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“Vision to Mission”

Matthew



MATTHEW 2:11

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Special Music: “Wise Men” Allen Krehbiel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pppy7thsK08>

Our Guiding Star

Lost on a sea of ambivalence
We have settled in the vast darkness,
Bobbing anchorless on vast seas
Devoid of Hope and filled with questioned prophecy.
Smothered in a wintry woolen coat of Spanish Moss
Masquerading as sullen clouds
That devour the light
and never sets it free.
Obscuring the moon
And Hiding the stars from our tired eyes.

But we hold within our hands and our hearts
A promise.
A star will break the persistent bonds
Of tainted skies
And fling the clouds to the earth in broken mounds
Of mist and fog
Revealing the wonder of creation,
Moon and stars aglow.

And there before our eyes,
The blazing fire of our guiding star
Like a diamond cut from the center of the earth
And fueled by a host of angels
Pointing the way
To the very source

Of our salvation

**And there He is,
A gift bound and given by God
Neatly tied in ribbons of grace.
A babe to rescue the nations
And give light to the darkness.
As Isaiah foretold,
“His name will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Eternal Father,
Prince of Peace”
He has shattered
The clouds that obscured the heavens
And made a path
By way of a child
Given in love,
That we may sit
In the presence
Of the creator of all that is.**

Rev Walt

We, and by we, I mean human beings, are quest oriented. We are fascinated by people that take their dreams by the reins and set off into the unknown in search of things that may or may not exist. From Ulysses to Indiana Jones, if we aren't part of the journey then we are routing them on. We want them to succeed. We want Ponce de Leo'n to find the Fountain of Youth. We want Columbus to find a route to the West Indies and accidently discover North America. We want Madame Curie to find the properties of Uranium. We want Frodo to destroy the ring. We are not just fascinated by the results, but also by the very quest itself. We were glued to our televisions as Apollo 11 made its way to the moon and we sat on the edge of our seats as Neil Armstrong took that magical step from the landing module to the surface of the first foreign celestial body that we had visited. We felt like we were all a part of the wonder of that experience. We want to be first in line to see movies like Star Wars, National Treasure, The Hobbit, Harry Potter, Indiana Jones, Crocodile Dundee and Romancing the Stone. In the 30's, 40's and 50's it was The Wizard of Oz, the seven "On the Road" movies with Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour, The Thin Man, and Sherlock Holmes.

We like to see the good guy find the treasure or find and defeat the bad guy. We enjoy stories where a vision is set and a mission is accomplished, especially if the vision is a seemingly impossible one and the odds are stacked against the hero or heroine. Even in the Bible, we find our attention drawn to events where people are faced with impossible odds: Moses parting the Red Sea, Noah and his

family building the ark and surviving the flood and Jonah being swallowed by the whale. So, it is only natural that we are fascinated by the Wise Men.

We do need to take a minute and separate what the Bible tells us in contrast to what we have grown up knowing from tradition. I don't bring these up as a source of contention, but I think it is important we know the actual story in the Bible before we try to embellish it. And, just so you are clear on where I stand, I truly believe that the story of Christmas is the most glorious of stories and doesn't really need out embellishment. I am going to read the whole story here as found in the 2nd Chapter of Matthew so that we are all on the same page. Matthew is the only one of the four Gospels that talks about the Magi.

Matthew 2:1-12

- 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem**
- 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."**
- 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.**
- 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.**
- 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:**
- 6 " "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,**

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for out of you will come a ruler

who will shepherd my people Israel.””

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Having read this, here are the things I want you to note:

- 1. The wise men were from the east. They were not from Israel and it does not say that they were Jews. Most likely, they were court astrologers given**

to study and learning and probably had many scrolls on numerous topics. Part of that treasure could easily have been a copy of the Torah. But the only thing we know with certainty is that they saw this wondrous star and felt it was important to follow the star and seek its source. They did know that the star would lead them to the new-born king of the Jews. So, they received insight before following this star as to what it was all about; either by a vision or prophecy.

