

THE WISE MEN:

This morning, we turn our attention to the wise men. We will look at their story together and I will finish with the story of the fourth wise man; this story is a work of fiction. The story of the other Wise Man is a short novel or long short story by Henry van Dyke. It was initially published in 1895 and has been reprinted many times since then.

The group of people I want to talk about today are known as Magi. Tradition says that there were three kings. The Bible doesn't use the word wise men or king but magi. It also doesn't say that there were three of them. There could have been three, but the Bible doesn't say.

However, we do know that Magi were scholars who were like modern day astronomers or cosmologists. These were men who had studied the ancient Scriptures and were waiting for the Messiah, a Saviour, a King who would come and change human history. They studied the heavens because the Scriptures said his coming would be marked by a tremendous event in the heavens or sky. This would be the coming of a star that would mark the time and place of his birth.

Amazingly, these prophesies that were talked about began to unfold in their lifetime. When the star appeared, it was like a beacon that would lead them to a child from a poor family who had been born in a manger. We can't really begin to imagine what it must have been for them. Hope had turned up and oh there was real excitement.

When they followed this star, it didn't lead to one of the prominent cities of the world but to the little town of Betlehem. Instead, they found the baby in the arms of a young and poor Jewish mother in a borrowed home. Maybe they thought that this would mark a huge shift in the political and social world that they lived in.

The lesson of the Magi, when it comes to Christmas is this; Wise men seek him and when they do, they find him. Jesus walked this earth and claimed to be God himself or God in human form. This is not a neutral statement there is no ambiguity here. You can call him a liar perhaps with some mental health issues or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord.

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. Matthew 2:1-3

The star led them to the little town of Betlehem. Wherever the star led, they were probably expecting to find the birth of some kind of golden child, surrounded in splendor and honour and glory. Instead, they found the baby in the arms of a poor Jewish mother in a borrowed home. But their expectations were rattled in ways beyond what they expected to see.

Now, why was King Herod disturbed and, even more intriguingly, why was all of Jerusalem disturbed that Herod was disturbed? It's because Herod was one of the most wicked, vile, cruel, heartless, deranged, insecure, evil men who has ever lived. Well, keep that in mind with the Magi. This ruthless, conniving, murderous, power-hungry person was told by some

travelling Magi that a new king of Israel had been born. They just wanted directions so that they could worship Him and acknowledge His kingdom.

Let's keep reading, 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. Matthew 2" 4-9.**

¹²**And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.** ¹³**When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." Matthew 2: 12-13.**

¹⁶**When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Matthew 2: 16.**

Herod may think he is in charge, but we know different. The gospel tells of a prophetic figure, Jesus who suffers the worst the empire can do to him. Execution by crucifixion. However, his resurrection exposes the limits of Roman power. The Gospel and Jesus construct an alternative world. It resists imperial claims and power. It launches a new community, the church which refuses to recognize Herod's rule and authority. It offers an alternative to the world; a community of God manifested in Jesus and witnesses the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church.

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.' Matthew 2: 4-6.**

²**"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah 5:2.**

Although the king comes to shepherd the lost sheep of Israel, this love is not restricted to Israel. Wise men, non-Israelites have observed a star signaling the king's birth. Guided by hope, the wise men follow the star, but it is not sufficient to lead them to the place of Jesus'

birth. They assume that the king of the Jews will be born in Jerusalem, the capital city. The enemies of God's kingdom often are used to serve the movement that has begun in Jesus.

We know this is no ordinary child. Yet, Jesus is a newborn baby. He has no royal courtiers to care for him. No military guard defends him. He has no palace or army. His life is threatened by Herod who had huge resources at his disposal. We are left with some questions. Who will care for the future king? Who will protect him? How can he possibly survive to bring about those roles prophesied for him? Will it all be over before it starts?

Yet, all through the story we get the strongest impressions that God is in control! The miraculous appearance of the star to gentile Magi or wise men signaled that God was about to send Israel its messiah. He was also going to move beyond Israel and bless the world as he had always wanted too. What a story, the parents of Jesus are sovereignly sent to Bethlehem, fulfilling ancient prophecies despite living far away in Nazareth. They are provided with humble gifts that will enable them to escape the murderous plans of a paranoid slaughterer.

We also see God working by communicating through dreams. ¹² **And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.** ¹³ **When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."** **Matthew 2: 12-13.** Don't be surprised or scared if God talks to you through dreams. He continues to do that through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"The Story of the Other Wise Man" is a captivating novel written by Henry Van Dyke. First published in 1895, this timeless tale takes readers on a journey through faith, compassion, and the pursuit of a higher purpose. Set during the time of the biblical Nativity, the story follows the life of Artaban, the fourth wise man who sets out to find the newborn King of the Jews.

The novel is set in ancient Persia, at a time when three wise men embark on a journey to follow a star that heralds the birth of a new king. Artaban, a fourth wise man, is also aware of the prophecies and sets out to join his companions. However, on his way to meet them, Artaban encounters various people in need and is compelled to help them. As a result, he misses his opportunity to meet the other wise men and find the newborn king.

Throughout his journey, Artaban faces numerous challenges and sacrifices, always guided by his faith and compassion. He sells his precious jewels to fund his acts of kindness, with the hope of finding the king and presenting him with a gift worthy of his divinity. Despite his best efforts, Artaban misses the major events of the Nativity, including the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus and the flight into Egypt.

Years pass, and Artaban continues his search for the king. His journey takes him to Jerusalem, where he witnesses the crucifixion of Jesus. In his final act of selflessness, Artaban uses his last remaining possession, a pearl of great price, to ransom a young girl from slavery. As he

dies, Artaban hears a voice telling him, ⁴⁵ “**He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Matthew 25: 44-45.**

When we sing “Immanuel” we are proclaiming that God is with us. When God showed up in Jesus Christ, he was not a pillar of fire, not a tornado but a baby. There is nothing like a baby. Little babies can be picked up, hugged, kissed, and eventually they cling to you. Why would God come this time in the form of a baby, rather than a firestorm or a whirlwind? This time he has come not to bring judgment but to bear it. To pay the penalty for our sins. To take away the barrier between humanity and God, so we can be together. Immanuel, Jesus is God with us.

So, where does that bring us? To a comfort and a challenge. Here's the comfort. I don't care who you are. I don't care what you've done. If you repent and come to God through Jesus, not only will God accept you and work in your life, but he delights to work through people like you. He's been doing it all through history.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17. Here is the challenge. Take that first step and accept God into your life. Regardless of how or why you came today. God brought you here today to say to you I have a gift for you at Christmas, and you matter to me. As you get ready for Christmas. Have you received God's free Christmas gift of Jesus Christ. This gift you won't find under the tree. Don't go another Christmas without receiving God's Christmas gift for you.