

The journey of the wise men

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Following the narrative of the birth of Jesus, the gospel of Matthew introduces us to these, somewhat, mysterious men. They had travelled some 800 km with the sole intention of finding Jesus and, according to their own words, to worship Him.

“where is He who was born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and we have come to worship Him”

Those who seek are never ignored, and worshipers of Jesus never forgotten.

- a) Jesus said that those who seek, *will find* (Luke 11:9). They will not be ignored.
- b) Of those who worship, Jesus said that their worship is never forgotten. To a woman who poured very expensive perfume on Jesus as an act of worship, He said that her worship would always be remembered (Mark 14:9)

What can we know about the Wise Men?

1. They were from the East – most likely from Babylon (when Babylon was part of the Persian empire).
2. The only other reference for ‘*wise men*’ in the Bible, comes from the Book of Daniel, of when Daniel was in Babylon (Daniel 1:20,2:2, 4:7, 5:7). According to Daniel, there were ‘*wise men*’ in the court - scholars who studied the stars and other sources of knowledge about the future and they were spiritual advisers to the king.
3. These ‘*wise men*’, having come from the royal court of Babylon, were most likely aware of the prophecies of Daniel about the birth of the Jewish Messiah (Daniel 9:25-26).
4. There is also another mysterious character in the Bible who lived near Babylon, called “Balaam” (Numbers 22- 24). He is someone that scholars believe was a sort of ancestor of this group of ‘*wise men*’ in Babylon.

In Numbers 24 we read how Balaam was contracted by king Balak to curse Israel. However, instead of pronouncing a curse through occultic powers, God took over his tongue and he pronounced blessing. Not only that, but he prophesied about a star that would appear one day in Israel:

Numbers 24:17 NLT - *I see him, but not here and now. I perceive him, but far in the distant future. A star will rise from Jacob; a sceptre will emerge from Israel. It will crush the heads of Moab’s people, cracking the skulls of the people of Sheth.*

These men that went looking for Jesus, knew the prophecy of Daniel and that of Balaam. Those seeds of God's word in their hearts set them on a quest. That is what God's word does: it burns in us and moves us.

They started seeking for the Jewish Messiah. As I said, those who seek are never ignored, and worshipers never forgotten.

God loves it when people seek because as Jesus said, *when you seek, you find*.

Their Journey

On a quiet, starry night, a great light appeared from a distant land. The gospel of Luke says that *the glory of the Lord* appeared to shepherds on a field (Luke 2:9). The wise men were astronomers not theologians and to them, a light 800 km away looked like a star – a star, but unlike any other star. Could this be the star that had been prophesied by Balaam? Such was the brilliance and distinct nature of this star that I believe they must have realised that the new-born king was worthy of more than just well-wishes – he was worthy to be sought and to be worshipped.

“where is He who was born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and we have come to worship Him”

1. A journey of faith

Theirs was a journey of faith. The wise men set out not knowing exactly where they were going. Unlike what we may see in our Christmas cards, the wise men did not follow the star. The star only appeared the night Jesus was born and only appeared again a second time after their conversation with Herod ... not while they were journeying to Jerusalem.

2. Their journey involved a huge cost

They would have travelled with a large entourage for protection and because they were high ranking officials. They would have had to pay heavy costs for such an expedition.

It probably took them close to 2 years to reach Jesus.

- Unlike what we may see in nativity scenes, the shepherds were there in the cave at the birth of Jesus, but not the wise men. The wise men came to Jesus when He was already in a house.
- Here is referred 7 times as a 'young child', not as baby Jesus. He was a toddler.
- Also, after Herod's conversation with the wise men, he asked for all males up to 2 years of age to be killed.

That is how we know that it would have taken them possibly 2 years to reach Jesus.

Two years of moving from place to place, asking about the king of Kings. No doubt at great expense for them and their entourage.

Theirs was a journey of faith, of great cost and perseverance.

3. A journey of perseverance

Can you imagine how many cities they must have entered, how many doors they must have knocked, while trying to find Jesus - only to be disappointed every time? They had to persevere. When they finally reached Jerusalem, they were probably filled with hope again. If there was a new-born King, surely this was the place to find a King.

“where is He who was born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and we have come to worship Him”

However, there was no baby in the palace. Herod was furious and the religious leaders had no idea: they knew that the Messiah would be born in a little town called Bethlehem. Beyond that they knew nothing. They hadn't noticed any star, they were busy and obviously couldn't be bothered to travel six miles to find out. Remember, it is those that seek that shall find!

The wise men had come so far but still no king to worship. However, they persevered! As they left Herod, the star they had seen once, many months before, makes one last appearance to lead them exactly to where Jesus is. God really wants people to find Jesus!

Matthew 2:9-11 - ⁹ *When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.* ¹⁰ *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.* ¹¹ *And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him [not Mary]. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

- They feel down – a posture of surrender
- They worshipped Jesus
- They opened their treasures – which is the same as saying that they opened their hearts (“*Where your treasure is, there is your heart*” – **Matthew 6:21**).
- They offered gifts of great prophetic significance:
 - Gold – a gift for a King
 - Frankincense – a gift for a priest
 - Myrrh – used for burials – a gift for a Saviour (one day, this young child would die for our sins and would have a sign “king of the Jews” written above His head).

Conclusion

In the course of the first two years of the life of Jesus, I am sure that many others had come and visited. However, the Bible highlights this visit. What an unusual group of men this was – their effort was unusual, their faith and perseverance rare, their worship the only reason they came.

What a contrast to the religious leaders of the day who couldn't be bothered to seek Jesus, even though He was not 800km away ... but only a few km. They were so close, yet so distant from Jesus. They were so close and yet so unaware.

The wise men were distant but because they wanted to see Jesus, they came close!

Ephesians 2:13 – *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ”.*

We were like those men: we were far off, distant from God. However, we have been brought near!

This Christmas let us come to Him with passion, with open hearts and sincere worship!