

Matthew 2: 1-12; “Christ’s Star Going Before Them”, A Christmas Season Sermon
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 25th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.

I would like to bring to your attention, this morning, the fact that God knows very well how to providentially bring divine guidance to those who would worship His Son. For these wise men were indeed guided by the Lord God in an extraordinary way by this star, which is called “Christ’s Star” in verse 2. “For we have seen His star in the East and we have come to worship Him.” For you and me today, He guides us preceptively and doctrinally by the instrumentality of His word, and by the leading of His Spirit. He guides us into all of the truth of how we ought to worship and serve Him. And He providentially leads us and guides us to the place where we can worship Christ with a clear conscience in spirit and truth. Let us behold this morning the glory of God in the way that He led these wise men to find, and to worship God’s Son.

My proposition to you is this – Even as the wise men of old were led to the place where they could find Christ and honor him with their gifts, even so, persons who are wise today will be also led by the Spirit of God to the place where they might honor the Lord with their worship and with their gifts. Let me give you 4 observations in regard to this truth. 1st of all – God would go before these men, supernaturally, leading them by this star, in their search for Christ. (verses 1 and 2) 2nd – God would go before these men to give them the wise counsel of the Scriptures. (verses 3-6) 3rd – God would go before these men to divinely warn them of the hypocritical worship of evil men. (verses 7 and 8) 4th – God would go before these men to let them find Christ and worship Him. (verses 9-11) In setting these truths before you, I want you to see that even though God does not guide His saints by a literal physical star, still He does most definitely guide them, and go before them, to establish them in the way that will lead them to have wisdom in their walk with Him, and their worship of Him.

1st of all – God would go before these men, supernaturally leading them, by this star, in their search for Christ.

We have here before us a most marvelous sight; the gift of a Child from God, the Lord of Glory, the king of the nations, and the Savior of the world, living in obscurity. “Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given, and the government would be upon His shoulders. Upon His shoulders, does it say? Most certainly one day after His earthly ministry was finished, it would be so. But at this point, His rule and His establishment as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was not at all to be seen as He entered this fallen world of sinful man. He was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And He came into this world as the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world. The world was made through Him, and yet, the world did not know Him. He came to His own people – the Jews, and they did not receive Him. There was no palace for the King, no pomp and circumstance, no trumpets blaring their announcement that the King had arrived. Those who lived in the closest proximity to Him knew little or nothing of the fact that the greatest person in all of human history, and their Messiah, had arrived.

The Bible says that there is none who seeks for God unless He sets them a-seeking. And surely we can see it in this case before us. We stand amazed that the Jews in Jerusalem who had all the promises of the Scriptures, and who had waited for such a long time for their Messiah, their Prince, would fail to see and acknowledge His birth. But for the most part; they is what happened. They were so close in time, so close in physical proximity to their salvation, but yet they were so far away. But even when men were, in this case, very negligent, we find that God Himself would take the momentous step to arouse interest in this greatest of all the events of

that day; the entrance of His Son, the Lord of Glory, coming into this world to be its Savior. The Father, by the working of the Holy Spirit, set certain men to seek His Christ in the days after His birth. And a very unusual group they were, too. They were wise men; they were Magi, they were the sage philosophers of their day. They lived afar off and they were brought near; while others who were near, remained afar off in their hearts.

Who were these men who traveled so far to see the Christ Child? And why did they do it? They are called wise men or magi in the text. In what sense were they wise? The word in the Greek is “Magoi”, whence we derive our word, “Magicians”. But these men were not charlatans. They were not tricksters, or deceivers. They were men who were sincere seekers. They were men of observation and learning. Commentators are not agreed about where they came from. Our text says, “from the East”, which could mean Arabia or Persia. R.C.H. Lenski thinks Babylon, and I tend to agree. Because in Daniel 2: 48 we find written that “the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts. He made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and the chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon”. And in Daniel 5: 11, when Belshazzar was troubled by the handwriting on the wall he was told, “There is a man in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God.” “And in the days of your father light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.” So, it is very likely that these men who came searching for Christ the King were descendants of these men who learned from Daniel, and they had, in all likelihood read his writings.

