

**Matthew 2:1-6**

1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

The birth narrative is found in two places in the Bible. In Luke we have the beautiful story of the shepherds seeking out the Lord on the very first Christmas day. In Matthew there is information on what takes place shortly after the birth with the arrival of the wise men. This is known as Epiphany. It occurs in Bethlehem at a house. Now we have made it through Christmas, the birth is over and the season of Epiphany starts on the sixth of January. Epiphany is about the Gentiles, the non-Jewish Magi or wise men that seek out the Lord. In Luke, the birth narrative has the shepherds, which are Jews working near Bethlehem. However, in Matthew, the wise men are from far away, somewhere outside of Judea.

The significance of Matthew's story is that Jesus is for all the people, not just the Jews. Matthew shows movement that began with the promises to Abraham and David and moves throughout history. It is in continuity with the Old Testament prophecy. Chapter 1 has a genealogical summary and chapter 2 has fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. This brings the Biblical world into our world. The fulfillment of the hope shows how our searching leads to the God of the Bible.

Advent leads up to Christmas with the people waiting and anticipating the arrival of Christ. At Christmas we celebrate the birth which is the mass of Christ. The very first Christmas is when the shepherds visit the Lord on the day of birth. Epiphany comes later as the wise men look for Jesus it takes time to travel. When they find him it is several days after the birth. Luke's setting is one of poverty, they can't even get a room. In Matthew's setting it is gifts from royalty and wealth.

The magi come with a specific purpose for a specific person. They came to worship the King of the Jews. Tradition has it that there are three because of the number of gifts. However, the actual number is unknown. They go to Jerusalem because it is the headquarters of the kingdom. They did not question if this is actually the new king of the Jews. They knew his identity. They only question where he is located. Outsiders from outside of their culture, outside of their religion, and outside of their area knew about the promise from God. Like many others, they did not have a clear picture of the details.

The story shows a disparity between the kingdoms. These outsiders have no special relation to the Torah. They have no commitment to the human made rules of the Jews. They followed the light. We hypothesize about what the light can be, a comet, a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, or even it is an unidentified flying object. It really doesn't matter. What matters is that they followed the light. Here is a profound biblical lesson. When we go through Christmas, we follow traditions and look at lights. King

Herod was on the wrong track. His immediate goal was to preserve his own wealth and status. He was in a symbiotic relationship with Rome and needed to protect his political position. So, he also asks where. He didn't have knowledge of the scriptures that were provided by the Old Testament prophets. They had to call in religious scholars. The chief priests were the ruling class and the scribes were the professional experts. They were in the know. They knew that the prophecy says that the promise from God will come to Bethlehem. Yet they did not respond. This is the part that I find amazing. The Scriptures reveal the divine status of Jesus. King Herod and the religious leaders find out from foreigners that the prophecy is being fulfilled right now and they do not respond. The foreigners have seen the light while the religious leaders are still in the dark.

The wise men make it to Bethlehem and find the house where Mary and Joseph have relocated. They present the gifts to Jesus in a house. The story is not about Mary or Joseph. The story is about Jesus and Gentiles and the trouble they get from the Jews. When the magi find Jesus, they are like the shepherds, they are overwhelmed with joy. They presented expensive gifts to the new King of the Jews. Through further divine intervention the magi are warned in a dream of the evil nature of King Herod. To the best of our knowledge, they never question the validity of this information. They trust in God, disobey Herod, and return home using a different route.

The Bible story is for us. It is about non Jewish people looking for Jesus to worship him while Jews reject him. They came for a specific purpose – to pay him homage. They never question the realism of his divinity status. They are overwhelmed with joy upon finding Jesus. The realism of prophecy is an opportunity to worship and present gifts to the Lord. The Good News is for all of us. The God of Abraham fulfilled the promise to the Jews and to rest of the world. What the wise do is follow the light, look for Jesus, and pay him homage when they find him.

We come to church, participate in worship, and read the Bible and then go about our daily living. But the Bible shows us that God is devoted to us. God is living, loving, and active. God gives us the light in a world of darkness. In your life, I hope and pray that you do what wise men do follow the light and seek out Jesus when the rest of the world does not.