

Carol Service: WISE

The Christmas narrative has many, many amazing events associated with it. One such event is the account of the wise men or Magi from the East who came to see the one born King of the Jews. We know very little definite about them except they came from the East. We do not know if that means Babylon (*modern Iraq*) or further east - even China as some have suggested!

Neither do we know if there were 3 wise men! We know there were 3 gifts given, but did 2 or 6 or 9 share the cost of such gifts? The song "*We three Kings of Orient are*" owes much to elaborate storytelling through the years.

We may so often think of them going to Bethlehem and meeting up with and crowding in with the shepherds in the stable, but the Bible says they came to the child in a house. We know Herod in his murderous rage, killed all boys under 2 years of age, which indicates they may have been travelling a long time and Jesus was a toddler! I say those things not to sink anyone's romantic view of this event, but to point to the accounts as presented to us by the Bible and not by a romanticised, rose tinted view of the real events.

The wise men travelled from afar, a long distance to find the one born King of the Jews. We have to say they were wise in doing this and all of us can learn from them and will be wise if we do as they did. I want to use the word WISE to hang some thoughts on, using each letter in my headings:

Wonder.

These men in their own country were those who studied things and they suddenly saw a new star in the heavens to their amazement and surprise. It caused them **to wonder** at what it could mean, what it signified. It got them thinking, **pondering**, examining things and from their knowledge they concluded that a new and great King had been born to their West. As they looked, probed and read, they concluded it was the king of the Jews - probably from having access to and knowing the ancient writings of the Jews.

These men saw this great event and it cause them to wonder, to question, to find out what it meant. What about us this Christmas? Another Christmas is upon us, have we ever really wondered as to what Christmas is really about? We may take it as some sort of fairy-tale; something that once a year is nice to remember, but like the fairy lights on the tree, it is put away until next year.

To be wise involves wondering about what really happened there in Bethlehem so long ago; it will **involve us thinking** of the events and who Jesus really is and why His birth was so special and is still celebrated. If He really was God the Son - God born into this world, taking to Himself our humanity, what was His purpose in doing so? This should cause us to wonder.

Instruction.

The wise men headed off to the west, destination Jerusalem - the capital where the palace was. There they asked their question “**Where is the one** who has been born King of the Jews?” King Herod didn’t like this question, but he couldn’t

deny the question of the wise men, nor the events that had led them there. Herod then asked the **teachers of God's word** the question and they gave him and the wise men the answer "*In Bethlehem in Judaea*" because these things had been foretold in God's word for the old prophets.

Here were the strangers, who travelled a long way, yet in their wonder they went to the wrong place, but they were prepared to ask questions and receive answers to their questions. Someone here may wonder at the events at Christmas, even at Christianity, but are **we ready to ask questions** and receive instructions to answer those questions? We may even be thinking things through and beginning to realise there are questions we need answered, but are even still working out the questions!

Christianity welcomes honest questions and people who want to know the answers. Here in this church will try and answer the questions in line with what the Bible, teaches - for we believe this is God's word through and through and is reliable for all matters of faith and life.

The wise men received instructions from God's word and it helped them. Are we prepared to receive instruction from **God's word** to help us with our questions about life, its meaning in relation to God and what life is all about?

Searching.

The wise men were searching for the King of the Jews; Herod realised this and told them to go and to continue to search **for the child**. This they did using the answers they had been given

and also guided by the star. They searched and they found the child. Their whole journey from their homeland was one of searching for this One and it didn't matter to them where it took them, for **their aim** was to find Him.

For us here, are we willing to **search** out, to see if this One central to the Christmas story, to Christianity is real and relevant to our lives in our modern days? The wise men felt it was worthwhile searching for Jesus. I would urge us to be wise like them and search out, not to give up searching out whether Jesus is real and how relevant He is for our lives in our uncertain and confusing days. **The Bible encourages** us to search for God and to do so in a wholehearted way and assures us we will find Him. These wise men searched for Jesus and did so with:

Expectation.

As they left their homes they took their royal and expensive gifts - they were expecting to find that King and expecting He was well worth going to find and then to give these gifts to Him. Indeed, when **they found Him**, we are told that the 1st thing they did was that they worshipped Him. Here was a little child, a toddler and yet these wise men bowed before Him, worshipped Him as God. Then they gave Him their royal and expensive gifts.

Do we expect to find that **Jesus is someone special** and we can know not only about Him, but come to know Him? There should be an air of expectancy about us. Many have said something like "*God if you are real, then reveal yourself to me, let me know you exist.*" Yet some have ignored the clear

evidence presented, others have seen the evidence and really realised God does exist. Expect God to answer your honest searching, your honest questions and your honest wondering.

If He is as the Bible says He is, then realise He does answer prayer, so we are to expect that, expect the Christ of Christmas to be the Christ of this Christmas, of the years ahead, for He is real and living and can be known as our God and Saviour.

This Christmas time let's **all imitate the wise men** and search to find Christ and when we do, let's then worship Him. There is a car sticker, a poster, some feel it's a bit trite, light, trivial on its own, but it says "*Wise men still seek Him.*" This Christmas may we all be wise people to seek and to find Him - for Christmas is all about Christ. I pray that we would all know the true meaning of Christmas by coming to know Jesus as our own Saviour, **the Saviour born there**. As we do so, may we would know **God's help, love and presence** on ourselves and our loved ones as we go on into a New Year.