We need to recognize however that these men needed supernatural guidance from God Himself in order to locate the Lord Jesus. And this supernatural guidance came in the form of this star. This star was no ordinary star. It was a supernatural star. I know that there are some well-meaning people who believe that this star was nothing other than a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn and that somehow God guided them by this means, at the right time, to go to Jerusalem to inquire further as to where the Child was to be born, but I believe that you have to do violence to the text of Scripture to conclude so. You have to unnecessarily suppress the supernatural and real and tangible guidance of God that is mentioned here, to do so. This attitude comes from wanting everything to have a rationalistic explanation, but a person who has seeking faith knows better than that. They know that unless God had led and guided these men that the Christ Child could never have been found. This was a supernatural star, created by God for the marking off of this event and for the direction of the wise men. “We have seen His star in the East.” They saw it there; and this star “went before them”, it says in verse 9. And it went before them till it came and stood over where the young Child was. That is much too low in the sky to be Jupiter or Saturn or both of them together. Normal stars do not move like that.

First, they were led by the star to Jerusalem where they asked the question: “Where is the King of the Jews?” They were given the right answer from the word of God, by the scribes and chief priests, and yet, even though these religious leaders knew the right answer, which was Bethlehem, they did not go with the wise men in their search. You should note this carefully. You can know many of the right and the orthodox answers to questions related to finding Christ and yet, it is possible that you may do nothing personally to find him for yourself. I am sure this must have perplexed the wise men exceedingly. Instead of going with them, the shrewd Herod sends them off to Bethlehem with the words, “When you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” These wise men were blessed by God to have the star go before them, to guide them and lead them and it would actually come to stand over where the young Child was. We must be more than orthodox to find Christ. We must be personally and divinely guided to Christ’s door. Men can give us the gospel, but only God can draw us to Christ.

The hymn writer says:

Sages leave your contemplations; brighter visions beam afar, seek the great Desire of nations; ye have seen His natal star. Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the new-born King.”

2nd – I want you to see that God would go before these men to give them the wise counsel of the Scriptures.

We are not told, but I wonder if perhaps some of the descendants of the magi in Daniel’s day still had access to his writings. I believe that they knew of the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel chapter 9, concerning the coming of the Messiah. Perhaps they had rightly calculated the prophecy of the 70 weeks, the 490 years, from the time of the edict of Artaxerxes in his seventh year, or from that which was given to Nehemiah, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes reign. These men had some knowledge of revelation or tradition which persuaded them that the time had come that the King of the Jews would be born. This “Messiah the Prince” they believed would be their promised deliverer from sin. Although He would be the King of Israel, they believed, in accordance with the Scriptures that they had, that He would also be the Ruler of the nations. Although they were Gentiles, they believed that worship should be given to this great King whose rule and reign as a Savior and a King would extend to the Gentiles in all the world one day, just as it had to the Jews. It is very likely that they had carefully read the book of Daniel, and that they had come to understand that this Promised Messiah would be cut off after 62 weeks, but not for Himself. They realized that He would make an end of sin; that He would make reconciliation for iniquity, and that He would bring in everlasting righteousness. And this is what they had come looking for; they had come looking for a King, who was also destined to become a Savior. And they were not going to be disappointed. Their certainty came from being divinely led.

Let me make application at this point. People, when they come to Christ don’t just happen upon Him; they must seek Him, if their conversion is according the normal and usual way that He is found. He must be sought; and the person who will find Christ must be divinely led. These men needed light on God’s Word, and they needed light on their way. The way that God guided these men to the Christ child was by “His star”. But they had known that Christ was coming into the world during a certain period of time, during a certain range of years. They knew this by the Scriptures. In all generations since Christ came, people are guided and led to Christ by the Word of God itself, and the Holy Spirit then sovereignly shines His glorious light upon the truth of the word that people might understand. Psalm 119: 105 says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” If you have true saving faith, it is a seeking faith. And a seeking faith will read and listen to the Bible, the Word of God, being preached, because that is God’s usual means to bring all of His chosen people to Himself. People must also be drawn and illumined and guided to Christ by the Spirit of God. There must be light on the Word and light on the way. A person must have their path illumined and their footsteps must be providentially guided by the truth of God’s word toward the King of Glory, by the shining light of the Holy Spirit. We have seen “His star” in the East”.

3rd – God would go before these men to divinely warn them of the hypocritical worship of evil men.

