

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 2**

**“1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen 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 when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ” 7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 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 had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.”**

## **“The Wisdom of Christmas”**

**Last week we considered the light of Christmas with a quick review of the subject of light in the Bible.**

- **We celebrated that Jesus came as the light of the world & learned that we were to be lesser lights as well.**

**The candles of the season are still lit this morning as we consider one last portion of the Christmas accounts:**

- **The coming of the Wise Men from the east!**

**And this is very appropriate because we left last week with the challenge to let our light shine from a lamp stand rather than hiding under a basket. We spoke about how it impacts ALL areas of our lives and of course that brings up the necessary questions about whether we are doing what Jesus commanded us to do in those areas.**

- **We know this requires wisdom and these wise men can be both an example and a reminder for us in that regard!**

**In seeing them as an example we need to ask some basic questions:**

- **Who were these men?**
- **How did they know to come?**
- **Why did they come?**

**So, what we know about these men for sure is given in the brief account by Matthew that was our morning text. We are told that they were wise men or magi from the east: We are not given their names nor the specific country or region they came from: They are faithful Gentiles who come in faith.**

- **The other two questions are related, but the reason they came was to see the new born King!**

**We also know that they had a star to follow, but it leaves the question of why they knew about this king and that they should follow the star.**

**To properly answer that we need to remember a bit of the history of Israel.**

God called Abram and promised him many descendants, that Kings and nations would come from him and that he would inherit the land of Canaan. As we learned in Genesis, Abraham believed all these by faith, later we see of them locally fulfilled in the OT, then made full in Christ and now expanded with the Body of Christ [those lights] Even with the coming of the twelve tribes, the conquest of the land and Kings David & Solomon on the Throne, God's people were not faithful.

- God judged them after generations of wicked Kings and Jerusalem was destroyed.

However, Daniel and other captives were taken to Babylon and with God's blessing rose to positions of prominence. We know the stories about Daniel and his friends but don't often focus on the impact they and the other priests, scribes, and prophets had on many Gentile lands.

- King Nebuchadnezzar's conversion is one such impact for sure.

BUT when we look to the Book of Esther we see it went much further: Again, we know some details well, like Esther becoming queen and her enemy Haman being hanged on the very gallows he built for her Uncle Mordecai. We read last week at the Table about how Mordecai went out in royal apparel and the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor [*Ester 8:15*]

- But the Book does not end there because Haman had already sent the King's decree that all the Jews were to be destroyed.

Thus Queen Ester prevailed on the King to reverse that order and give the Jews the power to defend themselves:

**Ester 8:** "8 You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke." 9 So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language."

- Now the impact of that is easy to just pass over, but we are talking about the Persian Empire here!

We are told there are 127 provinces [think of states if you will] and that this Empire now stretched from Africa to India. There were many languages involved but notice that the Jews had kept their own language in all these regions. The new edict had its intended affect:

**Ester 9:1** "On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. 2 The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. 3 And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. 4 For Mordecai was great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent."

The Book of Ester goes on to detail their victories and how the Feast of Purim was established to remember how God had delivered them.

It ends on this high note, "3 For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen." [*'all' there means those in the 127 provinces stretching from Africa to India!*]

So, it should not surprise us that there were those in the East who knew that Jehovah had promised salvation and were expecting the coming of Messiah just as some faithful Jews like Simeon and Anna were in Israel.

- **The Jews had maintained the Hebrew tongue & would have carried with them the Law & the Prophets!**

**We don't know the details of what these later wise men may have been given or learned, but they did know to follow that star & search for the King!**

- **Faith always obeys!**

**Their coming and their gifts for Jesus have been spoken about & sung about down through the ages, even though we do not even know their names!**

- **There coming is a fitting conclusion for the Christmas season because they remind us of the importance of wisdom & obedience!**

**We started this Advent season with the Angels who announced the coming of Good News, just as we are commanded to do with the Gospel today! We then considered the Shepherds who reminded us that Jesus came as the Lamb of God to be THE sacrifice for the sins of His people! We studied the faithful parents: Not just those who would raise John and Jesus, but those who had continued to be faithful down through those four hundred years of silence. Next we were warned to avoid the trappings of the busy Christmas season and challenged to keep Jesus at the center of Christmas and all things!**

- **With the Christ candle lit, we remembered that Jesus came as the light of the world and sent us out to be lights in a dark world as well.**

**The Wise Men followed a great light and gave the world light as well by helping to reveal the Light of the World: That new born baby in the manger. Their witness to King Herod gave Him and all Jerusalem the opportunity to repent and come and worship as well, but we sadly know that they refused.**

