

## So Close and Yet So Near: Wise Men

### Welcome/Prayer

### Introduction

During this Advent season, which our sermon series is following, we've been looking at how people responded to the news of Jesus' birth. Some reacted with indifference and made no attempt to check out things for themselves; others went to great lengths to find and be near Him. The wise men are such examples, and they played a significant role in the story of Jesus' birth as told in the gospel of Matthew. Although Matthew doesn't tell us who they were or where they came from (other than "eastern lands"), he does focus on what they did. From the actions of the wise men, we discover how we, too, can come near to Christ and experience His presence.

1. On a scale of one to 10, how close to God do you feel you currently are? Explain the reason for your score.
2. What images come to mind when you hear the words, "wise men"?
3. What do you know about the wise men?

### Preparation

Read the following text related to today's message:

#### **Matthew 2:1-2, 7-11 (NLT)**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup> "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

<sup>9</sup> After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

### Break it Down

Herod summoned the wise men to find out where the Christ-child was, not to worship Him, but to destroy the newborn King. Herod was afraid of Jesus because he saw the newborn King as a threat to his identity, and thus he stayed away. The wise men saw Jesus' birth as the greatest gift to mankind, and so they sought to be near to Him and celebrate His arrival.

**Like the wise men, we come near to Christ by...**

#### **Looking for signs of God at work around us.**

The Greek word for "wise men" is *magi*. Historical documents suggest that magi were part of a priestly order in the Persian Empire and were skilled in philosophy and science. In the ancient world, such learned men frequently studied the stars and believed that man's destiny was

influenced by the heavenly bodies. A spectacular astronomical event was believed to be a divine sign that the Deity was breaking into human affairs. Looking for evidence that God was at work, the wise men routinely searched the heavens. When they saw a bright phenomenon in the sky, they were convinced this signaled the arrival of One sent by God. Because they were looking for such a sign, they saw what others missed. The wise men show us that when we're searching for signs of God at work, we're likely to encounter the Lord.

1. Have you ever been interested in astronomy or witnessed a peculiar event in the sky that captured your attention? Describe what happened.
2. Where have you seen evidence of God's work in unusual, unexpected places?
3. What captures the attention of most Americans? Where is our focus (or distraction) most of the time?
4. How could we become more aware of God's presence around us?

### **Going to great lengths to find Jesus.**

Historians have speculated about where the magi originated, but tradition holds that they were from Persia (which is east of Palestine). If this is true, they traveled a great distance to find Jesus in Bethlehem. The journey from Persia to Palestine could be anywhere from 600 to 1000 miles...across rugged, desolate terrain. For Christians, sometimes it can feel as though we're on the same journey; however, if we are going to be close to the Lord, we're going to have to do whatever it takes to find Jesus and remain in His presence. The key is commitment.

1. Share about a long and difficult journey that you've made.
2. What hardships have you experienced in your walk with the Lord?
3. How did you overcome them?
4. Assess your commitment level regarding what you're willing to do to follow Jesus.

### **Giving Jesus gifts and worshipping Him.**

The reason for the magi's search for Jesus was made explicit—to worship Him—and their worship had tangible components. When they found Jesus, recall that they bowed down (i.e., a posture of reverence and submission), and they gave him gifts of the very best things that they had. If we want to be near to Christ, then we should worship the Lord by giving Him the very best we have. After all, He did that for us when He gave us His Son.

1. Why do you think the wise men were willing to humble themselves before the baby Jesus by bowing in worship?
2. What does it mean to give God the best we have to offer? What might that look like, practically speaking?
3. Is there anything in your life that you're withholding from God and unwilling to give Him?

### **Conclusion**

God in Christ has come so close to us that we would be remiss not to draw near to Him. Let's be on the lookout for signs of God at work. Let's be willing to do whatever it takes and go to great lengths to find Him and remain in His presence, and let's truly worship the Lord by giving Him our very lives.

1. What is one thing you can do during this holiday season to demonstrate your love and devotion to Christ?
2. How can you give Jesus what He wants by serving others in His name? Commit to doing it.

### **Close in Prayer**