Herod’s worship is that which serves his own interests and his peculiar self-deceptive worship is to see Christ put to death. Truly, he worships himself and His own kingly self-serving interests. Look at how he schemes to see Christ put to death. Look at how he schemes deceitfully to serve his own interests. In verse 8 he says: “Go and search diligently for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” What deception! What Treachery! What hypocrisy! I will use these wise men, he thinks, to reveal the whereabouts of the infant king. And then I will get rid of this Christ. Many people since Herod’s day seek to ride on the back of the sincere seeker of Christ in order to get what they really want.

And they do this on the pretense of pretending to worship Him. They either want power and control, like Herod, or they want money and position in the Church by means of self-exaltation. I think about the Pope, who claims to be the vicar of Christ, who manipulates the worship of countless thousands of people to stand in awe of his riches, his pomp, and his glory. When Christ came into the world He came seeking none of these. Christ was born in obscurity and He voluntarily emptied Himself of all selfish worldly ambition. He lived in humility, poverty, and self-denying love. Does the Pope look anything like Christ in the way that he lives? And yet men call him Holy Father. And a study of the history of the Popes would show that some of them were more like Herod than like Christ, or even the Wise men.

Listen to John Calvin in his Institutes, Book 4 chapter 2. "While we are unwilling simply to concede the name of Church to the Papists, we do not deny that there are churches among them." "The question we raise only relates to the true and legitimate constitution of the Church, implying communion in sacred rites, which are the signs of profession, and especially in doctrine." "Daniel and Paul foretold that Antichrist would sit in the temple of God (Daniel 9: 27; 2 Thessalonians 2: 4); we regard the Roman Pontiff as the leader and standard bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom." "By placing his seat in the temple of God, it is intimated that his kingdom would not be such as to destroy the name either of Christ or of his Church." "Hence, then, it is obvious that we do not at all deny that churches remain under his tyranny; churches, however, which by sacrilegious impiety he has profaned, by cruel domination has oppressed, by evil and deadly doctrines like poisoned potions has corrupted and almost slain; churches where Christ lies half-buried, the Gospel is suppressed, piety is put to flight, and the worship of God almost abolished; where, in short, all things are in such disorder as to present the appearance of Babylon rather than the holy city of God."

While we believe that there may be some true Christians in Roman Catholic churches, we certainly can affirm that Calvin was right in his description of what the Papal office and practice has been. Let us not be deceived by men who will promote hypocrisy and deception in doctrine and practice. They certainly want to be seen as true Christians. They certainly want to be seen as leaders who are over those who follow them into falsehood. Herod said he wanted to worship the Christ Child. But remember, there was murder and self-interest in his heart. May God give us wisdom to see that all through the history of the Church there have been those religious leaders called Popes, priests, and bishops, and also, sad to say, some who were called Reverend or pastors who thought that they were offering God service to kill or to abuse true Christians. There were a number in past generations and there have been some in our generation who have been willing to excuse themselves in the fleecing of their flocks, the molestation of children, their violation of chastity, and all privacy and decency, in the name of truth. And other leaders, looking on, have sometimes tried to excuse the offending minister for having committed such sins. And this is supposed to be the true worship of God!

But true worship is born out of something far different. It is based upon the Word of God and the promise of God that – "In the fullness of time He would send forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons." Jesus was born to die for the sins of all His people, but Herod would make Jesus die and anyone else die who would threaten his own interests. Jesus is to be worshipped for Who He is, the King, not only of the Jews, but also the King of all Kings, and the Lord of all Lords. We need to know to remember it well, that Christ is not always found by men who hold religious positions. Men who ought to humble themselves when they see the supernatural powerful working of God; they will often spurn the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit. Men who are eager to be called Bishops or priests or even pastors; some of them think that it is weird to follow Christ's star – to receive the Holy Spirit's light, which would lead them to salvation, and the true worship of God and Christ. You must be divinely led and illumined if you would be saved. You must not think that being religious or talking religious is

enough. Your heart must seek, your mind must be led to search God's word. You must be willing to submit your mind, no matter how intelligent a person you are, to be taught concerning the truth, which is found in the word of God.

