

**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.”

## **Wise Men Still Seek Him!**

In the season of Epiphany, it is appropriate to turn our attention to Matthew’s account of the coming of the wise men from the east.

- The coming of these Wise Men in the second chapter of the New Testament foreshadows the coming of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God, which is very important to us as Gentiles!

I mentioned several times during the Advent and Christmas seasons that the coming of Jesus changed everything and the bringing together of the Jews and Gentiles was a critical and central part of the Gospel going out to the world...

- It is what Simeon saw in his prayer at the Temple...
- It is what the Prophets of old foretold and proclaimed
- What was promised to Abraham
- What was implied in the promised victory of the seed of the woman in the Garden!

We should understand that these wise men come as the “first-fruits” of the fullness of the Gentiles that God will bring into His Kingdom. This week I will focus on how we as modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century Saints should be impacted as individuals in our Gentile world by the obedience we see in these Wise Men. And next week, Lord willing, I will consider the impact on the broader world as we review the fulfilment of what Simeon understood about God’s grand plan of salvation. Here in Matthew chapter two we see wise men who choose obedience and life as opposed to the fools in Jerusalem led by King Herod who rebel and choose death: We want to be the wise ones seeking the abundant life Jesus promised and not the fools that love death, so with that in mind I want to focus on a few simple lessons from our text this morning as we learn from these men who are the first fruits of the Gentiles!

- First & foremost, we should see that God gave the wise men guidance & they were willing to follow it faithfully:

We often spend a WHOLE lot of time & discussion trying to figure out just what the sign they followed was and the timing of their coming, rather than marveling at this simple lesson of obedience that is placed right in front of us!

God gave them guidance and they followed it! – *a pretty simple lesson!*

So we should ask, if God gave us guidance would we follow it? Yes, of course is our quick response: Especially if it were a spectacular sign in heaven that we could follow. But I fear we need to be honest here:

- We would certainly be ready and willing to give all IF God gave us some big task that would save the world...

But if He asked us to wash the dishes, we would want to discuss whether it is our turn or show how those dishes are someone else's responsibility! Too simplistic you say?

- Well, let us consider Paul's instruction to young Timothy about God's guidance...

I Timothy 3:14 “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for EVERY good work.”

- So kids, verse 17 is another verse that seems so clear that many adults have to wonder if it can mean what it says: [repeat verse 17: “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for EVERY good work.”]

So, God gives us guidance in the Bible so we are equipped for which good works? Yes, most of our English Bibles translate the Greek here in this verse as “every good work” ...And if we study the original Greek language of the Bible so we can be sure we have the full meaning, we find it really means “EVERY good work!” Or we could ask this question another way:

- What part of our lives does the Bible NOT speak too?

The world tells us that this Book is an ancient book for an agrarian people with little to teach us today. Sadly, many in our churches tend to agree with that statement more than they should...

- Leaving things like science, technology, history, politics and much more of life outside the reach of the Bible, often forgetting to even read the first two-thirds of God's revelation!

For example, some would argue that these ancient writers obviously knew nothing of the Internet or text messaging on our phones... Right?

- Why electricity had not even been discovered yet!
- So, does the Bible give us any guidance as to who we should speak to or how we should say things when using all these wonders of modern technology?

How about this verse in Proverbs 25 that we will come to on January 25<sup>th</sup> in our suggested readings:

“4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.”

Or we could consider Paul's instruction to the Colossians:

“4:5 Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

We are encouraged to make resolutions for the New Year and this might be a great place to start:

- How about posting that verse on each of our computers & phones?

Then we could check each message we compose against this Biblical standard BEFORE we hit the “send” button? And of course we could also ask that very important question about whether we are redeeming the time with all our modern tools and entertainment or just wasting it.

- Yes, simple obedience can often be this simple!

In this morning’s account we are NOT told the details about the star these wise men were given to follow:

- But we are told that they obeyed its guidance, reminding us that we should heed ALL the guidance given to us in God’s Word for all of life!
- They were rewarded not only with further directions, but also with the blessing of being able to worship the newborn King!

These wise men stand in stark contrast with the religious and political leaders there at Jerusalem: They had the very Words of God as keepers of His Scriptures: AND they knew them, being able to tell these Wise Men the city where the Messiah would be born: Little Bethlehem!

- The Messiah lay only about five miles from Jerusalem, yet NO ONE from the temple or the palace was willing to make that short journey.

This is where the rubber meets the road if we are to learn the right lessons for living in our time:

- How often is the solution to our problems just a short distance away and yet we are not willing to make the journey?

Often because like these religious leaders and King Herod we are so absorbed in what WE are doing, or distracted by the wisdom of the world that we ignore the wisdom that God offers to us plainly.

