

## **HOW TO HELP SINCERE SEEKERS? (Matthew 2:1-12)**

After years of witnessing Christmas pageants in the churches he served, a Baptist pastor in Alabama gave the following rendition of the Christmas story:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. And all went to be enrolled, each to their spot on the stage as previously marked. And Joseph also came in along with Mary, his betrothed, who was with pillow. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a plywood cradle, because there was no place for them behind the scenery.

In that region there were also a lot of little shepherds out in the field, wearing their towels and bathrobes pretty tight. And the church spotlight shone on them, and they reacted with facial expressions of practiced fear.

Then came Wise Persons [these are modern times, you know] dressed in borrowed worthy potentate costumes bearing two jars and a box.

A voice quoted Scripture over the loudspeaker with the good news. The choir sang. And the people watching in the folding chairs all joined in and sang, “Joy to the World.” And the program ended. Then they took all the borrowed animals home.

And in the church office, there was peace among all, for no one was bitten and the lights stayed on. And everyone returned to their homes, promising to call their neighbors and invite them to the second performance tomorrow night . . .

As far as Christmas pageants go, there are a couple of mistakes that churches routinely make when dramatizing the Christmas story. First, we place the Wise Men at the Manger, and second, we limit the number of Wise Men to only three.

A careful reading of the Biblical record reveals that the Wise Men showed up a considerable time following the birth of Jesus. They arrived after Mary, Joseph, and the Baby were living in their own house in Bethlehem, not while they were sheltered in a stable. Also, the Bible doesn’t say there were three Wise Men. The Bible simply lists three gifts. There could have been 13, 30 or 300 magi. We don’t know.

The Bible states the presence of the Wise Men and their announcement they had come to worship a newly born King threw the entire city of Jerusalem into confusion and turmoil. The arrival of just a few weary-worn travelers would probably not have had such a significant impact. If, however, a large band of travelers came on pilgrimage from their homes in the East, wherever that was, that would certainly have caught the attention of those in Jerusalem.

There is a certain church in suburban New York City that puts on a living nativity scene every Christmas season. The church is in the center of town, and they hold the living nativity on their church lawn. They have church members play the parts of Joseph, Mary, the baby, the shepherds, the Wise Men, and they have real animals—sheep, cows,

a donkey, and even a camel or two. The characters assemble in the Fellowship Hall and wait for their cue to head out across the church lawn to the stable.

One year, the Wise Men borrowed brass censers from a local Orthodox church so that as they made their way across the church lawn they could do so enveloped in smoke and incense. Before they left the Fellowship Hall, they got their censers going. They were unaware that the smoke from their censers had set off a silent fire alarm. The local Fire Dept. got the electronic emergency message and was convinced the church was on fire.

As the shepherds, angels, and Wise Men were taking their place, the firemen came roaring to the scene with sirens blaring. The firemen immediately began unrolling hoses getting ready to battle the non-existent blaze. When they finally figured out what had happened, the fire chief said, “You Wise Men are setting off alarms all over town!”

The very first Wise Men on the very first Christmas did exactly that. They set off alarms all over the city of Jerusalem before they ever got to Bethlehem.

This month, we have been focusing on the cast of Christmas and allowing each central figure to teach us their own special lesson. From Joseph, we learned about obedience. Mary instructed us about saying *yes* to God by faith. The shepherds reminded us about hope. We observed the baby in the manger last Sunday giving special attention to who He is and what He came to do. Today, we come to the Wise Men. I once received a Christmas card that proclaimed, “Wise men still seek Him?”

I believe there are two kinds of people in the world, and both classes of people show up in the story about the Wise Men. Let’s read the story one more time—Matthew 2:1-12.

In this story we see that **some people are seekers**; they want to find God; they want to know God. Such people are like the Wise Men. **But some people are sitters**; there are two kinds of sitters. Some are like the religious leaders; they think they know God and have God all figured out. The religious leaders knew where the Messiah was to be born, but they didn’t join the Wise Men in their search for the Messiah. They didn’t seem to really care. Some people sit comfortably in their supposed belief. Then there are those like Herod who sit staunchly in their opposition. Herod didn’t search for the Baby on his own, but he did want to kill the Baby once he was found.

