Truly Wise Men…

Look at this nativity scene (picture). We've all seen this scene many times before. Most of us have been one of those characters! Some of us have it in action figures in our living room. But there's one set of characters in this scene that never quite seem to fit in! The cows look good, Mary looks great, to say she's just had a baby and the shepherds definitely look like they belong in a barn, but the wise men? Who are they? What are they doing there? And a camel, relaxing next to the donkey and the sheep? I don't think so! They just don't look right do they? In all their fancy clothes with their fancy gifts! Who are these guys? Well, funnily enough, we don't know that much about them because the bible doesn't say that much about them.

Most of the things we think about the wise men comes from tradition actually! I'm sorry if this may come as a shock, but they were really late! In fact, the reason they look a bit out of place at the stable, is because they are out of place! They didn't even make it to the Stable! Jesus was probably walking by the time this rabble arrived! And, get ready… there weren't only three of them! They brought gold, frankincense and myrrh – which is 3 gifts, but nowhere are we told there were only 3 of them – most scholars think at least 12! And here's the worst part…we don't even know if they came on camels – I know - shocking! In fact, Matthew doesn't mention their form of transport at all! Could've been camels, but who knows? Could've walked, could've cycled or could've gone for my favourite option - the hybrid!

But the Bible just doesn't say much about them. Except that they were wise. We do know they had wisdom. So that's what we are going to think about today – what it was that made them wise! So that we can follow their example. And so we're going to read Matthews account and then I have 4 points for you: 4 lessons to learn from these fascinating characters.

Matthew 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,[2] saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." [3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: [6] "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" [7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.[8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."[9] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.[10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. *(Pray)*

My first point this morning:

1) **Wise men seek the Truth**

Like I've said, the bible doesn't say much about these men. But it tells us that they were Truth-seekers. And wise people see the truth. You see, truly wise people aren't happy with guesses or speculation. They want to know the truth about God for themselves. It's not wise to just believe everything you hear or even everything you think. And these guys wont just believe what others tell them. Look at verse 2 again. The Wise Men asked, *"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"* They wanted to seek him. Deductions and guesses were not enough for these guys. They couldn't just stay settled in their comfy homes back in the East. They had to see Jesus for themselves. They weren't happy to

know about Jesus. They wanted to know him personally. They wanted to witness him - see him with their own eyes.

Now we don't know how long it took the wise men to get to where Jesus lived. But we know they had been planning it a long time – for years probably. They were so excited that this was going to happen in their lifetime that they knew it was too important to miss. They would seek him for themselves. And you know, God rewards truth seekers. Listen to his promise in Deuteronomy 4:29 *"if you seek the Lord your God, you will find him, if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul".* But notice that last part. Its not a casual seeking that God rewards. It's an intense, all consuming, pursuing of the truth that God rewards. I wonder how far you're willing to go to find God? We often say that we're seeking God, but we know deep down that we're not really. A prayer here or there isn't true seeking. We want God's blessings don't we? But how willing are we to pursue him with all our heart and mind and soul? How determined are you to know the Living God? I think the wise men challenge all of us this morning – whether we you are Christian or not, to be seekers. To ask questions, to study, to seek the truth with all we've got. These were astrologers. They were highly educated, highly intellectual and hard-working people. But more than that they had wisdom that went beyond their education or their experience. They were wise, first and foremost, because they were seeking the truth for themselves with all their heart and soul.

After al,l what can be more important than knowing the truth? And so perhaps you're wondering, ok Mark, I agree, I need to seek the truth. I need to really pursue it with all I've got. But where do I even start? Well again, the Wise men can help us out: my second point this morning, answers that question of where is truth even to be found?

2) Wise men read and believe God's Word.

We're so used to this nice nativity picture with all the wise men, that I bet most of us have barely stopped to ever think about where these wise men got their information – why were they so desperate to see Jesus anyway? There was no

Internet then: no CNN, no BBC news and yet they travelled hundreds of miles…but why? Because they were studying the Word of God – the Bible. They were studying the book of Daniel in particular. They were obviously familiar with the writings of the prophet Daniel, who had actually been at one point, the chief of the wise men in Babylon. And chapter 9 of Daniel gives a prophetic timeline for the birth of the Messiah. And so they've worked it out. They have got their information from Scripture. Not only Daniel, but also in the book of Numbers, in chapter 24, there's another prophecy that specifically mentions a "star coming out of Jacob." So these wise men were searching for truth in the right place – in the Word of God. And they were guided to look for the King of the Jews by a miraculous stellar event, the "Star of Bethlehem," which Matthew tells us in verse 2, they had called "His star".

So these men were basing everything on the Word of God. They truly believed in the prophecies of the Bible. They really expected God to fulfill his word. And notice that they didn't just read these prophecies, but more importantly, believed them. Because anyone can read the bible. You can buy a bible in just about any bookstore. Hotels put them in rooms, you can even get it on your phone! (the youth don't know that yet – don't tell them!) So reading it is not too difficult. I bet there isn't a person in here who has never read a word of the Bible! But, it's not just about reading it. It's about believing it. It's about submitting to it. It's about trusting every word of it. There's a massive difference. The wise men didn't only read about this prophesied event – they trusted that God was who said he was and would fulfill his promises.

Do you believe God's word? He said he would send a Saviour, because no matter how hard we try or how good we are we cannot save ourselves. We're all doomed to eternal punishment outside of Jesus Christ. But here's the greatest news that anyone could ever have: by believing in him, not just reading about him, but believing in him, we have eternal life: we get to live forever in heaven. They're not my words. They're the words of God found in the Bible in John 3:16. And just as God was faithful to fulfill his word about sending the star of Bethlehem, so he will be faithful to fulfill every other word that he has ever said.

