

**Text: Matthew 2:1-12**

**Theme: How Far Would You Go To See Jesus?**

**Date: January 6, 2008**

In the Name of the New Born Savior, Christ the Lord, Dear Christian Friends,

The story of the wise men has fascinated believers for centuries. Who were they? Where did they come from and when? How many of them were there? These questions about the wise men have produced a lot of fictional ideas over the course of time. Such as, don't put them in the manger scene with the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth. It took months for them to make the journey to Bethlehem. It may have even taken more than a year, since Herod wanted to kill all the children in Bethlehem under two years of age. And as our text says, Mary and Joseph and Jesus were staying in a house when they came. Also, we always picture them as being very wealthy, riding in a caravan of camels. The idea of wealth comes from the rich gifts which they brought - gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They may have been rich. Or perhaps they were just ordinary people who cashed in their entire savings account to bring the Savior gifts worthy of a king. We just don't know if they were rich. And finally, we don't know even how many of the wise men came to see Jesus. We think of three wise men because there were three gifts. There could have been more wise men for all that we know.

What we do know about the wise men is that they were the first Gentiles to come to the Savior. We know they came to Jerusalem by following a star which God put into the sky to lead them. And we know they came a long, long distance to see Jesus. It's this last detail in our text which invites each of us to ask a question of ourselves today: ***How Far Would You Go To See Jesus?*** 1) God wants you to find Jesus, and it is 2) God who leads us on the way to see Jesus.

### **1. God wants you to find Jesus**

Sunday, January 6, is the Festival of Epiphany. In some parts of the world, January 6 is a bigger day than December 25. It's called the "Gentiles' Christmas." On this day we celebrate the fact that Jesus came to earth to be the Savior of ALL people. While the shepherds knelt at the manger, and Simeon held Jesus in his arms, and Anna praised him in the temple, this story shows us how God brought strangers from a distant land to see Jesus, too.

The fact that Jesus came as the Savior of all people shouldn't be a big surprise for us. Throughout the Old Testament, God made it clear that the Savior would be a Savior for all the people on earth. When he spoke to Adam and Eve, did he speak to them alone? Or to a few of their descendants? No. He spoke to them and to all the people on earth who would be born from them. When God gave the promise a Savior to Abraham, did he speak only to Abraham and to his descendants? No. He said that all the nations on earth would be blessed through his offspring. And what did God say through Isaiah, in our Old Testament reading for today, *"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"* (60:2-3).

In our epistle lesson, Paul calls the fact that Jesus came as the Savior of all a "mystery" or a "secret." *"In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus"* (3:4-6). This truth is at the very heart of the gospel. If Jesus came only to save a few, or to save some, then how can I ever be sure that Jesus came to save me? But if Jesus came to be the Savior of the world, then I can be sure. If Jesus came to be a Savior of all people, then he also came to be my Savior.

Friends, this is a mystery or a secret that the devil doesn't want you to hear about. He tries to keep it a secret in a number of different ways. Sometimes he uses an accusing conscience. At the end of the year, when I take stock of my life as a Christian, or look back on all the goals I failed to achieve as a child of God, Satan tries to convince me that God really doesn't want me in his kingdom because of my sins. Perhaps there are some whom he would desire, but why would he possibly want me? That's exactly how the devil wants me to feel.

And sometimes the devil uses a false doctrine or a blatant lie which says that Jesus died on the cross only for people who are good enough for heaven. Satan's lies sometimes tell us that God only wants people in heaven who have lots of money, or people who have good health, or people who have a strong marriage. Satan tries to make us believe that these are the kinds of people God wants in heaven. But Oh, how Satan can lie! Sometimes because of our social status or because of our poor physical health or because of our family life or struggling marriage our sinful nature is tempted to believe Satan's lies. But what a wonderful truth the Epiphany mystery reveals to you and me. Jesus is My Savior. Jesus is Your Savior. And God wants each of us to life forever with him in heaven regardless of how much money we make, regardless of our physical health and regardless of our family life. What matters to God is simple, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."* The Epiphany story reminds us that God extends his invitation to the very ends of the earth. The color of your skin does not keep you from Jesus. Your social rank or family make-up does not keep you from Jesus. Not even your sins can keep you from Jesus. God wants you at the manger! God wants you to know Jesus and to have the peace of forgiveness that knowing him can only bring you. Not only does God want you, but ...

