

When It's Time to Seek Direction

Matthew 2:1-12

January 6, 2002

Dr. J. Howard Olds

There is a story soaring across the Internet these days suggesting things might have gone better if the wise men had been three wise women. After all, had women been in charge, they would have asked for direction, gotten to the Manger on time, assisted with the birth, cleaned up the place and made a casserole for the Holy Family. Will the battle of the sexes ever end?

Of course, the author of that analogy evidently failed to read the Gospel of Matthew for our scripture lesson says, "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. And on this weekend when the world has put Christmas back in a box for another year, we pause in the Church to celebrate the season of Epiphany—the celebration of Christ as the light of the world, even a light for strangers from afar.

This sermon is contained in six words—the first three are these—**they came seeking** and the second three are these—**they knelt seeing**.

THEY CAME SEEKING

Who were these visitors from afar? John Hopkins Jr., Whose hymn we just sang, identified them as three Oriental kings who traveled far over *field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star*. 6th Century churchmen named these foreign visitors Melchoir, Balthasar, and Gasper. Western Christians get them to the Manger so we can get a little package done up in one night so we can get on with our lives at the front of the New Year. Interestingly enough, the Bible substantiates none of these. It makes no mention of them being kings nor does it bother to count how many may have been in that band of people who came. The Bible strongly suggests that their visit probably 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 the truth; astrologers in an era when astrology was a respected science. They came from Persia, modern day Iraq or Iran, they were Gentiles in search of a Jewish King. They were people from a foreign religion come searching for this Christ. Matthew, writing to a particular population, starts it off in the 2nd chapter saying “I need to say to this my particular Jewish audience Christ who was born is Christ for all”.

O'er field and fountain and moor and mountain they followed the star. In the heat of the day and the chill of the night, they traveled on. With saddle-chaffed legs, sun-burned skin, dust-caked eyes, they came seeking a Jewish Messiah. Maybe they did not know the Torah, most likely they could not recite the Ten Commandments, maybe they never read the Prophecy, just tired old sinners, hungry for a spiritual dinner. So they came seeking and longing to discover

Christ for themselves. Here is the point: **Wise men and women still seek for a Savior.** Whether you know it or not, have recognized it or not, that is why you are here today. It may not be in your conscious mind at all, but somewhere in the depths of your soul, weaving together in the formation of your life, is the deep, deep, deep hunger for God.

Ann Sullivan approached her deaf and blind student Helen Keller saying, “Today I am going to teach you about God.” Ms. Keller signed back, “Good, I have 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 the search for God cannot wait”. Larry King says, “I have a lot of respect for true people of faith. I have interviewed hundreds of them, I have always searched myself and I envy people who have it. I just can’t quite make the leap for myself.” According to *Newsweek* Magazine, a mother has a 4 year old who comes in the door and says to her, “What’s that man doing on the cross?” The child has seen a crucifix. The mother said, “I knew instantly that I had to get back to church.”

My colleague, Chuck Hunter, says post modern people no longer buy 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 have come here today searching for something, welcome. You are at the right place. Seekers are welcome here.

Bring your questions, express your doubts, but don’t stop there. Accept God’s

grace. Embrace the life style of Christ. Join the company of people committed to transforming the world. Maybe some of us are more like Herod than we are the Magi. It's all happened right before our eyes in our very own homes, but we have been so busy with other things, with political things, that we miss the very thing that could make all things meaningful. Verse 3—*When Herod heard, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him and he called in the chief priests and asked “where is Christ to be born?”* Is it not interesting—same question—where? Searching, looking, hunting. There is something inside the soul that longs and looks and reaches for God and whether it is right under your nose and right in your home town, as it was for Herod, or its around the world, there is still that search, that desperate longing to find the spiritual answer to our soul.

So, I raise the question today, if somebody asked you how to find God, where to find God, could you give an answer? If somebody asked you—walked into your office tomorrow as into Herod's long ago, and said, “Where can I find God?” Could you give an answer? When you child crawls up into your lap as they will surely do, and says to you, “Who is God?” What kind of answer are you going to give? Do not be defensive about it. Be honest about it. If you do not have an answer, if you have been around for a lifetime but failed to make a life connection, it is okay. Now is the time to take that child's hand and together begin to discover what it may mean to come to Christ and to worship here. They came seeking and God honors the search.

THEY KNELT SEEING

V. 11 *On coming to the house, they saw the child, with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.* What a picture. Grown men, respected, dignified, scholars, bumping their heads on the low doorway of a windowless hut, where a peasant couple is struggling to raise their first born child. Mary greets them, the hostess of hospitality that she is, and Joseph begins to question them. Soon a toddler runs out and crawls into His mother's lap. Suddenly these men of distinction, fall to their feeble knees and worship Him. Why would they be so bold? How could they be so certain? What is the persistence that helped them travel so far? Do they fully understand? The questions could go on, but the record is that they fall on their knees and worship.

Arch Bishop 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 once said, "to 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 and adore, to respect and revere. It has more to do with substance than style, more to do with God than gimmick, more to do with presence than preference. And so Isaiah, in the year that King Uzziah died, comes to the temple and sees the Lord high and lifted up. He is in the presence of God. Except to be in the presence of God, what other reason is there ever to come to Church? It is more than the songs we sing. It is more than the ritual we say. It is more than the sermons we endure. It is being in the presence of the Almighty. When God is there, what do you do except fall on

your knees and wake up from our sleepiness and worship the Divine? And in the midst of our discover we make a great discovery. We discover that in all of our searching, God has been searching for us. We discover that in all our seeking, someone even greater has been seeking us. And, that our best attempts to find, learn, stretch, reach and travel, is, in the long run, but a lazy getting up to open the door for the One who has been knocking there all along. You see, he is searching for you. That is the Gospel.

When I was a little kid, community fish fries were always held at our house. We played hide and seek. I was the smallest of the ones around. They never wanted me to play. I would pester them until they let me play. They would say, "Sure, go hide". Secure in my hiding place, I would wait and wait. They would go through 2 or 3 cycles of "IT" . Finally, I would get up from behind my tree and yell, "Hi, I'm over here. Come and find me." They never did come and find me because they did not want me there anyway. But my God is not like that. My God is searching for me more than I am ever searching for my God and that makes all the difference.

The first Sunday of a brand new year. What do you do, except fall on your knees and say, "Find me Lord. I am yours." In awe of that, that is worship.