And they are all found in the bible. You wont find truth anywhere else but in the star of Bethlehem: in Jesus. He is the truth. He said 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me'. The Truth is found in the Word of God and it's found in Jesus Christ. The wise men went there because they knew it was true.

And so wise men seek Jesus and wise men believe the bible. But wise men also

3) **Recognize the worth of Christ.** – that's my 3rd point this morning.

Look at verse 10 in our passage: 'When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy'. In other words they were thrilled! They could hardly contain themselves! They were in the right place at the right time! The prophecy was true. God had done what he said he would do. These men knew what they had found! They knew that Jesus was unique, completely exceptional. Perfect! And oh were they excited.

They knew that Jesus was not just any other human. He is God incarnate. He is the visible image of the invisible God. Charles Wesley put it this way, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity." We don't get to see God. But Jesus represented God to mankind. He was born as a baby in a stable in Bethlehem 2014 years ago, but he existed as God before that! He was there at the creation of the world. He has always been there and always will be there. He's glorious. He's perfectly unique. Look what the writer to the Hebrews says about Jesus (Heb 1:3-4): 'The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him (Jesus) is greater than every other name'.

And so, the Wise men say they have come to 'worship' him. And do you know what that word worship actually means? Literally it means to stoop and kiss. It was a word that spoke about the way you paid homage to a king or queen – to royalty. You stooped down and you kissed his foot. It's the ultimate sign of

respect - bowing on one knee. Nobody did that to me this morning. Clearly no one thinks that highly of me. I shook some hands and even did 3 kisses but on the cheek. No one stooped down and kissed my boots! And I'm glad of it! But think about it: here we have super highly educated, respectable, intellectual people and they are bending down kissing a little child's feet in a poor home in Galilee. Again, they teach us that true wisdom is to bow low before Jesus Christ. To recognize his value and his worth and worship him. These were wise men because they saw more than just a small poor child. They saw deity. They saw Him as the ruler of the world. They recognized his worth. No wonder it got Herod so agitated – he is the ruler after-all right? Surely he deserves the bowing low and the kissing? Or at least so he thinks.

My final point this morning as we seek to keep learning wisdom from these wise men is that…

4) Wise men humble themselves before Jesus.

Just consider the difference of these two people for a minute. On the one hand, you've got the wise men who are seeking the truth. They have studied the scriptures. They have made the massive journey to Israel to see him for themselves so that they can bow down and worship him and go away blessed and rejoicing that they have seen the Messiah. And then you've got King Herod. No doubt Herod also knew that there was something special about Jesus - his advisors had told him that this was no ordinary child, but that he had come to be a ruler and a deliverer. And yet I find it amazing how different his reaction is to the wise mens'. One worships, the other murders. He gets stressed. He fears for his throne. He's worried he'll be superseded. So what does he do? He schemes up an evil plan to kill Jesus, and every other child in the region. It's horrendous. So, instead of recognizing the worth of Jesus, instead of seeking the truth for himself, instead of humbling himself before God incarnate, he is more concerned about his own reputation and his own status. He wants people to worship him. He wants the glory so much that he is willing to kill to get it. What a fool!

But, while we may not be quite so evil, don't you think we all have some herodian tendencies? I mean after all, he just enjoyed the attention. He loved his position. He just wanted the praise of others. And then Jesus comes along and suddenly all this is threatened. He knows that this little child could interfere with his life: could steal his thunder! Don't you ever feel like that? That Jesus might interfere with your life if you let him in? That he may intrude in your business? Let's face it, he doesn't just slot in the background does he? He's not a co-pilot and he's not a backseat driver (thank goodness!) He's a driver. As soon as you become a Christian, He becomes not just your Saviour, but also your Lord and you bow to him. Your life is no longer your own. You don't get to do what you want or go where you want, Jesus has a say!

Perhaps some of you see Jesus as interference in your life. But as long as you resist him, you won't experience true joy. Until you bow to Jesus as Lord, until you humble yourself at his feet and say: 'my life is not my own, it's yours Jesus. Take me where you want me, do with me what you want', you will not experience peace and joy as a Christian. You wont be living the life that God intended you to live. All of our restlessness and stress and striving comes because we refuse to humble ourselves to Jesus. But Jesus encourages you to let go. He wants you to come and worship him: to kiss his feet. Don't be like Herod, resisting Jesus, be like the wise men and humble yourself before King Jesus. Let him take control.

Conclusion

You know, the dictionary defines wisdom as the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment. We all want to wise men and women. We don't want to be foolish do we? But we can't just assume that the older we get the wiser we'll become! And education is great and can increase knowledge and wisdom, but I think we all know that the cleverest, most intellectual people on planet earth are not necessarily the wisest! So if wisdom is not just getting more knowledge, and its not just have more experiences, and its not just getting more grey hairs then what is it? Where do we get our definition of wisdom? From the Bible. And in particular, in the book of Proverbs. And it says in Proverbs 9:10 that

'The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom'. In other words, worshipping and reverencing God and the One he sent, Jesus Christ, is true wisdom: it's fundamental to having wisdom. You see, Jesus is wisdom itself. Seeking truth is seeking him. 1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Jesus Christ "became to us wisdom from God". And so these were truly wise men, because they started with Jesus. They sought him, they believed the Word of God, they recognized his worth and they humbled themselves before him to worship him. What an example they set for us. Let us do the same and become truly wise people.