

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem **2** and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. **5** "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Wise Guys or Wise Men?

Whenever I hear of the three wise men, I flashback to reruns of the three stooges. The original wise guys, Larry, Curly, and Moe. Famous for their slapstick comedy - something I wish would regain popularity. They made the worst possible choices for comedic value and didn't die. In spite of a series of foolish decisions and unfortunate events - they were rewarded, they achieved their purpose. Life worked out.

I don't want to call the Magi foolish or stooges. They certainly had to be wise in order to travel to Jerusalem with gifts fit for a king. They were able to make good decision based on the circumstances they were under. That's wisdom. A wise person is able to process mass amounts of information, sift through it, and come up with a proper response that fits the context. But then, they arrive in Jerusalem and everyone starts

acting like a stooge. After a series of unfortunate events, with the worst choices made - they achieved their purpose and found the king. Life worked out.

Does that feel like your life? One series of unfortunate events that somehow work out. Sometimes even in spite of our stooge like behavior life works out and yet at other times life feel like a divine comedy and there is no point or purpose in trying because it feels like God is laughing. He's not. He's leading us back to himself like he led the Magi to his son. Our lesson shows the grace and mercy of God in making himself known so that we may see with eyes of faith the wisdom that God has given.

Our order of readings is a bit out of order. Last week we observed the Slaughter of the Innocents, but before that happened the Magi visit Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. These Magi arrive in Jerusalem following a star during *the days of Herod (Matthew wants us to know that he is King) the King*. The Magi arrive and ask the King, "Where is your King?" They didn't ask, "Has a child been born to you?" They were certain of that so they ask the King of the Jews, "Where is the King of the Jews?" This question troubles all of Jerusalem. Herod displays his wisdom by refraining from a response of, "Wise guys, eh?" and a double eye poke.

If the Magi were so wise why would they ignore the information around them and ask such a question? We should probably sift through some of the information surrounding the Magi. Because the Magi - weren't known as Kings until the 6th century. They weren't known as wise until the 8th century. It wasn't until 1863 that they became, "We Three Kings of Orient Are" which is a great hymn but it takes a lot of artistic license (kind of like our Magi at the manger scene.)

We don't know much about the Magi yet we know they were not kings but servants to kings. We don't know how many of them there were or even if they were men. We know there are other Magi in the bible and in these instances Magi is translated as sorcerers or astrologers who looked to the stars for guidance. These are pagan, tarot card reading, consulting the dead diviners. And yet the 17th century pietistic movement tried to clean up this scene as if we need to protect baby Jesus from the filth of this world.

But Matthew wants us to be surprised. He writes, "*Behold Magi came!*" Any Jew would have questioned, "Magi?!" Not Hebrews, not pious Jews from among God's chosen people, but unclean Gentiles, pagan rivals of Rome. They don't know him. They don't have the temple, the law, the prophets. God hasn't delivered them. **No one would expect Magi to come in search of the Christ child.** So what are they doing here?

I don't know that the magi fully understood what kind of King Jesus is. The word for worship is a generic term used also for honor. Through a series of unfortunate events and bad decisions the Magi are brought before Herod, they take advice from a bunch of scholars who don't seem to care about their religion or their king, and then partner with a murderous king who fools them into thinking he really wants to worship this child - and the Magi have every intention of returning to Herod until an angel appears to them in a dream and warns them not to return back to Herod.

Were they really wise? Maybe a better and more loaded question is, "are we really wise?" That may be a foolish question for me to ask? That question may set you on edge like all of Jerusalem. So why would I ignore the information around me and ask such a question? Many have used this lesson as a command to be more like these wise men. We should seek Jesus. And we should but... we confess, *"I cannot by my own reason or strength come to him."* Paul writes in Romans, *"There is no one righteous, no one who understands, **no one who seeks him**, no one who does good, not even one"* (Romans 3:10-11) Isaiah agrees, *"Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people."* The bible says there is no one wise and no one is able to seek God. We are all wandering around lost in darkness.

We often fail to understand the importance of this child and in so doing we behave more like Herod or the religious leaders who snuff the excitement of those new to Christianity. Like Herod and the religious leaders may have grown indifferent to the good news that a Savior has been born for us and we may even take for granted our salvation assuming I'm wise others need to be more like me. Then sadly we may even make series of foolish decisions that lead us away from our Savior.

The point of Matthew's history isn't, "Be like the Magi! Or don't be like Herod, or the religious leaders." Rather Matthew is amazed that those closest to God miss out on him, while those the furthest from God find him. The wise guys find God - not by their diligent search or effort but by God's grace in revealing himself to fools.

The only wise decision made was travelling to Jerusalem - the most logical place for a king. It's not that they are wise men whose learning has led them to Christ but that they are ignorant people to whom God reveals the Christ in this child. There was nothing special about Jesus, no beauty or majesty to attract us to him (Isaiah 53:2), no halo hanging around his head. Nothing that would state, "This is my son." **But there was a star that guided them to Joseph's house - to this child.** That star was needed because

no one was wise. Not the religious leaders, not Joseph, not even the Magi. **The star of this history is the star and that's because of the one guiding the star: God.** God used even a star to lead the Magi to his Son and eventually to his word.

The only wise one is this little child declared by pagans to be King of the Jews. The only wise one is the God who carefully controlled the events of history and used even the pagan practices of the Magi to reveal to them their King. The Magi rejoiced - *exceedingly with great joy* (the opposite of trouble) because they finally understand. This is the king, not them. The next time Herod is referred to in vs 7,12 - he's no longer Herod the King. He's just Herod because a child has dethroned him.

Just as the Magi, you too have come to the most logical place to meet God. Here among his body he reveals himself in his Word and Sacrament. It's not because of our learning or wisdom that we are wise but God reveals our king. He reveals what our king has done.

The next time that Jesus is given the title, "King of the Jews," he is being mocked by soldiers and condemned by the religious leaders. Even though he doesn't look like a king, Jesus takes up his reign and rules over his kingdom forgiving our every foolish decision and stooge like moment. Instead of a star we follow the witness of those who saw him rise not from the east but from the dead. And life works out.

See Jesus with the wisdom of faith. He is our Savior, the redeemer of all people. He has redeemed all people. He rose from the dead. It doesn't matter how far from him you've been. That's why it's called grace. Jesus came for those you wouldn't expect. Jesus says, *"It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick."*

Just as God used a star he can use life events to lead us to his Word where he *makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 3:15). God redeems us. If he can make use of the Magi - then he can make use of us by sending us out to find fools who are just like us. **So don't be the Magi - be like the star.** Then those who are wise will *shine like the stars of the sky leading many to righteousness.* (Daniel 12:3). Rejoice exceedingly with great joy leading people to Jesus. Bringing together the rich and the poor, the pagan and the pious, even kings and religious leaders, at the foot of the cross.

You don't have to be a stooge. In fact you are wise not because of your intellect, learning, or effort but because God has made you wise for salvation through faith, through his Word. Maybe life is a divine comedy following a series of unfortunate events

and horrible decisions but we already know how life works out. **God makes himself known even to Magi - so that no one may doubt that salvation through faith can be given to wise men and wise guys alike.**