

Searching for God

[Read Matthew 2:1-12 NIV]

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.

Opening Image

One of my all-time favorite movies is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

The main character is Dr. Indiana Jones played by Harrison Ford. Dr. Jones is on a quest to find a treasure, the long-lost Ark of the Covenant. The opening sequence of the movie is filled with adventure, suspense, and high-speed action.

Dr. Jones uses many clues to help find his treasure. These clues take him all over the world. He encounters many old friends and foes along the way. One of his friends is an old girlfriend named Marion.

She wears an amulet around her neck that is an important clue to find the Ark. She agrees to give the amulet to Dr. Jones if she can tag along.

Another old friend cautions Dr. Jones about what he will find. The friend says that he is not searching for any old ancient artifact, but he is really searching for God.

Search for God

Finding buried treasure would be great. But the truth is buried treasure is not what any of us really needs. There are other treasures that are much more important in our lives.

Some of the treasures we have are all around us in the forms of family and friends. And of course, **the** most important treasure is our relationship with God. And today we can learn something about that treasure from the Magi and their search to find the King of the Jews.

Narrative Intro

Our scripture lesson today is about the Magi and their search for the "King of the Jews." They think they are on a quest to find a political ruler or an earthly king. In reality they are on a journey to meet God in the flesh. Just like Indiana Jones, they were really

searching for God. And, just like Indy, they had several clues to help them find their treasure—except, in this case, the clues were provided directly by God.

God gave the magi three clues to guide their search: (1) Reason-God's good creation, (2) Holy scripture, and (3) Experience-personal encounter.

Reason-Observing Creation

Clue number one: Reason. We know from the book of Genesis that God created everything in the heavens and on the earth. The magi observe a special star in the sky. This is the first clue they receive. They reason from their years of observation that something special is taking place.

Creation has always been a sign that God does exist. Many theologians throughout history have given the example of the Watch and the Watch Maker.

If someone found a watch while walking on the beach they would be amazed. This complex device could not have appeared out of nowhere. It could not have created itself. It could not come together randomly. Therefore, there must be a watch maker.

The same can be said about the universe. The complexity of the universe is amazing. Reason tells us that this complex collection of matter and energy could not have appeared out of nowhere. It could

not have created itself. It could not come together randomly.

Therefore, there must be a creator.

God has made us rational creatures. God has given us minds to think. God wants us to use our reasoning powers, because reason can be a clue to finding God.

Holy Scripture

Clue number two: Holy Scripture. The magi follow the star for 900 miles on a journey that would have taken several months to find the new king. They travel to Jerusalem thinking that the king would be born in a palace in the holy city. This is where they get their next clue.

Jerusalem

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem they ask the current king, Herod, and his attendants where they can find the one born "King of the Jews." The king and his attendants were greatly disturbed. The chief priests and teachers of the law are summoned by Herod who asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

Holy Scripture

And so, the chief priests and teachers of the law turned to the Holy Scriptures for direction and said, "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel" (Mt 2:5-6).

Secret Meeting

After hearing this, Herod called the Magi and met with them secretly. He met with them secretly because he did not want anyone to know that the long-awaited Messiah had been born. Herod told the Magi what he had just found out—that according to Scripture, the child would be born in Bethlehem. He asked the Magi to search for the child and report back to him—not so that he could worship him, of course, but so that he could kill him.

But despite Herod's cynical plans, the Scriptures had spoken to the Magi. Not even Herod's power-hungry manipulation could stop God's Word from accomplishing its purpose. The Magi had heard the Word of God, and now they had their second clue.

Experience

And then clue number three: Experience. The Magi departed Jerusalem and continued to follow the star. The star stopped in Bethlehem over a house where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped they were overwhelmed with joy. They were at the end of their long journey.

When they looked at that child sitting on Mary's lap, they experienced something. They realized that their long journey was

over. They had found the treasure they were looking for. Not an earthly king. Not a political ruler. But Jesus—God in the flesh! Looking at that tiny child, sitting on the lap of a poor peasant girl, they experienced the very presence of God. And it changed them.

Finding Jesus

And so they honored Jesus by bowing down and worshipping him. They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Why those three gifts? Gold signified that Jesus was indeed a king. Frankincense signified that Jesus was God and was worthy of worship. Myrrh signified that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice to save us from our sins.

When the Magi finished greeting the new king they were warned in a dream to avoid Herod and they took a different route to return home.

Transformation

When these Gentile wise men started on their journey they were looking for a king in a palace in the royal city of Jerusalem. What they encountered was a mother and child. What they found was life changing.

They did not go back to Herod. Matthew says, "They returned home by a different way." In other words, they did not go back the

way they came. They were changed by their experience of the presence of God.

Summary

And so the Magi found their treasure—not earthly treasure, not buried treasure, but the most important treasure of all—the presence of God in Jesus Christ. And God gave them three clues to find the treasure: Reason, Scripture, and Experience.

Good News

The Good News is that God still does the same thing today! Today's Scripture tells us that God sent his only Son into the world to transform and to save God's people. The Magi, who were Gentiles, were some of the first people that received this gift of love by welcoming God's Son to earth.

God revealed his Son, Jesus to them through a star, through scripture, and through personal encounter. They responded by: travelling great distances to seek Jesus, worshipping him, giving him gifts, and returning home changed.

Our Response

So, here's the question for you and me: How do we respond to this Good News? Are we willing, like the Magi, to go out of our way to seek Jesus? Are we willing to worship him with our whole hearts? Are

we willing to give to him, generously and extravagantly? When we leave worship, do we go home changed?

Actions

Today I urge you to join the Magi and seek the most important treasure of all. Be open to the clues God puts in your life. Seek God by using your reason—your mind—to reflect on the awesomeness of God in creation. Seek God in the pages of Holy Scripture. Seek God in experiences like baptism—yours or someone else’s—and through prayer, worship, serving, and Holy Communion.

Intro to Covenant Prayer

And one more way to seek God is to Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. In a few moments we will be praying the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. In this prayer we seek to be God’s humble servants. As we pray, help us to have the mind of Christ. Help us to reflect on Scripture. Finally, help us to experience your love.

Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

Let us pray together the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt; Put me to doing, put me to suffering; Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to thy

pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Selected Bibliography

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