

women scientists. That's interesting. I think this reminds us of what 1 Corinthians 1 reminds us in verses 24 and 26 through 30, that not many wise, the Bible says, according to the flesh are chosen. Not many noble are chosen. God can save anyone and does save all kinds of people, but for some reason God just does not seem to put his hand on many in that category.

Copernicus in the 15th and 16th century, the mathematician, was the first who taught that the sun was the center of our universe. He often referred to God in his work and he believed in the Bible. Sir Francis Bacon, for example, the early philosopher, the one who gave us the scientific method, was a strong believer and he believed that in everything our discoveries fly to Providence, that would be his phrase. When we discover something, we go back and seek a providential God put all this together. And you can look at Kepler or Galileo or Descartes or Isaac Newton or Michael Faraday who invented the electric motor, all of these men believed in God. Michael Faraday was a devout committed Christian. So that's what I mean by modern science. Modern science came out of Christianity, if you will. It came out of a God-centered perspective. The whole idea of throwing God out to be a scientist is a relatively new discovery and, by the way, those guys would have never had a foundation to build on if it wasn't for the men who believed in God, the original scientists.

Well, here we have the scientists of this day, 2,000 years ago, they were called magi. They studied in astrology and math and different things but notice, first of all, I. in our outline: these guys are drawn by the light. They are drawn by a divine light. The Bible says all this happened in verse 1, in the days of Herod the king. Herod the king was an Edomite. He was a made king by the Roman Caesar and we know up until this time the prophecy of Genesis 49:10 has been faithfully fulfilled which says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." So the scepter shall not depart from Judah, the idea there is that out of the tribe of Judah would be the leadership of Israel, and we know that up until this day, the greatest number of people in the Sanhedrin, or the leadership of Israel, were from the tribe of Judah and it's very interesting that after Jesus came, this fell off greatly and the tribe of Judah was no longer prominently represented among the leaders of Israel. Do you know why? Because they were to be prominent until Shiloh came. That just means peace and he is the Lord of peace. He is the Lord who came to bring peace between a holy God and sinful man, and when he came, the scepter now has departed from Judah because now Jesus is the true leader of Israel. He's a true leader of the universe, even. The scepter is now given over to Jesus Christ.

Now the Bible calls these guys wise men. Again, these are the scientists of the day specializing in astronomy, astrology, natural science, math, and the Bible says they are from the east. We have no idea particularly where that is, perhaps Arabia, perhaps Persia, Mesopotamia. We just don't know but here's the point in verse 2: they saw his star. Great mystery surrounds this whole story, but they saw his star. They saw this light. One thing is for certain: God suspended the laws of the universe and the so-called laws of science, and he can do that anytime he chooses, and he caused a star, a heavenly light to appear and lead these early scientists to the Christ child. Now these men had spent their lives

studying the laws that order and connect the physical universe, yet to find truth, to find God and to find salvation, they had to look beyond so-called scientific law. You see, you'll never find God under your microscope. You'll never find God looking through your telescope. He's not down in the petri dish. He's too big for that.

The star appeared and moved around against all the natural laws of science and isn't that a perfect illustration for us? That is the way the Spirit of God guides men to Christ. You can't figure it out. You can't put your finger on it. You can't understand. It's a mystery. How is it that sitting under my voice this morning there are many of you who sit there and as we preach through the things of Christ, there is a warmth in your heart and an affection for him and a treasuring of him and an honoring of him, and then likely right beside some of you is someone who appreciates the story but it just doesn't do much for them. What's the difference? The Spirit of God who has moved in one heart and has yet to move in another heart.

Again, look over to John if you will, right quick. We'll just look at this quickly or you can just listen to me read it, John 3, and beginning in verse 3. John 3:3, "Jesus answered and said to him," this is Nicodemus, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again,'" you could even translate it unless one is born from above, "'he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" He just won't see it. He won't grasp it. He won't comprehend it unless he is born from above as a spiritual birth.

Verse 4, "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'" You just can't figure it out. It's not according to anything men can comprehend.