Jesus clearly teaches us that we must seek FIRST the Kingdom of God, and that applies to all the practical areas of our lives... The bottom-line is: When Jesus speaks, WE should listen even if it might conflict with what we think are ‘good’ things we have as our priority to get done!

- We want to be like the obedient wise men who sought after life and found it with the Baby Jesus!

We do NOT want to be like those who ignored God’s guidance: And if we believe that the Bible speaks to all areas of life then we must be ready to obey in all areas in these same very simple ways...

And far too often, it is simple obedience that is needed for some of the most critical areas of life...

- Just as the salvation of the world lay with the little baby in the manger!

We are in a season of births and baptisms here at Church of the King, so childrearing would be one area to consider as an important example. Despite what all the books & experts might have to say, there are only two major principles given to us in the Bible about good child rearing:

- Nurture & discipline!
- Our children are to be instructed and trained and that means the Word and the rod.

Now even the world will go along with a bit of reasonable religious instruction but certainly NOT the rod. And yet what does the Bible say? [*use Loving Command as the simple explanation*]

Under normal circumstances, covenant children are raised in families so having strong marriages should be important as well. Again, you can consult thousands or tens of thousands of books and articles or you can study Ephesians chapter five! Too simple? Not really!

[*Use the example of the Triangle for marriage counseling.*]

Next, as we turn to our singles and young people the BIG question is how to prepare for a good marriage?

Again, with relationships the Bible gives us some very simple principles: With all the books on courtship and dating the simple truth is that you are to look for someone who shares your faith and values as you strive to be the disciple Jesus wants you to be!

- And how about that important subject of money?

That is an important topic for our state and nation these days, but I am focusing this morning on our personal lives so what are the simple principles? Well, R.C. Sproul Jr. got it down to one simple line: ‘Work hard and spend less than you make’ and I would simply add that we should NOT forget to put God first with His tithe.

Now of course none of us can carry all of this out perfectly... But my point is that we should NOT miss the simplicity of obedience! Not following the commands of Scripture is a sin, and ALL sins can be repented of as we learned last week in Psalm 51.

But we learn from our Christmas characters that not all sins are equal when it comes to consequences:

We have what might be considered high crimes and low crimes... Some may fail to obey because they question the wisdom of the instructions or neglect them. This would be the example of Zacharias who was silenced for nine months! Sadly you can also have open rebellion which is what we see with King Herod and the other religious leaders! Such disobedience endangers our very souls for all eternity!

So let us make this a year of obedience with the same attitude we encourage in our youngest covenant members:

- Let us always obey right away, all the way and with a smile on our face and in our heart!

And finally, we should also remember that this account of the Wise men clearly shows that God protected and cared for His Son, as He does for us: The Messiah, even though He was a helpless baby in a poor family is kept safe: Joseph is warned in a dream and Jesus is taken to safety before Herod’s men kill the children of Bethlehem...

- God’s plan of salvation cannot be thwarted!

While clearly seen here in Matthew chapter two with regard to Jesus: He Himself applies it to ALL of us who are united to Him:

- In John chapter ten we see a very similar situation and what follows are some of the most comforting words we can find in all of the Scriptures:

There we find Jesus at the Temple: John 10: 23 “And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.

26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.”

- Neither the words or works of Jesus are acknowledged by these hardhearted religious leaders...
- Just as they ignored the Baby Jesus and the coming of the Wise Men

Here is yet another reminder that our salvation is wholly dependent on God’s Grace!

Jesus then contrasts them with those who DO hear and obey & they should be a great comfort to us all: “27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

- And then we see that just as God protected His infant Son when He was most vulnerable, Jesus protects us as His sheep:

**“28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”**

**Jesus and the Father united in this great purpose, which is being accomplished by the Comforter who was sent to us:**

- **Jesus will save His people from their sins, we are united as His body and His Kingdom will advance and we can KNOW that we are secure in the hands of our faithful covenant God!**

**The title of this week's sermon is simply “Wise Men Still Seek Him” and it should remind us that we face that important decision about who to follow even now in the year of our Lord 2017:**

- **Only if we truly seek Jesus will we enjoy the blessings of life that God offers His people!**

**I hope we are all spending time this month studying once again the Wisdom of Solomon in the Book of Proverbs: If you are following our daily readings, you would have read this life and death contrast and the call to obedience clearly in chapter eight this very morning!**

**But in case you missed it...**

**Proverbs 8:32 "Now therefore, listen to me, my children, For blessed are those who keep my ways. 33 Hear instruction and be wise, And do not disdain it. 34 Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors. 35 For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the Lord; 36 But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death."**

- **God offers rich blessings for obedience and dreadful curses for disobedience.**

**As we are commissioned and sent forth this week...**

- **Let us remember that it is important to choose wisely!**

**Communion meditation: Proverbs 9:1-6:**

**"Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city, 4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 "Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine**

**I have mixed. 6 Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding.”**