

## THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

DECEMBER 18, 2022 | LESSONS FROM THE RESPONSES OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS  
MATTHEW 2:1-12 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, as we come before you today, we acknowledge that you are the King of Peace. When we come before you, we can bow our knees and we can worship you, and we can understand this peace. I'm sure there are people who have come in today that are struggling with anxiety, or struggling with trauma, or struggling with challenges in their lives that desperately need this peace. So Lord, I ask for your comfort – to comfort each one of us as we come into your presence today and recognize who you are and what you've done for us. We thank you for Christmas and know that it's because of the birth of Jesus that you started this earthly ministry that led to the crucifixion, the death of Christ, and then the resurrection. That we can celebrate because He's conquered death. That's just the beginning of the reign then of Christ in our hearts, where we can experience the peace that you want us to enjoy in our lives. We thank you for that. We ask that you'd make that a very real part of our day today and of our Christmas as we look forward to the special celebration of the birth of Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Pastor Don and I over the last several sessions are teaching about the responses to Christmas from the various Christmas characters in the story. Today we're going to look at the wise men. In order to look at the wise men, we have to go back about 600 years to start our story.

The story takes place, I'm going to say, about 600 years before with a man named Belteshazzar. You might not know him. You might know him as Daniel. The story takes place and we can read it in Daniel 2.

It starts with a king who was very upset because he had a bad dream, a very bad dream. So he was upset about it. He was troubled by this dream. So he called all the wise men, and the astrologers, and the magicians in, and he said to them, "I have had a terrible dream. It is your job to tell me what the dream is and to tell me what it means."

"Oh, King, we can't tell you what the dream is. You tell us what the dream is and we'll tell you what it means."

"No," Nebuchadnezzar said, "I'm not going to do that. I have you as my wise men and astrologers and magicians, and it's your job to tell me the dream and what it means."

"Oh, king, we can't do that. That's unheard of. You tell us the dream and we'll tell you what it means."

"No," he says, "If you can't tell me the dream and what it means, I'm going to have all the wise men in Babylon killed."

They said, "We cannot tell you the dream. Only the gods can tell you the dream."

Nebuchadnezzar said, "You are stalling. I'm going to have you all killed." He called Arioch, his head guard, and he said, "I want you to want to round up all the wise men to be killed."

So Arioch goes and finds the wise men. He comes upon Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He says to them, "We need to round you up because you're going to be killed."

Daniel says, "Why is the king being so harsh?" Arioch told him the story of what was going on. Daniel that night just prayed. As he did, God revealed to him the dream and the interpretation of the dream.

So when he woke up in the morning, he went to Arioch. He says, "Arioch, do not go and kill all the wise men. Don't gather them up. I have the dream and I know the interpretation of the dream." So Arioch quickly went in to the king and said, "King, one of the Hebrew wise men knows the dream of yours and the interpretation of the dream."

So they brought Daniel into his presence and the king said, "Do you know the dream and the interpretation of the dream?"

Daniel says, "No, I can't tell you dream and the interpretation. I can tell you, though, there is a God in heaven who has revealed to you mysteries of things to come. As you were pondering in your bed the future, God has revealed to you this great dream that you are seeing and you've seen. I can tell you about it because of what God has revealed to you."

"It's a big statue that you saw. A statue with a gold head, a silver body, a belly of bronze, and iron legs, and feet of clay and iron mixed together. Let me tell you the interpretation of the dream, oh king. You are that great king, the Babylonian king, represented by the gold head. But there is going to be another kingdom after yours that's going to be represented by the silver (we know today that that is the Medo-Persian kingdom that was established). Oh king, that kingdom is going to fall off the scene and there's going to be another kingdom represented by that belly of bronze. (We know today that's the Greek kingdom with Alexander the Great.) After that kingdom is deposed, there's going to be another kingdom, represented by the iron legs that is coming. (We know today that's the Roman kingdom.) And then there's going to be this feet of iron and clay. There's going to be this large rock that you saw in your dream, not hewn by human hands, as you saw, but a huge rock that's going to come down (of course we know that's Christ) and he's going to come down and smash the feet of the statue. That statue will be consumed like chaff in the wind. And that kingdom will be one that's established and a kingdom that will last forever."

Nebuchadnezzar, like you, said, "Wow. Yes, this just rings true to what I dreamt. So great that God has revealed this to me." The Bible says he bowed down and he worshiped. He said, "He is the God of gods, the Lord of kings." He put Daniel as the head wise man. He would be the wise man in charge of all over the wise men of Babylon. Daniel said, "I want my friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to work with me." So they became the wise men and the head of all of the wise men in Babylon.