So here are these wise men, these scientists of the day see this star and enabled by the Spirit of God, they know they need to follow this star and find the Christ. It's an amazing story. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:5 it is the Spirit who quickens the dead. In Ezekiel, we have that parable, that picture of the dry bones being brought to life by the Spirit of God infusing them with life. In John 6:44, Jesus said no man can come to the Father unless the Father who sent me draws him, unless the Spirit the Father sends draws him to the Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:9 and 10 is a great cross-reference here, "just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen,'" you don't find God just through the eye gate, "'things which ear has not heard,'" you don't find God just through the ear gate, "'and which have not entered the heart of man,'" you don't find it through your inner intellectual and cognitive abilities to think and discern, "'all that God has prepared for those who love Him.' For to us," notice it here, "God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." You see, salvation does not come through observations of the human eye or through the available information gathered by the human ear or through the reasoning and deductive powers of the human mind. Science

depends on these. As a matter of fact, that's all science has what their eyes can see, their ears can take in, and their minds can comprehend and in today's world, that's all truth is to these guys. If my natural senses cannot comprehend it, then we disregard it as being true. Science depends on these things but salvation is not dependent upon those things. Salvation is a work beyond and above the power of man. Do you believe that? Salvation is a work beyond and above the power of man, that's why we work hard to make sure we are not doing a humanly devised thing to "motivate, coerce and even manipulate" people into coming to God. It's not about that, it's above that.

Here we have in our text these wise men, they see a star and they didn't put the star there, they know man didn't put the star there. Against all the known laws of science, this light, this star appears and begins to move and they follow it. God indeed suspended the laws of nature and sent a star to guide these ancient scientists to the Christ and this is the way all are saved, the Spirit comes and guides you to Christ. He shows you your need for him and he convinces you of who he is and of his saving power. So these men were led or drawn by divine light to Christ.

Notice II: there are some others who were blinded in the light. The light was all around them yet they are blind to all of it. Notice it there beginning in verse 3 and we'll go through verse 6, "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Think about that. Zacharias and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the angels all are just elated and overjoyed at this coming of the Christ, but the great majority of the people, including the religious elite in Jerusalem, were just troubled by it. "What does this mean? Is this going to mess up everything?"

If I could just, I don't want to labor on this today but I can't help but go there a little bit, it's almost like when God shows up in a Baptist Church, it scares some people to death, "This is going to mess up! We've got it all figured out. God is going to show up and mess the whole thing up!" Good. In one crude illustration, it's kind of what Donald Trump has done to our government. He showed up and they said, "Well, we don't do it this way," he said, "Well, why not? I've got the highest electoral votes and we're going to shake this thing up." I'm not saying pro or negative. I love his positions but I'm not saying pro or negative about it, but I mean, he did come in and start shaking things up. I hope he keeps shaking, by the way.

Well, that's what happened here. God has come to earth and some are glorying and praising and worshiping and just ecstatic with praise and excitement over it, but most were troubled by it. They are just blind in the middle of the light. Let's continue on, verse 4, "Gathering together," this is Herod the king, "Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet.'" Verse 6, "'Bethlehem, land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.' Then Herod," verse 7, "secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 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." And we all know he's a liar. He's a liar. How many people want to get into the church and get into the things of God because it's all about what they want to achieve, it's all about their agenda? Herod just wants to kill him. He sees Jesus as a rival to his power and control.

So these guys, there is really no effort in the record of Scripture that the people at large or the leadership of Israel traveled to Bethlehem and tried to inquire of this at all. The religious establishment, the honored scribes, the esteemed theologians of the day, they knew the teaching, "Yes, he's going to be born in Bethlehem"; they had the knowledge but where is the power? Where is the power of discernment of what was happening? Where is the power of understanding? There is such a picture of false professors. They had the knowledge, they knew what the word said, but not the power. In other words, they knew the story but they missed the glory.

What about you this Christmas? We all know the story but do you grasp the glory or has it grasped you? Has it captured you? The glory of the story, the glory of this one came for sins to be forgiven. This one, the Christ child, came that God's righteousness might be imputed to us unworthy sinners. This one came that justification, that is we stand just before a holy God, could be granted to us free as a free gift of God. The glory of being adopted as a child of God into his family. The glory being changed by the Spirit and begin a new life. The glory of new priorities. The glory of new joy. Yes, you know the story and I know the story but do you bear evidence of new power and glory in your heart and in your life, the glory of truly knowing Jesus Christ? Here by the initiative of God, these scientists are led to find Christ while the great majority of Israel, including the religious establishment, completely miss it. Blinded in the light.