2. The second thing to note is that it does not say how many of them there are. This is where tradition and scripture kind of blend together and we need to be wary about our assumptions based on tradition. Tradition tells us that there were three Wise Men. It tells us this because there are three gifts. But the Bible does not tell us there were three wise men and there could have been more. It does tell us there were three gifts. But it is a reach for us to assume that there are three wise men just because there are three gifts.
3. We do not know the names of the Wise Men. Tradition tells us that they were Gaspar from India, Balthasar from Arabia, and Melchior from Persia. Tradition also tells us that they were kings, but that is not mentioned in this passage from Matthew. The tradition that they were kings is often attributed to:

Isaiah 60:3

**1 “Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.**

**2 See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.**

**3 Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.**

**But I fear that may be taking the scripture out of context since it really
doesn't directly address the Wise men.**

- 4. The fourth thing that I would like to mention is that the Wise Men were
never at the manger. You will note in the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of
Matthew that we read earlier it says:**

**11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and
they bowed down and worshiped him.**

**In other words, Mary and Jesus were living in a house, not a barn. We also
know that Herod believed Jesus to be under 2 years old because his order
was to kill all the boys under 2 years old. So, while the Magi are a
significant part of the Christmas story, they did not join the shepherds at
the manger.**

Tradition is important. But it is more important to understand the actual scripture and how it reads as opposed to relying on tradition to teach us. We can put the Wise Men in our nativity scene because the Wise Men are a part of the story and when we tell the story we need to be able to separate tradition from scripture for the sake of our children and those that we teach the story to.

I believe that knowing the story of the Wise Men, who they were and why they are an integral part of the Christmas Story is of importance to all of us. Rather than focusing on the contradictions between tradition and scripture, we need to focus on what the Wise Men add to the story.

The Wise Men saw the star. A magnificent, beautiful, brilliant star that overwhelmed the night sky. And because they were educated and wise, because they had been students of the spiritual and the scriptures, the star held a special meaning for them. It piqued their curiosity. It called to their westering spirit. It called them to mission. A mission to give meaning to prophecy and perhaps an avenue to a better understanding of who God is. So, rather than sit in their libraries of study or at their desks of solitude, rather than stare at the night sky with wonder and a questioning mind, rather than wait for an answer, they packed up their lives, bought some very expensive gifts based on speculation, boarded their camels and let the star guide them.

And where did that star take them? Not straight to Bethlehem. Instead, it took them to the Holy City of Jerusalem. And their arrival in Jerusalem caused enough of a stir it gained them an audience with King Herod where they told him their story. It was the chief priests that directed them to Bethlehem by quoted from the prophecy of Micah chapter 5 verse 2:

**“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,**

And the star came to rest over the child was. Their joy must have been unsurpassed. They had come to what they thought was the end of their journey. Whatever doubts they had had about taking on this quest vanished. The treasure that they sought stood before them. The embodiment of God in a child. They were so overwhelmed and sure of their find that they bowed down and worshipped him.

They unwrapped their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; appropriate gifts for a king. Gifts with meaning beyond just their value. Gifts meant to acknowledge the unique nature of the child that stood in their presence.

You might think that that would be the end of the story. After all, they had traveled all that way and found what they had sought. They had worshipped the child and presented him with gifts. Time for an anti-climactic return home.

But that isn't the end of the story. They had a dream. Much of the Christmas story finds purchase in dreams. It takes a very open mind and a relationship with God to find wisdom in dreams. Joseph had a dream which told Him that it was alright for him to be joined in marriage with Mary and that everything that she had told him regarding the conception was true. God does speak to people in dreams. He does reveal His essence and His plan to those willing to listen and step onto the paths of those dreams.

The dream that the Wise Men received told them not to return to Herod and to return to their country by another way. Doing that required another test of faith, to step on a new path when they were familiar with the old path that had brought them to Bethlehem to begin with. Sometimes the mission that God places before us will take us out of our comfort zone. But there is always a reason to stick to the mission given to us. God expects us to stick with the plan even if we think the plan is uncomfortable or flawed. It is in following the plan that we continue to find joy and peace.

So, the Wise Men followed the plan and returned home a different way. And that was part of a new mission. We don't know what happened when they returned to their homelands, but it is a reasonable assumption that they told everyone they knew about their quest and what they found. How would they ever be able to keep such an incredible journey to themselves?

How can we keep such an incredible story to ourselves? The stories surrounding the birth of our Lord are incredible. God has given us a vision. A vision to tell the world about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has placed that vision before us. It is our mission to pack up our lives, straddle our camels and follow the star wherever it leads us so that we can tell the world about the glories of our savior and all that He has done for us.

AMEN