What do we know about Herod? Herod was a maniacal, ruthless, paranoid king. He sought to eliminate any and all threats to his kingship. History tells us that Herod had his wife, her mother and grandfather, and their three sons murdered. Herod’s violence to his own family led Emperor Augustus to say it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son!

When it comes to God and the things of God, we can either be seeker or sitters. Some sit in their faith; some sit in their opposition.

If you don’t know God and lack a personal relationship with Him, I encourage you to be a seeker. Seek to enter into a relationship with God by getting to know and committing yourself to His Son. Maybe you already have a relationship with God through Christ. What should you do? There are two things you can do. First, seek to grow that relationship by getting to know Christ more intimately. Second, seek to help others who are seeking to know the truth about God.

The Wise Men illustrate for us what is involved in being a sincere seeker. As we look at this text, I want us to consider how we can help sincere seekers.

## **Since Seekers Follow the Light They Have, Shine Yours Brightly**

The Wise Men were magi. They weren't kings; they were scholars. They had been schooled in science, astronomy, astrology, and medicine. Somewhere along they way, they had heard that a Jewish king would be born and He would bring peace to the world. Very likely, they learned that from the writings of the Hebrew prophet Daniel. Centuries before, he had been one of their number. Since Daniel was highly esteemed, they would have been familiar with what he had written. Listen to Daniel 7:13-14.

When those magi observed a never-before-seen star, somehow, they linked the appearance of that star with the birth of this promised king. They were convinced this new star was a heavenly announcement of the Messiah's birth.

They were so convinced that they set out in search of this child. Their journey may have been as long as 1000 miles. We don't know how long it took them to prepare for and make that trek. Look at v. 16. Jesus may have been a toddler when the Wise Men arrived.

These Wise Men were seekers. They followed the light they had, as little as it was. God used a star—something they were familiar with—to motivate them to begin their long and arduous journey. God provided additional light when they arrived in Jerusalem. It was there they learned the Scriptures foretold the birth of a Messiah and that the Scriptures named Bethlehem as the birthplace. Then, the Lord provided further light still. Look at vv. 9-11a. God was guiding them each step of the way.

God always provides what is needed to guide us into a relationship with Himself. The first thing God has provided is His word. The Bible is God's self-revelation. God is not trying to keep Himself hidden. He wants us to know Him. The Bible says that God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). God has provided His word, but He has also provided another way for us to know Him.

The star the magi saw testified that God gave His Son that we might know Him. Jesus reveals to us who God really is. If you truly want to know God, then you must begin searching the Scriptures to discover who Jesus was and who Jesus is. Read the gospels. Read what Jesus said. Read what Jesus did. Learn His teachings. Learn His ways.

If we are going to seek God, we must follow the light we have. God has provided marvelous light through His word and His Son.

And if we are going to help others find their way to Christ, we must shine the light God has given us. Jesus told us that we are the light of the world. Look at what He said in Matthew 5:14-16. People should know that Jesus is real by the way we live our lives, and if we are shining our light God can use that light to guide them to His Son.

One of my favorite stories involves the author Robert Louis Stevenson. When he was a child, he was rather sickly. One night his nurse walked into his bedroom to discover that he was standing at the window with his nose pressed against the frosty pane of glass. The nurse fussed at him, "Child, come away from there. You'll catch your death of cold." Little Robert, however, didn't move. He stood there looking out the window as a lamplighter was working his way through the nighttime blackness lighting each lamp along his route. Robert pointed and said, "See! Look there! There's a man poking holes in the darkness."

You and I live in a rather dark world, but Jesus has called us to the task of poking holes in the darkness around us. We are to light our world with the love and truth of Jesus. Go light your world by shining the light of Jesus brightly.

### **Since Seekers Question the Ones They Know, Tell Your Story**

The Wise Men traveled straight to Jerusalem and straight to Herod, the King. They must have reasoned, “If anyone would know anything about the birth of a Jewish king, it would be Herod, who is the King of the Jews.” The Wise Men unashamedly sought help from whoever could aid them in their quest.