III. Worshiping the true light. Worshiping the true light. I have four subpoints here. First of all, the praise in their worship. The praise in their worship. Notice verse 9, they talked to Herod, Herod said, "Hey, go and find out where he is. I want to come and worship him." Verse 9, "After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was." So the star reappears after they meet with Herod and begins to continue guiding them to where the Christ is.

Verse 10, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Now as we preach through the narrative, the Gospel narratives of the coming of Christ, over and over and over we see this continual praise. Now it hits the scientists, even. Now when the Bible says, they have exceeding great joy, this means – listen – this means these guys, these great intellectuals, these dignified sophisticates, they are absolutely beside themselves with excitement. It's like when your football team goes ahead and how excited you are. It's beyond that. These scientists, these dignified sophisticates, these intellectual elites, are just resounding with excitement and joy. Oh me.

They see the star, it went and stood, the Bible says, verse 9, over the place where the child was, and then verse 10, when they found him, that's when the joy came on. Here is a good cross-reference for us to be reminded of, Matthew 11:28 through 30, "Come to

Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke," interesting word of the day, the yoke that you would put on oxen to haul a big heavy load on a wagon, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart," and you put on the yoke of following Christ, you find that he's gentle and he is humble and he says, "You will find rest for your souls." He says, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." If you come to me weary and heavy laden because you see your need of a Savior, you see your need of forgiveness of sins, you see your need of being justified before this holy God and you are beginning to grasp that all you deserve from him is judgment and righteous retribution, if you come to him with that burden, he will freely and fully take it off. That's why he says, "Put my yoke on. My burden is easy. My yoke is light and you're going to like what I have for you." I can't help but believe that in some ways these magi, these scientists when they found Christ, the Spirit of God enabled them to grasp, "This is the one who takes away our sin burden."

Dr. Roy Beeman was my professor in graduate school. Dr. Roy Beeman worked in 39 languages. He was a country boy from Southwestern Kentucky but he had a genius mind but he loved God. I don't know how many times he would stand in the class and say, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace but," he said, "you know, I've studied in museums and universities all over the world and everywhere I've gone, every time I've witnessed for Christ," he said, "I would always come to the statement, they might say I'm a Confucius or I'm an atheist or I'm a whatever," he said, "I would always ask them, has your sin burden been lifted? Do you feel you stand just and accepted before a holy God? Has that burden of your guilt and sin been lifted?" He said the only ones who could ever smile and say, "Yes, it has," are those who know Christ. I think that's why these guys rejoice with exceeding great joy. They found the one who can lift the sin burden.

Friends, let me ask you on this Christmas Eve, how in heaven's name are you going to stand before the Triune holy God in your sin? Have you ever thought about the awesomeness of that moment? There is only one way: if Jesus has lifted the guilt off of you and lifted that burden. My goodness. Now you're so dignified and you're so sophisticated, you couldn't let out a shout on Christmas Eve, but if you'll meditate on it for a while, some of you get to bed by 11:30 tonight and think on it and that exceeding great joy will come alive in your heart and you might just give a little silent shout there on Christmas Eve. Oh, the joy of being released from the yoke of sin and condemnation. Can I just be frank and honest with you? I need that this morning. I needed it before I went to bed last night. "I need thee/ Oh, I need thee/ Every hour, I need thee/ Oh, bless me now my Savior/ I come to thee." There is not a moment I don't need him. I need that guilt removed and that sin burden lifted every moment of every day. And do you know what? He's faithful to do it.

That's why he said, "Come to me. My burden is light. My yoke is easy." I believe these scientists grasped that. I believe they got that. That's the only reason I can think of, they got it. It made sense to them. I think they were saying, "Of all the stuff and all the hours and all the years and all the dedicated studies and the things we've done, beyond all of science we found what we need. We found Christ." You see, you are either resting in joy of Christ's yoke or you are laboring under the burden and yoke of sins unforgiven.

