

**Matthew 2: 1-18; "The Seeking Faith of the Magi", A Christmas Season  
Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 24th, 2006,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

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. He came into the world as the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world, and 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 of all human history, their Messiah had come. The Bible says that there is none who seeks for God unless He sets them a-seeking. And we stand amazed that the Jews in Jerusalem who had all the promises and who had waited so long for Messiah their prince would fail to see and acknowledge His birth. But for the most part; they did. They were so close in time, so close in physical proximity to their salvation, but yet so far away. Even when men are negligent, God Himself will arouse interest and set certain men to seeking His Christ in the days after His birth. A very unusual group they were--these wise men; these Magi, these sage philosophers. They lived afar off and were brought near; while those who were near remained afar off in their hearts. Let us behold this morning the seeking faith of these wise men who traveled hundreds of miles to find Christ, and the wicked unbelief of Herod and others, who think nothing of the King of heaven come to earth. Wise men seek Christ when grace is at work in their hearts. The wicked in their pride will not seek Him. My proposition to you is this--Wise men in their search for Christ will overcome all obstacles to find Him while wicked men will always pursue their wicked desires because they do not want Him. So let us ask the question--How are the wise men and Herod different from each other in their search for Christ? For both were seeking and both professed the desire to worship Him. Let's let the wise men represent all true seekers after Christ and Herod will represent all those who seek after Christ for the wrong reasons. We will see that the wise men differ from Herod in 2 radically different ways.

**1st- The Wise men were divinely led, while Herod was selfishly troubled.**  
(Verses 1-3)

Who were these men who traveled so far to see the child Jesus, and why did they do it? They are called wise men or magi in the text. The word in the Greek is "Magoi"- whence we derive our word, "Magicians." But these men are not charlatans, tricksters, or deceivers. They are men who are sincere seekers, men of observation and learning. Commentators are not agreed upon where they came from. Our text says, "from the East," which could mean Arabia or Persia. 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 and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon." And in Daniel 5:11, when Belshassar 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." 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 and knew of the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9 concerning Messiah. Perhaps they had calculated the 490 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem given by Cyrus King of Persia. 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 One would be their promised deliverer, the King of Israel, and the Desire of all nations. They believed that worship should be given to this great King whose rule would extend to the gentiles as well as the Jews. They had come looking for a Savior. Their certainty comes from being divinely led.

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." Men are guided and led to Christ by the Word of God itself. 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 led toward the King of Glory by His light. We have seen "His star" in the East.

This 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 seeking faith knows better than that. It knows that unless God has led and guided that Christ could have never 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.

They were first led by the star to Jerusalem, where they asked the question "where is the King of the Jews?" They and Herod 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 will do nothing personally to find him yourself. I am sure this must have perplexed the wise men exceedingly. Instead 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 to actually 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 newborn King.*

But did you know 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; 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--His 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.

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; all the blessings of a new heart, sins forgiven, and a relationship with the Father. It is only sin that robs us 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--to be free." "I suspect that Christ will take this all away 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 destroyed his own life and the lives of those around him. 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 protected their own lives and the lives 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 leaving that you can stake your soul upon.

**The 2nd way that the Wise men radically differ from Herod is that the Wise men brought Christ true worship while Herod brought hypocritical worship.** (Verses 4-18)

Herod's worship is that which serves his own interests and his worship is to see Christ put to death. Look at how he schemes to see Christ put to death. Look at how he

schemes deceitfully to serve his own interests. "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." 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 to stand in awe of his riches, his pomp, and his glory, when Christ came seeking none of these. Christ was born in obscurity and He 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 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." I believe that even Calvin was wrong on the subject of the sacred rites, but certainly he was right in his description of what the Papal office and practice has been. Oh, let us not be deceived by men who will promote hypocrisy and deception in doctrine and practice, as those who want to be seen as true Christians and leaders among the faithful. Herod says he wants to worship the Christ Child. But there is 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 who think that they are offering God service to kill or to use true Christians. They are willing to excuse themselves in the fleecing of their flocks, the molestation of children, their violation of their chastity, and all privacy and decency in the name of truth. And they will excuse offending ministers for their sin. And this is supposed to be the 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 Lord of all Lords.

These Wise men were not Jews, but they were sincerely seeking Christ, the King of the Jews because they believed in a primitive form and fashion, 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 precious, and 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 wonderful blessings flowing from those sufferings. He would finish the transgression and make an end of sins. He would make reconciliation for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness by His death. He would be cut off, but not for Himself, as it says in Daniel 9: 26. I still wonder if the Wise men had access to Daniel's writings and made up their gifts accordingly.

They worshipped Him 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 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 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 to glorify God in any better way when we do so in an aesthetically beautiful building, than we do so in a stable if Christ is there. Worship is all about having our focus on the One to whom we have come to bring our offerings. There is no indication in the text of disappointment on the faces of the Magi when they had to go into a stable to worship Him whom they had come so 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 the stable. 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!