## 2. God leads the way to see Jesus

How did these wise men find Jesus? We can't say what made them follow the star to Bethlehem. Was it something their forefathers had learned when Daniel had been a part of the Magi? Did they learn from Old Testament Scriptures about the star? Did God give them a special revelation, much like he had done for old Simeon in the temple? We don't know. We, however, do know that *"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" [1 Corinthians 12:3]*. How they discovered that the star would lead them to Jesus, we don't know. We do know WHO led them! God did!

And what a journey God took them on! If they came from the area around Mesopotamia, which seems likely, their journey was about 1,500 rugged miles by the caravan routes. It was a journey that probably took them several months or maybe even a year to complete. Can you imagine taking a year off of work for such a journey? Walking 1,500 miles? Traveling through strange countries and sleeping under that star? They expended this much energy and time and resources just to be in the presence of the Savior!

When they arrived in Jerusalem, the Lord continued to guide them on. They went to Herod's palace to inquire about the newly born king of the Jews. Herod brought in his own "wise men" who looked into the prophecies and discovered that the Savior was to be born in Bethlehem. When the wise men went to Bethlehem to continue their search, the star moved in the sky directly over the house where Mary and Joseph were staying. Obviously this wasn't an ordinary star that God placed in the heavens. Ordinary stars don't change directions. Nor can they accurately pinpoint one house among many! But this was a special star for a special purpose.

Finally, their search was over and they weren't disappointed. The Bible says: **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 AND OF INCENSE AND OF MYRRH.** The same God who led them on this journey led them to believe that in this simple child they had found their Savior and their King! This journey was not a waste of their time!

Friends, by the grace of God, you have also been led to know Jesus as your Savior and to worship him! For most of you that journey began with your baptism. It continued at your dinner table with daily devotions and prayers and at bed time with Bible stories your parents read to you. Your teachers and your pastors helped you to look into the prophecies of the Bible and to understand what God has told you in his book. As you received the true body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, you have again received God's promise of the forgiveness of sins for the strengthening of your faith. Were their Christian friends who helped you along on that journey by encouraging you in your Christian faith? Often times there are! Did a faithful Christian spouse help you learn more about the Savior? Maybe! Did God use some event in your life to change the course of your life's journey so that you would walk more closely with Jesus every day? Possibly! Just as the wise men were not brought along by accident, or by dumb luck, but by the grace of God, so God has led each of you to Jesus.

Will the year 2008 bring you even closer to Jesus? We pray the answer is "YES." I would imagine that most of you have made some New Year resolution to improve your life in some way this year. It seems that most New Year resolutions have to do with eating less and exercising more; Or perhaps you've resolved to spend more time with your family; Or to call your parents more often; Or to spend less than you earn instead of more. These are all admirable goals. But do they bring you closer to Jesus? No! Not at all!

But reading and studying God's Word will. This is not an easy journey, mind you. It takes time and effort on our parts to set aside a time for listening to God's Word at home and in church. And if we are just beginning this journey through the Bible, then we may have to read carefully. We may even have to read a paragraph several times to understand its meaning - or look up a few things in a commentary. But do not think your effort is ever wasted! This book is our star! This book is what leads us to the Savior! Jesus said, [John 5:39] *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me..."*

Nor will Satan make this journey an easy one for you. If you choose a time in the morning when you can sit down and read the Bible, the devil will find a dozen other tasks that need to be done at that time. If you choose a time before bed when you can read follow the star in this book, then Satan will give you sleepy eyes and a reason to put it off another night. Satan was not successful in destroying the Christ child in Bethlehem. The only chance he has now is to keep us from following him! How far will you go to see Jesus this year? Will you carry out your intentions to know him better, if not entirely, at least in part?

Will the devil devise a plan to keep you from Bethlehem and from Golgotha and from the empty tomb? You bet! I do not believe that he will succeed. I say this not because I think I am so diligent, or because I think that you are so faithful, but because our God is better than Satan is evil. He has given us a star to follow by giving us the Bible. That star will continue to shine and it will lead us closer to Jesus. May this year be a year when we will follow closely in the steps of the wise men! Amen.