

Have you ever thought that you were a king or a queen or royalty of some sort? A wise man or a wise woman? Sometimes when I think about these characters in the scripture, they seem a little bit distant from who I am and the way that I live my life. Maybe you feel the same way, but there's actually some aspects of this story that I think parallel much of what we experience in our lives today. I want to invite you to consider that as we enter into this story again this week. Over the last several weeks we've been taking a closer look at some of the characters of the very first Christmas story, those that were seeking after Christ and those that God sought after.

The first week we considered the story of the angel, Gabriel, who sought Mary to say, "You will give birth to a son, and this child will be the Son of God." Then we looked at Mary and Joseph, how they responded to the news of this miraculous birth in ways that were humble and might model for us how we might live our lives.

Last week we looked at the story of those that were on the outside, the shepherds, and yet they were the first ones to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Today, we consider the story of the magi, the wise ones, who came intentionally to seek after Jesus.

These stories are ones that connect in different ways. They're ones we hear year over year, and I want to begin by considering the role of Herod in this story. Now the wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, and Herod was the king at the time. He was placed in power by the Roman government. He was not a native to the area, but instead was a ruler that the people thought was an oppressor, represented an imperial power that was foreign to them. People weren't a really big fan of King Herod.

Here these people came from another country, and they came to who was supposed to be the king. They said, "Hey, we're looking for a king." Now wait a minute. This was Herod. He was in the royal palace. He was at the center of power there in Jerusalem, and these people seemed to know what they were talking about at least. They're asking for a king, and it's not me in front you, Herod might have thought. As you might imagine, any threat to the power of the king was a problem for him.

So he devises a plan. He perhaps thought to himself, "I don't know who this king is, but the scriptures say that this is where, if there were to be a king, this is where he were to be born. So go find out for me, and then come back and tell me so that I too might worship him." Of course we know that Herod didn't really want to worship Jesus. He wanted to kill him, but the wise ones leave searching for Jesus.

I wonder, have you ever been in a situation like Herod where you felt like, "Wait a minute. I think that's my job to do." It was Herod's job to be king. It wasn't someone else's job. It was clearly Herod's role. Maybe in your family, someone's doing something. Well, I thought I was always the one that did this. Or maybe at work you find yourself in a place where someone else is taking on responsibilities that you once had or maybe things are just different this year, and you say, "Wait a minute. I thought that was my job to do." Have you ever felt like that? Perhaps a little bit displaced, uncertain about what your role is in your family or at work or among your friends. This is where Herod found himself, and seeking revenge, he wasn't going to have any of it.

Perhaps you then, like those magi, those wise ones who set off on a long and difficult journey. The scripture text says this in just a few short words, "They saw the star, they followed it," but really it was an incredible journey. We don't really grasp the magnitude of what their travel was like. It's likely that they would have traveled from what would have been known as Persia, what we would know today as

modern Iran, to the Holy Land, the holy city of Jerusalem, about nine hundred miles. Now nine hundred miles is a long journey even today no matter how you might take it, and they didn't even get on I-70 or the turnpike or anything like it. It was a long and difficult journey which they made for the purpose of worshiping, of bringing honor to the one that they thought might be the Savior, the one whose sign they saw in the sky in the stars. They set off on a long journey uncertain about where it may lead them. It was going to be difficult and hard, and yet still they set forth.

I wonder, do you have anything in your life like that? A journey or a task or a project, something that is difficult and hard, and you're not sure where it may lead you, but you believe that it is something that God is calling you to. Or you would think that, "I think this is the right thing to do, and I don't know what the road ahead may lead, but I'm going to set out anyway." Do you find yourself like those magi? What challenges do you face? What is your experience of life at the moment? What difficult and hard journey are you on this season?

When we consider their time, their journey, when they finally come to the place where Jesus is, the scripture says that they saw the star and they were filled with joy. They were overjoyed. Some translations say they rejoiced, exceedingly with great joy. Really what we see here in English is four Greek words that describe the state of their souls. This is far beyond being happy or cheerful. This is joy times joy multiplied over and over, overwhelming joy.

I wonder, do you ever find yourself overwhelmed with joy? Not just happy or cheerful or things are going well, but overwhelmed by the joy of what you're experiencing. This is where the magi found themselves. They had been waiting for centuries. There had been an anticipation for a long time that there would be someone that would be born that would save the people from their sins. From the depths of their soul, they rejoice with an overwhelming sense of joy.

Now I don't know about you, but sometimes I struggle with this. I think sometimes followers of Christ struggle with this as well. Instead of being overjoyed, I think at times we can be underjoyed. Do you ever find yourself like that? We should be the most overjoyed people in the world, and yet too many times we are underjoyed. There's times where I have to remind myself if I'm feeling good, if I'm experiencing and joy just let my face know about it a little bit, make sure I smile. Maybe some of you struggle with that, maybe not.

The magi are overwhelmed with joy, so I wonder what is it that brings you joy? What is it that brings you overwhelming joy? Can you remember when you felt overwhelming joy? Does your faith or following after God bring you this type of joy?

Then what do we bring before Jesus Christ? The magi, when they arrived, they presented Jesus gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, the scripture text tells us. They were overjoyed to bow down and worship, to honor Christ with they had to give. They experienced the joy of giving as was shared a few moments ago. Both giving and receiving there is great joy in it.

It's been debated for centuries exactly what the meaning of those gifts were. Perhaps the gold represented that Christ was King, was the true King, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords has been born. That frankincense represented the divinity of Christ, that this is God's son. That myrrh at the time was used in embalming. When someone died, it was use dot prepare bodies for burial. Many believe

that this was a foreshadowing that Jesus would one day die on the cross, and that this small infant would grow up to suffer a terrible death on our sake and on our behalf.

The magi worshiped Jesus and were overjoyed to bring their gifts as an act of worship. They opened the very best of what they had and offered it to God in Jesus Christ in the manger. I wonder, as we prepare to welcome Jesus again this year, what do you bring to offer Christ? What do you bring of who you are, what you have, the gifts that God has given you, the way that you relate to other people? What do you bring to honor Jesus this year?

Whatever it is that you might bring to Jesus, the good news is that we worship God because God first created and loved us. We offer ourselves and our gifts to be used by God in ways that are good. We don't give to an uncertain, unknowable, God. We offer ourselves to a God who came to live with us, a God who came be among us, a God who brings light and life in ways that might encourage us to be overwhelmed with joy. This Christmas I invite you to bring yourself, all of who you are, to worship Jesus, to consider what it might mean to continue to grow in your faith, and like these magi, to seek Christ and worship with great joy.

Will you pray with me? Oh, God, sometimes we feel out of place, that someone else is doing our job. Sometimes we come to you, and we're underjoyed and not overjoyed. There are times where we face difficult and hard journeys. So we ask that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit, that you would encourage us to offer ourselves that you might receive even what little we might have to offer. Multiply and use it for your purposes this season and every season. We offer ourselves to you in Jesus' name. Amen.