**So, for this week as we consider again how we are to be those lights set on a lampstand, the Wise Men remind us that we too need wisdom, God's wisdom, to rightly order our lives.**

**It is appropriate that our calendar readings take us through the Book of Proverbs in the month of January and I hope many of you are reading along.**

**It is a vital book as those who follow the Horner Bible study plan know well.**

- **He has you read Proverbs & Acts each month, because they are important!**

**This week we come to Proverbs chapters 8 & 9, where we see Jesus as the personification of Wisdom!**

**Now, while I think we can certainly see the Book of Proverbs as the central teachings on Wisdom, those saying of the wise are not the only Wisdom we can find in the Bible.**

**Even the Books usually classified as the Wisdom literature, running from Job through Lamentations, are not the exclusive place to find wisdom.**

**Wisdom is needed in ALL areas of life and good discipleship of our children and others includes teaching people how to find and discern such Wisdom.**

**If young parents come asking about how to raise their children we know that Wisdom is given to parents in Deuteronomy chapters 6-10 and of course in the Book of Proverbs.**

**Has our modern age with all their experts and studies come up with better ways to raise Godly children?**

- **I don't think so!**

**When we consider the condition of far too many young people today, it should remind us of just how important it is to return to God's ways!**

- **And since our marriages are not doing much better, assuming folks even chose to marry these days,  
we should return to the Scriptures for Wisdom there as well.  
*[young people sharing their collective ignorance is not a good plan!]***

**We find wisdom given to husbands and wives in the Song of Solomon & again the Book of Proverbs.**

**God tells us where marriage came from, why it is important and how men and women are to relate to each other.**

**A VERY important part of being light in the darkness of our present age is living and defending Biblical marriage. People's lives are being destroyed by more of those experts and studies that tell us how to have better relationships when they cannot even accept what basic biology teaches about men and women! We can give people hope through our example and teaching.**

**The wisdom of the Bible does not only apply to marriage and children!**

**We can find wisdom given for our vocations in Ephesians & Proverbs. The Bible not only teaches us how to work well, but also teaches us about the importance of work. In an age where young people are being taught that being a sluggard is the right way to approach work so they will not be exploited, we again can provide hope by our example and teaching. *[mention the example of the workmen for the tabernacle.]***

- **We should pray that God make us good at what we do!**

**The Bible also has much more wisdom to share for our church life than just the Gospel, which of course is central. The Good News includes changed lives and those changed lives should thrive in our Christian community as we see in the Book of Acts.**

- **We also find wisdom about worship from Leviticus and Hebrews as we saw in my series on worship just before Advent.**

**With all of this in mind, we should also remember that the Bible is NOT a "how to book" for life. It is not just another way to find happiness.**

- **The Bible is the grand story of God's salvation, the salvation that was announced by those Angels on that first Christmas morning.**

**And the center of that story is Jesus, the Lamb of God Who came to save His people from their sins and to give them the abundant life we learn about in the Bible!**

**Just as we saw with the Christmas season, trying to live the Christian life, or any good life, without Jesus is vanity. It is building our lives on a foundation of sand and when the storms of life come, and they always come, whatever we have built will come crashing down.**

**This is why the Book of Proverbs tells us right up front that,  
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction."**

- **At bottom until and unless we rightly know, and fear the Author of the Story of our salvation, we are simply being fools!**

**For this New Year we should all strive to seek wisdom in the Bible, so we can be ready to serve God in whatever way He chooses to use us as He did the Wise Men and all the cast of characters we have studied in the Christmas accounts this year.**

**BUT as we do we must remember the warning that Jesus gave to those proud Pharisees who actually knew their Bibles very well...**

**John "37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. 38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent,**

**Him you do not believe. 39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; & these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”**

**When we go to the Scriptures for the wisdom we need in all areas of our lives, we must remember that we are searching for Jesus, and when we do we will find Him and the life He has promised:**

**As the Psalmist said long ago:**

**Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners,**

**Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;**

**2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.**

**3 He shall be like a tree**

**Planted by the rivers of water,**

**That brings forth its fruit in its season,**

**Whose leaf also shall not wither;**

**And whatever he does shall prosper.”**

**Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55**

**““Ho! Everyone who thirsts,**

**Come to the waters;**

**And you who have no money,**

**Come, buy and eat.**

**Yes, come, buy wine and milk**

**Without money and without price.**

**2 Why do you [a]spend money for what is not bread,**

**And your wages for what does not satisfy?**

**Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,**

**And let your soul delight itself in abundance.”**