

LED TO FOLLOW

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Dr. J. Howard Olds

December 30, 2007

There is a story soaring across the internet these days suggesting things might have gone better if the three wise men had been three wise women. After all, had women been in charge they would have 1) asked for directions, 2) gotten to the manger on time, 3) assisted with the birth, 4) cleaned up the place, and 5) made a casserole for the Holy Family.

Of course, the author of that analogy evidently failed to read the story as recorded in the Bible. Matthew writes: *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?"* That sure sounds like direction seeking to me. That sounds like following. That sounds like knowing there is something inside that must connect with something outside and they are willing to go long distances in order to make it happen.

On this weekend when the world has put Christmas back in the box for another year, let us pause in the church to talk about following. Henri Nouwen once said, "Leadership, for a large part, means to be led." Wise men and wise women figure that out. All of us are followers.

THEY CAME SEEKING

Who were these visitors from afar?

John Hopkins, Jr. identified them in the hymn as three Oriental kings who traveled far, over field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star. Sixth century churchmen named these foreign visitors Melchior, Balthazar and Gasper. Western Christians put them at the manger as a tidy part of the Christmas pageant. But the Bible makes no mention of them being kings, never bothers to count how many, and strongly suggests that their visit occurs one to two years after the birth of Christ.

They were Magi, good and holy men, skilled in philosophy, medicine, and natural sciences. They were searchers after truth; astrologers in a time when astrology was a respected science. They came from Persia, present day Iraq and Iran. They were Gentiles in search of a Jewish king.

O'er field and fountain, moor and mountain they followed that star. In the heat of the day, chill of the night, still they traveled on. With saddle-chaffed legs, sunburned skin, dust-caked eyes, they came seeking a Jewish Messiah. No, they didn't know the Torah, they probably couldn't recite the Ten Commandments, and maybe knew nothing about Jewish prophecy. They were just tired old

sinner, hungry for a spiritual dinner. They were smart enough and wise enough to know that they needed to be seeking and know that they needed direction and know that they needed to be following One who was above them. They were led to follow. So they came seeking, searching. *Where is he born king of the Jews?*

Wise men and wise women still follow, seeking a Savior. There is a hunger in our hearts that is never satisfied until we at last have found our connection with God. It is in every human soul.

Ann Sullivan approached her deaf and blind student Helen Keller saying, "Today I am going to teach you about God." Ms. Keller signed to her "Good, I've been thinking about him for a long time."

Ex-Beatle George Harrison, in an interview shortly before his death said, "Everything else in life can wait but my search for God cannot wait, it has to happen right now."

Larry King said, "I have a lot of respect for true people of faith. I have always searched. I envy people who have it. I just can't make the leap for myself."

A mother said, "When my four-year-old child pointed to a crucifix and said 'What's that man doing, Mom,' I knew it was time to get my family back to church to learn the faith."

Chuck Hunter, my friend, says post-modern people are no longer buying the rationalistic ideology of the enlightenment. Instead they are searching for something and willing to try almost anything from astrology to Zen, from sex to steroids, to find meaning in their lives.

If you've come here searching, you've come to the right place. If you have come here hungry for a spiritual experience, you have come to the right place to find the wondrous resources of a God who fails you not. Seekers are welcome here. Bring your questions, express your doubts. Accept God's grace, embrace the lifestyle of Christ, and join a company of people committed to living the questions.

Maybe you are more like Herod than like the Magi. Maybe you have been hanging around the right place all this time. It's all happened right before your eyes, in your own home town, but you have been so busy with other things, so obsessed with political things, and keeping things under control that you missed the very thing that could make all things meaningful.

Verse 3: *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. And he called the chief priests and teachers together and asked them "Where is Christ to be born?"* Interesting enough it's the same question, the exact same question. He had the heritage but had not met the Holy One.

Whether you have traveled from afar o'er moor and mountain and field and fountain or whether you are living in the same city and been in the church all your life, the question is the same. Where is Christ, where can I find him?

If somebody asked you where to find God, could you give a helpful answer? When your child or grandchild climbs up in your lap and says "Who is God?" don't panic, begin a joint pursuit. When a friend, co-worker, or neighbor asks you about your faith, be prepared to share an answer. Let your faith become so vital that you are vivacious when it's time to share it.

The best definition of evangelism that I've ever heard is one given by Albert Outler a long time ago. Outler says, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." I like that. It's not that I've got it all together, it's not that I've got all the answers, it's not that I've got a four-point step, answer these questions and sign on the dotted line and it's sealed and delivered for you. No, it's one beggar finding another beggar, telling us both where in the world we can find bread. That is evangelism.

I despise gossip. I've tried to wipe it out every place I've ever been. I finally decided it's human nature and I'm in a losing battle. So I've changed my tactics, I've changed my approach. I'd like to get you gossiping about positive things. If you are going to gossip why don't you talk about good things? Why don't you talk about somebody finding Jesus Christ? Why don't you talk about something positive that has happened in the life of your community of faith? Why don't you tell them about a family that wrote to me this week saying, "We came to Christmas Eve services a year ago and we found God there and we have been coming ever since." Spread that kind of gossip. Tell everyone you can find. If I could get people doing that, it's more important than all the television and radio and promotions that we do in the life of this congregation. Gossip about good things. If somebody wants to find the Lord, will you give them an answer?

You see, there is a hunger in our hearts, there is a desire in our souls that may lead us traveling a long way to find it satisfied. They came following; they came seeking.

THEY KNELT SEEING

Verse 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

What a picture. Grown men, respected, dignified, scholars, bumping their heads on the low doorway of the windowless hut where a peasant couple is struggling to raise their first born child. Mary greets them. Joseph questions them. Where did you come from and why are you searching for us? When little Jesus toddles into his mother's lap, they fall to their feeble knees in worship of him and give him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Why would they be so vulnerable?
How can they be so certain?
When will they fully understand it?

All of those questions didn't matter. They found the Christ and they came to worship him.

Archbishop Temple said, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, feed the mind with the truth of God, purge the imagination by the beauty of God, open the heart to the love of God and devote the will to the purpose of God."

Albert Day said "Worship is not a hurried visit to the window of a fast food restaurant for a moral sandwich and a cup of spiritual stimulants. Worship is communion with God."

To worship is to admire, adore, respect, revere. It has more to do with substance than style, God than gimmicks, presence than preference.

Isaiah 6:1—*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

We have accomplished our reason for being here if somebody sees the Lord today. Worship is more than singing a few songs, performing a few rituals, enduring a sermon. Worship is making a vital connection with God. To reach out and touch Him and say that you love Him. That is what worship is all about.

On our knees before the Holy Child, we make a great discovery.

The one we are seeking has been searching for us. All our looking for God is nothing more than a hesitant rise to open the door for the One who's been there all the time.

As a kid, I used to play hide and seek with kids older than I at the community fish fry regularly held at our house. My brother and his buddies would let me hide and then never bother to find me. After a while I would stand out from behind my tree of hiding and they would still ignore me. They really didn't want me in their big kid game.

God is not like that. He is searching for you more than you are looking for Him.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."

Whether or not it is clear to you, even now you are being found. It's not our

acting but being acted upon that leads to salvation.

Here at the threshold of a brand new year, let us seek the Lord while he may be found. Let us call upon Him and find Him near. Let us rejoice in God's guidance and follow his direction, all the days of our lives. Follow Christ; go with him all the way. Worship Christ, crown Him Lord of all. Come let us worship the Lord.

Amen.