

They Saw The Child

Matthew 2:1-12

December 10, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

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 and of incense and of myrrh.

So let me start off by saying that, yes, I do know that it could have been up to two years after the birth of Jesus when the Wise Men arrived. The text says they came to the house—not the stable—where Jesus was. We are not going to pick at chronological nits here...and miss the point. We are considering just who this child—Jesus—is. We will look through the eyes of the Wise Men today.

This passage has been interpreted and discussed in numerous ways. We know that Magi or Wise Men visited Jesus. Just who they were is not precisely known. They could have been astrologers. They could have been dream interpreters. They could have been advisors to high ranking officials. So many possibilities. By the end of the sixth century these Wise Men had acquired names: Melkon, Balthasar, and Gaspar. Matthew did not name them...nor did he even say there were three. Might have been just two...or twenty-two. Three is the number assumed and assigned because of the three gifts. They saw a star. Text says they saw a “star in the east”. What they saw was the star when it rose. They saw some kind of celestial phenomenon. So there is all of this and more that has garnered much discussion and speculation. And then, of course, that whole discussion as to when the Magi actually arrived.

We're not going to do a whole lot of straining gnats and swallowing camels here. We do know that Jesus was born. We do know Wise Men came looking for him. Call me simple, but that is quite good enough for me. These Magi

came looking for the one who had been born king of the Jews. They came to worship him.

Having said all of this, here is a question: how did they know? How did they know that there would even be someone who would be born king of the Jews? The Jews were not a nation at the time. They had lost that status. Further...how did they know that this king would be worthy of their worship...non-Jews that they were?

To begin to answer those questions, I am going to do something I have rarely done. I am going to offer a brief geography and history lesson. Geography has never been one of my strong suits. It was always my weakest category in Trivial Pursuit. But Matthew is very specific when it says these Magi came from the east. We know they came from the east.

Here's something else we know. Matthew wrote his Gospel specifically for the Jews. Matthew wrote to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah promised in Old Testament prophecy. To the Jew the east was all that territory east of the Jordan River. One such place that had been east of the Jordan River was Babylon...the seat of the Babylonian Empire...a place in the area of modern day Iraq. So what, you say. Big whoop, you add. Well...there just could be a big whoopness to this...maybe.

Now for the history portion. We all know from the Old Testament that the nation of Israel had its issues. They sinned. God sent prophets. They repented. Then they sinned some more. More prophets. More repenting. It was a pattern. God told them that if they did not get their act together and start being the people he wanted them to be and start being a witness to other nations...well, God would see to it that they would be led away into captivity. The people failed to heed this warning from God. So their land was