

THE ASTRONOMICAL MIRACLE SERMON *MATTHEW 2.1-12*

We're going to talk about miracle today, a miracle that is out of this world, it's an Astronomical Miracle.

The birth of Jesus in our world and in our hearts could certainly be classified as an Astronomical Miracle.

We began our little journey of Advent with the Expected/Unexpected Miracle the first Sunday in Advent. Remember God filled the tough and tender heart of Joseph with a new perspective and purpose. Joseph was obedient and did what God wanted.

Then came the Un-Bee-leeceivalbe Miracle from the available Mother Mary. She made herself available to the whim and will of God. His presence filled her heart and her body.

Last week we heard about the astonished Shepherds, who got an inside tip about the birth of Jesus. They found the stable and then left with their hearts filled with gratitude and mouths full of praise.

The Astronomical Miracle is about the one who changed addresses, from heaven to earth, resulting in changed lives. That is what the ancient astrologers of the East experienced. Sometimes we call them magi, scholars, or even "kings".

In the context of Matthew's Gospel and the story of the wisemen the Astronomical Miracle is really about making Jesus the KING of your life, letting his love and joy, peace and presence reign in your life.

The wise men teach us to seek, have the right attitude, want to come to worship, and want to leave doing what God wants us to do. If we follow the light of God's word and this morning we'll I think find some interesting truth not only in these next few minutes but for eternity.

To experience the Astronomical Miracle, first, **WE NEED TO SEEK JESUS.**

Now a better word for some of you might be to pursue. It's John Piper's word. Seek seems a bit more comfortable, pursue a bit more passionate or risky.

Each year I usually have one new great theological understanding or learning. This year I got it from a Saddleback pastor and it was this, "that if we never seek/pursue to KNOW, we will never really GROW." Let me say again. If we don't seek to know Jesus, we'll never grow in Jesus, grow to be devoted followers who want to serve him willingly and well.

Matthew sets the stage, the fight is on, the battle begun, the struggle for our souls. Who is the rightful king of your life? Matthew 2:1 announces the opponents, "***After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of Herod.***" Matthew introduces Herod, it's like, "in this corner, from Idumea, the Sultan of Selfishness, the Guru of Greed, the Darth Vader of Death, Kingggggggg Herrrrrrrod. Then we read, "***Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?"*** And in this corner all the way from heaven, the God of Grace, the heaven born Prince of Peeeeeeace, Lord of Life, Kingggggg of the Jews, Jesus. There you have it, the choice between the Herod like life which is a self-centered life or living out a Christ present, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Spirit-full life.

As we think about seeking, we see there will be some cost.

The cost to seek takes great **DESIRE**, can come at great **EXPENSE**, and sometimes we need to ask for **HELP**.

When you're going on vacation or want to go somewhere special, you'll usually only get there if you really want to go, you have a great **DESIRE** to go. The wise men had a vision. They would leave the comfort of home and take on this long and difficult quest. They could do so because of this great need, this great desire, "***We saw his star in the East and have come to worship Him.***"

Now how did they figure that out, this star business? Well God works in mysterious ways so we really don't know...it could have been as simple as God getting their attention with the unique alignment of the planets, remember they were astrologers...one planet symbolizing birth, the other the king's planet. So if you thought your fate was in the stars...well there you go.

Question: Do you have a desire to pursue God? Where does your desire to know more about God come from?

We hear to seek takes some **EXPENSE**..."***came from the East to Jerusalem***". As we think of the wise men on this journey they would have had to pay for food, guides, camels and new cloths. They would have had to pay for some protection or security for the trip was risky.

Question: What are willing to spend in time, money, and effort to know Jesus?

In seeking to complete our task or mission it usually takes some **HELP**. We see the wise men being able to stop at Herod's place and ask a few questions, "***Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?***"

It's hard for some of us to stop and ask directions. There is the old joke, "Why did it take the

Israelites 40 years in the wilderness to get where they were going?” They wouldn’t stop to ask directions.

Seriously, some of us have a hard time asking for help because we then we’ll think of ourselves as weak or inadequate. In our culture it’s not always so good for our self-esteem but it is great (and necessary) for spiritual growth.

The faith question: Are you willing to ask for help.

The next thing is WE NEED THE RIGHT ATTITUDE about Jesus.

Let’s check out the attitudes of the characters in this story; Herod, the priest and teachers, and the wise men, Verse 3, “*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all of Jerusalem with him.* Herod was so DISTURBED because there was a rival. This guy is even so PARANOID that he kills his own children.

Verse 4, “*When he called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.* (we’ll see if his intelligence is any good. Here is what his CIA came up with) *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.*”

It doesn’t seem like the priest or teachers are too excited. Here these guys are basically APATHETIC. They have all this knowledge about God, yet no heart, no passion to know or experience more of God.

Let’s go on, verse 7, “*When Herod called the Magi secretly and found from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report back to me, so I too may go and worship him.’*” Ya, Right...Herod is DECEPTIVE.

