# Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, **2**asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” **3**When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; **4**and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. **5**They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

**6**‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
    are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
    who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

**7**Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8**Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” **9**When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23179f)] until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10**When they saw that the star had stopped,[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23180g)] they were overwhelmed with joy. **11**On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12**And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

# Sermon: Seek and Find

January sixth. For most of us the trees are down, family has gone back home, presents have been opened. The twelve days of Christmas are over. The only things left are the credit card bills and a little extra weight around the middle.

Today marks a new season – January sixth is the feast of the Epiphany. It’s not something that we spend much time or effort on in North America, but elsewhere in the world today is a much bigger deal than Christmas.

Especially in Spain, the feast day of the Epiphany is marked by massive parades – the one in Madrid draws over 100 000 people. These parades are much like our Santa Claus parades, but instead of jolly old Saint Nick, the focus is on the three kings, or magi, who visited the young Jesus.

Over the centuries much tradition has grown up around the three wise men of the bible. They have been given names: Melchior, Gaspar, and Bathasar. They have descriptions – age, race, hair colour, beard length etc.

These are embellishments that have been added to the biblical description. These personas add to the festivities of the feast day and are fun, so long as we don’t try to make it factual. Because, when we look into what the bible says, what we find is that they are not named, they not called kings, and in fact we don’t even know how many there are.

All the bible records is that there were travellers called magi – which means astrologers - that came from the east. We can make guesses about them, of course. The Babylonians were noted for their astrological knowledge, and lived east of Bethlehem.

The gifts that they brought indicated that the travellers either had wealth of their own, or were representing people who had wealth. Beyond that, it’s all conjecture.

There are two conclusions that the biblical description makes very clear to us. First – these people were not Jews. And second, they were doing something that Jews were forbidden to do – looking to the heavens for signs and portents. They were non-Jews doing non-Jewish things.

They were outsiders: Gentiles, impure, unclean, defiled – not the kind of people that a good Jew would ever let into their home, or sit down to dinner with. They were the wrong kind of people. The shepherds were uncouth and uncivilized, but at least they were still part of God’s tribe. These magi just didn’t belong. They had no part in any King of the Jews. They were interlopers – intruders.

But they were seekers. They were the wrong people, and at the wrong time – the bible suggests they were a year late to the party – but they had gotten off their butts and traveled a long way to meet this Christ child.

I wonder if we have any people like that here with us. Not Christians. Doing not Christian things. And yet they following the signs as they recognize them; signs that have led them here, to come before Jesus.

I know we have those kind of people here. Because I am one of them.

We live in an age of seekers. People don’t automatically assume that the church is a bastion of truth and love – in fact we have quite a negative perception problem these days.

People turn to all sorts of different sources in their quest for truth and meaning. Many of those sources would not meet with our approval – there are many spiritologies and practices that we may consider wrong, or even ungodly.

I know, because I spent a significant amount of time as just such a seeker. I looked for answers in the strangest places. I investigated the healing and spiritual properties of crystals; I practiced astral projection – the intentional separation of body and spirit. I was involved in Wicca. I read the Necronomicon long before I ever read the bible. I practiced kundalini meditation, Vipashana meditation, psychedelic mind expansion, positive visualization, and even flirted with Scientology.

Even when I did finally come to Christianity I came the wrong way. I came because I thought they were some weird spiritist sect that had broken away from the mainline church. It turns out that they were just Presbyterians.

The point is that my path to the manger was not a direct one. Like the magi, I was the wrong type of person who was busy doing the wrong type of things, yet somehow, miraculously, that life led me – a child of God – to the Son of God.

And my story is not unique. This church would not exist but for the determination and simple faith of seekers who, like the magi and like myself, stumbled into Jesus’ birth scene. We all have our stories of being the wrong people, and doing the wrong things.

The important thing is not how we came to be here – but that we are here now. There is not a wrong way to come before Christ. Certainly some ways are quicker or easier, but like the field hands that were hired at five in the afternoon, it’s not the time that matters. It’s getting here that counts.

If being here is more important that how we got here, then that means that we ought not to be judging one another’s journey. Some of us have taken a very long, hard road to come to where we are and it shows. We’re looking rough.