You can imagine that over the years as each kingdom was deposed and others were elevated, that they were thinking, "This is another kingdom, just like Daniel's prophecy told us about." I

imagine these wise men over the years started to have regular meetings. Maybe they got together on Tuesday nights to just talk about the future and where they were in the map. They had Daniel's writings for them. They could go back and look at them. They probably talked about all of these things. These men were scientists. They would look at the stars and study them and imagine God's greatness in the stars.

But one day, there was a different star, a star that hadn't been there before. When they saw that star, they thought royalty. Because they believed when there was something new, a constellation or a new star, that represented royalty of some kind. So they decided that they would follow that star that was in the west, and they would go find this new king that had somehow been born.

I can imagine the conversations that they had with their wives. "Honey, you know the guys we meet with on Tuesday nights? Well, we discovered something new as we look up in the sky. We saw this new star out there in the west and we're going to take a business trip."

"How long are you going to be gone?"

"Well, I don't exactly know."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know. But we think we're going over to Israel, where the Jewish people came from. We're going to go that direction, follow that star to see where it leads."

I just want to point out these wise men for just a moment. Because in their lives, they saw something in this constellation that was different, it was surprising. I want to suggest that in our lives, as we're living our lives, sometimes things happen in our lives that are unusual. They're surprising. They just don't seem like everything else should be. In those moments, often God is working in our own hearts. Often God is working in our own lives and we need to be sensitive to that. Because maybe God is leading us in a different direction. These wise men decide to go to Jerusalem.

We pick our story up in Matthew 2:1-12. *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.* Now we don't know for sure that these wise men came from Babylon. They came from the east. But we do know this about them: They knew there was a king to be coming. They knew that this was the King of the Jews. So they must have had some kind of background in their lives. And they're following a star in order to get to this king and find where he is.

I would just think that there are some people who grew up with some religious background, some information about God and so on. But then there's a star in their lives. Each one of us who've come to Christ came to Christ from some kind of a star-like thing that happens in our lives that moves us in a direction toward Christ.

For some, it's being a scientist. It used to be that science and theology were much closer together than they are today. Today there's been this division or the separation where science has to do with facts and theology has to do with faith, and they seem to be on different sides of the fence. But the reality is that the further you pursue science in any discipline, you're going to get to Jesus Christ. Because that's where the truth is. If you have an open heart and you pursue science to its fullest, you're going to get to God and you're going to understand more about who God is. It may

be biology, it might be chemistry, it might be the human body. Or it might not be science at all. Maybe it's a tragedy that takes place in your life. In the midst of that tragedy, you say, "There's something more to life here." And that starts your pilgrimage towards Christ.

One man told me, "The way I came to Christ was I fell in love with this girl and she told me that I couldn't date her because I wasn't a Christian. She invited me to come to her church. I was really interested in her, but I went to church. When I got to church, I learned more about Jesus because I saw God's word and I heard God's word, and I fell in love with Jesus (in addition to the girl that I eventually married)."

I don't know what it is that sparked in you something that says, "Let's go figure out what this truth is." But here, these wise men were pursuing truth. When you start to pursue truth, you know where you end up? You end up at the scriptures, which are going to lead you to the Christ Child. That's what's going to happen in these guys' lives.

Well, I'm getting ahead of our story.

It says that they came, *saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

Why did they go to Jerusalem? They went to Jerusalem because if you are going to find the new king, you go to the capitol, and that's where the palace is. So they go and talk to Herod and they want to find out what's going on. Where's this new king? Because surely he knows about it. And they've come to worship Him.

Now we're not going to talk a lot about Herod today. He's a work, piece of art in himself that we could study at some point. We're not going to look at him today, but we have to pass through him to get to the rest of the story.

It says – *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him* (tells us a little about Herod himself); *and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.*

He had his own wise men that he would go to. These are the theologians. These are the people that had the scriptures. They knew the answer to the question because they had God's word. Herod knew where to go for the answers. And now we're going to find that they're going to go to the scriptures in Micah 5:2.

We have three groups of people. We have Herod, who's really not interested in this message at all. We have the scribes and the chief priests who are interested in this. They have the answer, but they don't really follow and go the six miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to discover the king.

