

The Wise Men

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 20th Dec 2009

Intro- Where's wally

- Have you ever been looking for something and could not find it, but then asked for someone else's help (perhaps your wife!) and there it has been all along right under your nose and yet you could not see it? This can be infuriating at the best of times, but all the more so when it is something very important you are looking for. When Jesus was born it was perhaps the greatest event in history, and yet for many it went unnoticed, even though they were in the vicinity but not for some wise men who travelled many miles away from the East. Who were they, and how did they find Jesus when others failed to, and how did they know to look in the first place?

Read Matt 2:1-12

Who were the Wise men?

- Traditionally on Christmas cards as kings. ILLUSTRATION- 'Kid talking whilst watching nativity play. One of the Three wise men about to come in. Uncle says quiet-you're going to miss the king coming in... boy say that's not Elvis'.
- They were wise men, magi (from where we get the word magic), rather than kings-astrologers (see Dan 2:2)-would have advised kings. Perhaps tradition of kings came from the cost of the gifts.
- They were from the East- Mesopotamia, probably Babylon. It is thought they travelled about 700 miles to get to see Jesus.
- Traditional names in Western Church from 8th Cent Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, but Eastern has different names (& it's all probably made up).
- They had 3 gifts, but their actual number is unstated
- Application- wisdom=to turn to Jesus, no matter what background you are from, what job you do, what age you are or upbringing. Have you done it? Are you continuing to rely on Him? What inconvenience will you suffer to get closer to Jesus ?700 mile journey.

What was the star?

- 1st Century Sat Nav!
- ILLUSTRATION- Satellite navigation-Drivers visiting Luckington, Wiltshire, have been getting that sinking feeling after trying to find a detour around a road closure in Sherston. Satellite navigation systems, together with misleading signs have been blamed after dozens of motorists tried to drive through a ford at Brookend in Luckington. Several lorries and vans have got stuck in up to three feet of water. Enterprising farmers have been towing out stricken vehicles at £25 a time. One local resident has been helping stranded drivers to dry out. The lady said: 'The other day my husband came home and I had to explain why there was a van driver's trousers in our tumble dryer. He was sitting in his cab, shivering in his boxer shorts.
In the Daily Telegraph -a lorry driver who, after trying to drive from Turkey to Gibraltar using sat-nav, finds himself some 1600 miles off course. Necdet Bakimci was driving his 32-tonne lorry, carrying expensive cars, from Turkey to Gibraltar when he fetched up, lost, in Skegness, England. Apparently, there is a Gibraltar POINT in Skegness. Eventually, Mr Bakimci arranged for his firm in Antakya, Turkey, to ship the cars to the correct destination from Birmingham and he began his journey home.
- Appeared and disappeared and reappeared-v9 &10. Hovered over a house (notice not a stable now- up to 2 years later, because Herod tried to kill (v16) all the kids 2 & under). Star would destroy earth. Shekinah glory- God's glory appearing as a star-like fire at burning bush, like fire & cloud over tabernacle etc. Like light appearing to shepherds. Shekinah had left in Ezekiel's day- now returned.
- Application- 'Seek & you will find'-Matt 7:7. Jer 29:13-'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.' Wise men really wanted to see Jesus & so God

guided them. God will guide us as we determine with all our hearts sincerely to find Him. If need God's guidance pray- call out to Him earnestly.

How did the wise men know?

- Is it OK to read our stars? No. They did not use astrology here, but had prophecies handed down to them
- Daniel the prophet lived in Babylonia (about 605 BC) and was put in charge of all the wise men, the astrologers of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Daniel had a specific prophecy (the 70 'seven's' Dan 9:20-27) about when the Messiah would come. This would have been handed down. Daniel saved the astrologer's lives by interpreting the king's unrevealed dream- this would have been ample testimony to the astrologers that Daniel's God was the true God and would lead to Daniel's writings being preserved by some.
- Daniel did not speak about a star, but another 'prophet' from Babylonia did- Balaam!. Balaam lived many years before Daniel (about 800yrs before, 1400 B.C) and was from Pethor in Babylonia (Deir 'Alla Inscription: Long Inscription relating a prophecy by Balaam son of Beor found on walls of ancient settlement in Jordan in 1967 by Dutch archaeologists. The text, in a language between Aramaic and Canaanite, can be dated to c.800 BC . He was a sorcerer (Num 24:1) hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel when they entered the promised land, however, he was only able to speak what God said and ended up blessing Israel and predicting the coming of their king- Num 24:17-'there shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre (i.e. king) shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab (i.e. Jesus ultimately shall protect Israel). Star is paralleled with king. Even though Balaam was bad and said dodgy stuff (and was eventually killed by Israel because he advised the Midianite women to seduce the Israelite men) God over-ruled and spoke through him on 4 occasions and also permitted his donkey to speak on 1 occasion.
- These prophecies they possessed. They naturally went to the place they thought the king of the Jews would be- Jerusalem. The teachers of the law gave them what they did not possess- the Micah prophecy (Micah 5:2) about Bethlehem.
- Application- the Bible is the Word of God and will keep us from stumbling, and straying especially the more we have of it- read it, ponder it, learn it and God will speak to you.

The cost of the gifts

- Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh (burn some)- very costly presents- Jesus' parents were so poor they could only offer the cheapest offering at the temple in Jerusalem for Mary's purification after childbirth- a pair of turtle doves-Lk 2:24. Perhaps used this gift to live on when fled to Egypt before the massacre of infants.
- Had to disobey Herod- risked their own lives to worship the King (Herod was paranoid against conspirators and had his favourite wife and 4 of his own sons killed).
- Also travelled 700 miles each way, probably by camel.
- Application- how costly is our worship of the king? He wants us to truly surrender our lives. Are they truly? Use this Christmas time as opportunity to renew our love for Jesus.

Summary

- Wise men made great sacrifices and took great risks and gave their treasures away but gained a far greater treasure, knowing God's guidance, protection and presence. Will we follow their wise example today?

Song: *Hark the herald. Choccies*