We shouldn’t judge each other for the holes in our clothing and the mud on our feet, the supplies we have lost along the way, and the scars that we bear, all the results of our journeying. Instead, we ought to celebrate each others presence. That we are all here together is a miracle. What else but God could motivate Hungarians, Koreans, Dutch, Brazilians, Scots, Brits, Danes, men and women, young and old, conservative and liberal, to get out of bed and spend a precious morning off together in this room?

The important thing is that we are gathered here to worship. Not how we got here. The important thing in the scripture was that the magi gathered to worship. Not how they got there. We are all magi in one sense or another. We have all come from outside the kingdom, and are now before Jesus. Once we were lost, but now we are found – that was last week’s theme, and it blends right into this week.

There was a second group of people in this weeks reading – the chief priests and the scribes. These were the religious leaders and the scholars. Often these are the folks that are at the receiving end of Jesus’ pointed observations, and we in the church tend to judge them harshly, but as we heard Ruth Anne read this morning, they had an important role to play.

When the magi set off to follow yonder star, they were following a natural sign. There are signs of God everywhere in nature – the heavens declare your majesty - the psalmist writes. But the natural signs could only take the magi so far.

They headed toward Judea, but then didn’t know where to turn, so they naturally went to the palace to seek out the newly born king. It wasn’t until the religious scholars turned to the sacred texts that they learned where this king would be found.

Natural signs and wonders can prompt us to move and to seek - they can get us going – but ultimately we are going to need sacred scripture interpreted in a community of faith to complete the journey; to get us through that final stretch, to kneel at the feet of the Christ child. Without the texts and without those people who were well versed in it, the magi’s journey would have been for naught. They would have gone home empty-handed.

The chief priests and the scholars are the next step in our journey. If we all began as the magi, as outsiders feeling in the dark but walking in faith, then once we encounter Jesus we begin to become as the scribes. We start learning the texts so that we can guide those who come to us for help.

We move from being outsiders to becoming helpful insiders – and helpful is the descriptor I’d like to emphasize. It is very easy, once we’ve become settled into our places, to start to think that we’ve earned our place in the kingdom. To believe that somehow we deserve to be part of this community and to look down upon those outside; those who are on the margins.

It is easy to judge those weary travellers who perhaps use the last of their strength to cross over the threshold – and let’s recognize that those steps outside are a mountain. It is a very intimidating and difficult thing for someone who is not part of a church to walk through those doors on a Sunday morning.

It doesn’t take much more than one judgemental word, or one accusing look, to convince that seeker that they are in the wrong place, that they don’t belong, to send them fleeing back into the world. It is not our place to judge anyone who comes to this community. We don’t judge them based on where they come from. We don’t judge them for following stars. We don’t judge the hurts, hang-ups, and habits that they are burdened with from their struggles in the world.

Our job is to use what we’ve learned from scripture and say ‘let me show you where you can find Jesus.’ Jesus is the healer. Jesus is the liberator. Jesus is the bread of life, the vine, the good shepherd, the gatekeeper. Whatever is wrong with the travellers that show up in our lives, it’s not up to us to sort it out. That’s Jesus’ job. Our job is to welcome, to make room at the table, and point to the one who gives new life.

We have all been magi. At one point or another, we were outsiders, following a star through a desert night. Maybe that’s where some of us still are. Our goal, once we encounter Jesus, is to grow into one who can use the scripture to guide – ourselves, our families, and those others who come to us. At the very least, we can aspire to be a star – a ray of hope that attracts the attention of those in the world and brings them far enough that they can encounter others in our community who can guide them further.

To the seekers and the travellers among us, welcome. I would love to pray with you that you will know this healer that we worship who changes and renews lives.

To those among us who have met Jesus, welcome. I would love to pray with you that we would all know further this healer that we worship who changes and renews lives.

To all of us here,

Arise, and shine; for your light has come,  
    and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
**2**For darkness shall cover the earth,  
    and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
    and his glory will appear over you.  
**3**Nations shall come to your light,  
    and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

The star of Bethlehem is replicated a hundredfold in this room, to serve as a beacon for all those whose restless hearts yearn to find home – a true home.

I speak to you this morning in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.