The OT tells us that the people of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years after Moses led them out of Egypt and before they made it to the Promised Land. Someone noted that even back then, men refused to stop and ask directions.

If you are going to find the Lord, you must solicit help from those who have already successfully begun their journey. You may pride yourself on being an independent person, someone who is strong and doesn’t need any help from anybody, but that really isn’t anything of which to be proud.

Even the rock band *Three Dog Night* knew that one is the loneliest number. God made us to need other people.

If you are going to find the Lord, you need to talk with someone who knows Him.

If you already know the Lord, then you have a responsibility to help others find and get to know God.

A friend once gave me a book written by a man named Mark Cahill. The title of the book is, *One Thing You Can’t Do in Heaven*.

Can you think of one thing you can’t do in heaven? One thing we won’t be able to do is share our faith with a lost person because there won’t be any lost people there. The only lost people you can personally reach are the ones you are alive, and the only time you can do that is before you die.

There are people in this community who want to know God, but they don’t know how to find Him. You and I need to stand ready to help them in their search. If someone asked you to introduce him/her to God, could you do it?

Listen to Colossians 4:5-6. We need to learn how to answer the questions that people have. To know what questions that lost people are asking, we need to talk with them. Get to know someone who doesn’t know Christ. You might be surprised how spiritually interested some people are. They are searching. They have questions. If we, as followers of Jesus, don’t answer their questions, others will attempt to do so, but we won’t like the “answers” they provide.

One of the best ways we answer people’s questions is to tell our story.

During a jury trial both the prosecution and the defense will call witnesses to give testimony. There are different kinds of witnesses. Some are expert witnesses. They possess specialized knowledge, but the most powerful witnesses are eye witnesses. All they must do is tell what they saw, what they heard, what they know. No one knows your story like you do. Tell others about your experience with God.

True seekers follow the light they have, so shine your light brightly. They ask the ones who know, so tell your story—what you’ve learned from your experience with God.

## **Since Seekers Worship the God They Find, Let's All Join Them**

The Wise Men kept up their search until they found Christ. Once they found Him, what did they do? Look at v. 11. They worshiped Him. They worshiped Him, and they gave Him gifts as an expression of their worship.

I want you to know something. You can give without worshiping, but you can't worship without giving. When you worship, you must give. You give your attention, your time, your heart, your gifts, your thanks, and your praise to God.

In Jeremiah 29:13 God promises, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart." If you will sincerely seek the Lord, He will enable you to find Him. When you find Him, you need to worship Him for who He is—Savior and Lord.

Dr. Thomas Long, a preaching professor from Princeton Theological Seminary told about a time a former student came to him. She confided, "I have a secret to tell you." When he asked what it was, she announced, "I'm pregnant." He rejoiced with her. She and her husband already had a 7 year-old girl, and they wanted another child.

Then she added, "We just got the test results, and we know two things about our child. Our child will be a boy, and he will have Down's syndrome. We will handle it. We are trusting God to help us."

At Christmas, this former student wrote Dr. Long a letter in which she told about her son, Timothy Andrew.

She wrote, "He has the sweetest disposition. Daily he shatters our images of handicapped and special needs. He may need special help, but already he is no slouch in giving us special love. We are blessed. Kate [their daughter] is Tim's champion. Hearing our concerns about how Tim might be accepted by other kids, Kate informed the kids on our block, 'My brother has Down's syndrome and everybody's going to play with him, or else!'

"One evening we overheard her talking to Tim. 'I'm so glad you're here, Timothy. I will always love you; I'll never leave you. I'll always be nearby.'"

There is a sense in which God sent Christ that very first Christmas as a means of saying to us, "I will always love you; I'll never leave you. I'll always be nearby."

The truth of Christmas, however, is really brought home when we worship Christ, as did the Wise Men. You can worship Christ by saying to Him, "I will always love You. I'll never leave You. I'll always be nearby."

I urge you to worship Christ by making and living out those declarations.

Are you going to be a sitter or a seeker? Become a seeker, and then, after you become a finder, become both a witness and a worshiper.