Now contrast this with Herod. What does it say of him when he heard that there was a King of the Jews besides himself? It says that he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And why was he troubled? He was troubled because he thought that he would lose everything if Christ were king. And the people were afraid of what Herod would do, if he got angry over this revelation. Many people do not seek Christ for similar reasons today and they are troubled when they hear of Him. You should understand that when you come to Christ that you do not lose anything but the guilt of your sin and the love of it. And you gain every good thing when you have Christ. Everything of real and lasting value is yours; all the blessings of a new heart; sins forgiven, and a relationship with the Father. It is only sin that robs a person of the real glory and the real power to do that which is right. The beauty of sin, my friend, is a fool's gold and a tinsel. But the beauty of Christ clothes His people with His righteousness, and takes away the ugliness of their sin from their souls. His rule over men is righteous. His yoke is easy and His burden light. But you say, "I want the control and the power over my life". "I want to be my own person, and to be free." "And I suspect that Christ will take this all away from me if He were to rule over me." "I do not want this man to rule over me."

But let me reason with you over these suspicions of yours. Jesus says in the gospels that he who tries to save his life of sinful independence shall lose it, and he who will lose it for Christ's sake and the gospel's shall find it. Herod lost everything and is in hell today. He was led by his own lusts, and He destroyed his own life, and the lives of those around him as well. But these wise men were divinely led, and I hope that you will be too. They "rejoiced exceedingly when they saw the star", and I hope that you will rejoice also at being led by God's Word and by His Spirit. They were even divinely led and warned not to return to Herod and thus they protected their own lives and the life of the Lord Jesus in accordance with God's wise perception. This is the kind of leading that you can trust. This is the kind of leading that you can stake your soul upon.

4th – God would go before these men to let them find Christ and worship Him.

Verse 9 says: "When they heard the king, they departed; and behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." "And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him." "And when they opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh." These Wise men were not Jews, but they were sincerely seeking Christ, the King of the Jews, because they believed with a reasonable faith, having looked into God's word, that this King would bring salvation to all men both Jews and Gentiles. I cannot help but believe this because of the gifts which they brought to the Christ Child, and the way in which they worshipped Him. Verse 11 says, "And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh." These are gifts of great value and of great spiritual significance which were brought at great cost to these men. They were not gifts native to their own country, but they were precious, and they were probably imported. The Gold they intended for this Child as being a King; the King of Kings whose life would be of the greatest value, and whose righteousness would shine forth as gold with no impurity. The frankincense represents the sweet odor of His life unto God as a fragrance in the nostrils of God. "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased," it was said of Him at his baptism by John the Baptist. His offering of Himself to God would be acceptable because He would be the faithful high priest to God in things pertaining to men and to God. The Myrrh – An aromatic gum, would represent His sufferings, and the perfume derived from it would be the savor of the wonderful blessings which flowed from His sufferings. He would finish the transgression and He would make an end of sins. He would make reconciliation

for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness by His death. And He would be cut off, but not for Himself, as it says in Daniel 9: 26.

They worshipped Him, it says, and it was more than a customary salute, a custom of their culture and times. They prostrated themselves before Him. But there was more. In the words of R.C.H. Lenski, the commentator, “They fell down and worshipped this child, born in this little village and not in Jerusalem; living in a house and in surroundings of the poorest kind; lying in the arms of his mother who was ranked among the lowliest of the land. And these men who were often in the presence of the King of Babylon; themselves high, mighty, and wealthy.” “From the capital – and King Herod – they had come to this poor house.” “They treat it as the grandest of palaces and this little child as the most glorious King.” “How could they do this?” “Their hearts must have beheld what their eyes did not see.” I think that this is very well said. Because that is what true worship in this life is all about.

We do not worship God, or glorify Him in any better way, when we do so in an aesthetically beautiful building, than when we do so in very poor surroundings. Worship is all about our having our focus on the One to whom we have come to bring our offerings. There is no indication in the text that there was disappointment on the faces of the Magi when they made their appearance in this humble house to worship Him; the One whom they had come so very far to see, and to present their gifts to Him. They had found the One whom their souls loved. Only true faith can look beyond the poverty and simplicity and see Christ in such surroundings. They saw the King of glory. Do you see Him today? Will you seek for this King today? Will you worship Him in spirit and truth, and receive His ministry to your heart? Will you present to Him the gifts that acknowledge to Him that you understand the purpose for which He came? If you will, your eyes will someday behold the King in all His glory, and you will fall down and worship Him forever!