OK, how about the wise men, Verse 9, “*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the East went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed.*”

The wise men had less knowledge but were still OVERJOYED or DELIGHTED at any little insight or information they got in the pursuit of Jesus. Don’t go by that too fast. That John Piper says that joy is a sustaining joy in times of suffering and sorrow. “He endured the suffering for the joy that would be found.” Jesus found joy in suffering, not for the pain but for the purpose, God’s greater good.

As James says, “Consider it joy when you experience trials and testing...why...they bring you to a maturity in faith.”

Who is your attitude most like? Herod? The teachers/teachers? The wise men?

First, we need to pursue Jesus. Second, we need the right attitude to experience Jesus. And Third, **WE COME WANTING TO WORSHIP JESUS**.

Here are three actions or attitudes that the wise men teach us about worship, let's see if you can find them...verse 11, "*On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.*"

A purpose of worship is to **COME** into God's presence.

An attitude of worship is to be **HUMBLE**, the wise men bowed down. A small cathedral in Bethlehem marks the birthplace of Jesus. It is not the most beautiful or most elegant but it is the oldest surviving church in all Christianity.

It is interesting that you have to stoop or bow to enter the main sanctuary. This is an act of humility. It is interesting too, because the doorway was walled up to keep out horses. The Ottoman's wanted to desecrate the church by having their horses housed and fed in the sanctuary which would be an abomination to Christians

Yet, how appropriate that you also have to stoop at the doorway and even more as you enter the small underground grotto. It is 13x30 feet, with a low ceiling, a cave marked as the birth spot of Jesus.

You're looking at the marble floor under the altar with the silver star in the middle. This is the place it is thought Jesus was born.

A purpose of worship, to come...an attitude, to be humbe, an act of worship is to **PRESENT GIFTS**.

"Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh."

Now let's talk about these gifts... **THE WISE MEN GAVE JESUS GOLD**.

Gold in most cultures is a good thing. It represents a high standard of wealth, status, or power and was often given as a gift to kings, foreign leaders, or dignitaries. We might say the wise men gave their best, something fit for a king. Jesus is our **KING**. We will want to give him our best.

THE WISE MEN GAVE JESUS FRANKINCENSE. This gift symbolized his priestly role. Frankincense was used in worship. It was burned and created smoke. Holy Smoke. Just as the smoke rises to the heavens, our joys and concerns rise to God in prayer and praise. The frankincense is a symbol that Jesus is our **HIGH PRIEST**. We want give God our all.

Gold is a symbol inspiring us to give God our best. Frankincense, a symbol encouraging us to give

God our all, and myrrh is symbol encouraging us to give God our sin, our worst.

THE WISE MEN GAVE JESUS MYRRH. Myrrh is a perfume used to embalm bodies. Myrrh is the symbol that reminds us that Jesus is our **SAVIOR**. He died on a cross for our sin, our worst if you will. Jesus asks us to give him our sin, our worst. There is this exchange of bad for good, good for bad...

“He who was without sin became sin that we might become the righteousness of God.”

I know I’ve said it before but I it’s worth saying again, “Our God is the only God that asks for everything.

So are you giving God your best? your worst? your all?

Let me add this...it will give us something to think about...one commentator said that the gifts were given as a symbol of exchanging one kind of life for another, that fits the story perfectly.

He suggested that the Magi because of their profession as scholars and astrologers from the East, that their religion might have been that of the occult if not just pagan. Gold is obviously results from their work. The frankincense was used in their chants to occult or pagan deities and the myrrh was brewed in potions. Thus, the wise men giving those “gifts” to Jesus were in effect saying, we want a new rule in our life...a changed life...the tools of our trade we surrender to you for whatever you have for us.

When we give something to God, good or not so good. God uses that for the greater good and for his glory and gives us something better back in exchange.

Seeking, right attitude, and worship, our fourth point, **WE LEAVE WANTING TO OBEY JESUS,**

at least want to work toward that, we desire to work toward that. ***“And having been warned in a***

dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

Matthew 2.12

We’ve come full circle, the wise men had a choice didn’t they? The Magi could do what Herod said and report back to him or do what God said, and not go back to him. They chose to go with God’s will not

Herod’s way. ***“They returned to their country by another route.”***

A changed of directions demonstrates a **CHANGED** life.

You and I make choices every day. Sometimes those choices are what God wants and what we want.

That works well for us. There are other times we find ourselves on the opposite side of the fence from

God when making decisions. I think if we've experienced the out of this world miracle of Christ birth

in our lives, that we have to ask, "What does God want me to do? Where does he want me to go?"

And then our gift to him is to go where he wants us to go and do what he wants us to do.

The Astronomical Miracle is really about making Jesus the King in your life isn't it. It's

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Astronomical Miracle.

Choose this day the rightful king of your life... choose this day who you will serve...