The scientists ended their journey here where Jesus lay. They traveled a long distance. They endured many a difficult day to get here, probably hot in the day, maybe freezing cold at night. That's the way the weather is over there. They end their journey at the feet of the baby Jesus. They find what Hebrews 3:11, 3:18, 4:1, 4:3, 4:5, 4:8, 4:9, 4:10, and 4:11 say. Do you know what all those verses in Hebrews say? You know, Hebrews is written to the Jews. It's about their law and about how they had to keep their law and keep the sacrifices and keep the rituals in order to try to maintain some sort of pathway to God, and then the writer writes to the Hebrew believers and says, remember, here's what's in all of those verses: enter into his rest. Rest. Now, you listen to me: you're a filthy, vile sinner and a holy God should crush you like a worm but if you know Jesus, you can lay your head on that pillow tonight and say, "Praise God, the sin burden is lifted. The guilt has been removed through the power of Jesus Christ." That's a good Christmas present right there. That's a great Christmas present.

Well, there is praise in their worship. They is exceeding great joy, the Bible says, not just a little, these guys are besides themselves like some boys running downstairs on Christmas morning. And then the posture of their worship, notice the posture of worship, "After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground," that means their bodies are laying flat on the ground, their faces are in the dirt, that's literally what this phrase means, "and worshiped Him." These scientists knew this was not another petty Jewish king. This is spiritual worship. They are bowing in worship. It did not come as a result of their esteemed scientific observations, they did not discover him under a microscope or through a telescope, the Spirit of God made him known to them. Men of esteem and material wealth find themselves laying on the ground in joyous worship at this baby's cradle.

Notice the gifts in their worship, C, the gifts in their worship. The Bible says in verse 11, "Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." These men were men of great means. And by the way, God has ordained, it's just the way we are made up, to worship him properly means we give gifts to him in his work regularly. It's just the way we are made and we need that. We need that part of worship to give gifts to him and to his work.

Gold, this speaks of their wealth. Frankincense was used in religious sacrificial offerings. All of these are expensive. Myrrh was a perfume. Myrrh was commonly used to anoint the dead. Often it's been said the gold represents that Jesus was King, the frankincense represented that he was God, he was deity, and the myrrh represented that he was Savior, he would suffer and die for us. We do know that God is practical. Joseph and Mary are soon going to have to run to Egypt. How do you think they paid their bills while they ran to Egypt and stayed there a while? Gold. Gold. Every time you send your pastor off on a mission trip, you ought to give him some gold. I'm absolutely not serious but God did, God took care of Joseph and Mary through these scientists, these wealthy men of esteem.

Notice the prophecy in their worship. You say, "Pastor, I can see the praise. That's there. I can see their posture. They are lying flat, overwhelmed with the glory and the wisdom

and the power and the beauty of what God has done through sending this Savior. I can see the gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh, what do you mean by prophecy? What do you mean by prophecy?" These scientists are Gentiles. They are Gentiles. They are not Jews. They are not of the tribe of Judah. They are not of the line of David. They are not of any tribe in Israel. They are outside of Israel. Remind yourself again that in this day and time, nothing was deemed as further outside the boundaries of God's plan than God's Savior, the Messiah, welcoming Gentiles. That would have been the most mind-blowing thing to comprehend, that the Messiah would welcome non-Jews. The thought was reprehensible.

But while very few among Israel cared to investigate about his birth, here these scientists from the east are drawn by God's doing to come to the Savior and they can become worshipers. And you know, that's really at the core of what salvation is, it's becoming a worshiper because you don't have the capacity to know him, to love him and to honor him as he deserves until he saves you. As it has been said many times and I'll say it again in my closing this morning, missions exist because worship doesn't. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Christ is of such glory, he's such a marvel, he has such wisdom and power and beauty, he deserves to be worshiped from all peoples, tongues, tribes and nations, and this is a prophecy that the Savior didn't come just for Israel, he came for all. God seeks worshipers among all men.

That's the story of Christmas and right here at the very beginning, God makes it very clear by not just accepting these scientists but making sure these Gentiles scientists get all the way to Jesus. Christmas is about finding him and worshiping him.