It sure reminds me there's a lot of religious people today who are content to be right where they are, but they really haven't seen Christ. They haven't met Him in a very personal way. There are a lot of churches in our world today that are declining in their attendance. There are many

churches that are closing, many of them because they're compromising really the truth of God's word. That they're saying, we just want to open up the church to anybody who will come, and they disregard sin and lifestyles that aren't appropriate. They get themselves into trouble. Or there's some churches that want to turn their Sunday morning worship service into a dramatic presentation. So we're just trying to encourage people to come to get excited with all of our lights and smoke and all the other things that happen. The word of God is pushed aside. It's the word of God that leads us to Christ. That's what's going to happen in our story today in Micah 5:2. Let's read it.

It says – *They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

When you dig into God's word, then you're led to Christ. Just notice the process of how God is speaking to these wise men. They must have had some kind of history before they saw the star. Something was going on in their lives. But then He led them through a star. When He led them through a star, He took them to the next place where they met the people who know God's word. Even though they weren't interested in finding Jesus themselves, they knew God's word and then God spoke to them through His word. And then they go to Bethlehem and that's where they meet Jesus. This real connection takes place with them.

Let's read it. It says – *Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. Because they're pursuing truth. They want to know what this truth is all about. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. That's like a big bowl of joy. I mean, that's a lot of it. Exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. They didn't worship Mary; they worshiped Him.*

Let's pause on that sense of worship. Because what is worship anyway? Worship is when you open your heart. When the heart of men and women is opened up and comes in contact with the heart of God, something happens inside of our hearts. They saw the Christ Child and this worship took place. When you come into our church service on Sundays, it is our desire that as your heart is opened up, maybe it's through singing, or maybe it's through teaching, or maybe it's through connecting with other people, that your heart is opened up and worship takes place. But sometimes it takes place involuntarily. In other words, you don't have control over what happens.

Like Saul of Tarsus, who was going along and God knocked him off his horse. Remember that? He was going to persecute Christians. God knocked him off his horse and then the next couple of days he's recovering from his blindness, he comes in contact with God and starts a life of worship.

Sometimes you're outside and you see something beautiful in creation, and wow. It's that worship. Or sometimes you turn on the radio and you listen to some Christian music, and a

worship song just touches you and you have that worship experience. Or sometimes you see that God has worked out the situation in various ways that obviously, He did just for you and you go, “Lord, I worship you.”

We need the worship of God in our lives every day. That's why we get out our Bibles and we open them up and we read them. Because we read God's word and as we do, we see something that we need for today, and we go, “Whoa. God, I worship you in the midst of that.” When we begin to worship the Lord, then things change in our lives. God provides new direction for us, as He did with the wise men. We start to say, “Lord, I was going this way. But now as I worship you, I see that I need to go a different way.” Sometimes that worship prompts us to stop in our tracks and just take time and say, “God, you are the greatest. You are the best. You are what I need.” Sometimes what it does, it says, “I just want to give my whole life to you, Lord. I want to worship you with all that I have. Lord, I just want to give gifts to you.” And that's what they do. They're responding out of their worship.

It says – *Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.* That's what worship does. It makes you want to give your whole life to the Lord. But certainly giving to God and giving to others, and just sharing in the life that God has given to us. They are so excited about the gifts that they can give.

And then we see – *And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

When you come to worship the Lord, I just want you to know He's going to change your path in life. The path you thought you were going on that was taking you back to where you were going to go is not the right path for you. God has something better, something different. He's going to take you on this path that you don't even know about yet. But when you come to worship the Lord and experience Him in all of His greatness, He speaks to you and He says, “Okay, here's what I want you to do. Here's how I want you to move.” So we're listening for that, aren't we? We want to know, what does God want for each one of us as we're going along in life? Because we are worshipping the Lord and we want to hear from Him and allow Him to speak to us in that powerful way.

So they head back off to wherever they were (probably Babylon). I can imagine the conversations when they headed back there. Conversations that said, “Hey, so how was your trip, honey?”

“Oh, you wouldn't believe it. I met the king. I met the king we've been talking about, that we've been learning about. The one with the rock that would hit the feet and destroy and start this big kingdom, this eternal kingdom. I met Him. I met Him myself.” They were likely eager to share that message with their wives and all the people back there, wherever they came from, to tell them about the great message. They had met the King. They had met Jesus and it has changed their lives.

I trust that today you've met Jesus and He's changed your life. We all need to come to Christ regularly and worship Him and embrace Him and appreciate Him. When we do, He continues to direct our path and move us forward. And that is the meaning of Christmas.