



Date: 12.22.2019

Series: Advent – Awakening Wonder

Text: Matthew 2.1-15

Title: What will you do when you find God?

MPT: Jesus is the True King who alone is worthy of our praise and our treasure.

MPS: All searches for God end in King Jesus, who alone is worthy of our praise & treasure.

Good morning. I've got some really exciting news I get to share with you this morning. For about two years Mercy Church has been searching for the right person to direct our student ministry. We have been very selective. It's the longest search I've ever been a part of but there's a reason for that. I am convinced...VERY convinced...that middle and high school are the most vital years for someone to establish their relationship with God and to learn what the disciplines of the faith that will carry them for the rest of their life. Study after study reveals this is the most likely season of life for a person to believe the Christian message. Over 2/3 of all Christians make the decision to follow Christ before the age of 18. That doesn't mean it doesn't happen later. Our church is an awesome example of that. But it does mean that this time in someone's life is crucial.

So Mercy has been searching for the right person to direct the great ministry many of you have already undertaken. We have members who are volunteering with our Sunday morning

student bible studies and several mercy members and attenders who are full time high school ministers through local area ministries like Young Life. A BIG THANK YOU TO YOU! What I see in Mercy Church is a church who believes in the value of student ministry as well!

So what we needed was a director who can help catalyze our church to be a church that reaches students and their families. We want to partner with families to help them raise their students in the faith and we need someone paying attention to that.

All that to say, we have completed our search and just recently hired Mercy's first director of student ministry. So will you join me in welcoming to the stage Allan Waruhiu and his family? This is Allan, M'Lynn and their three children Aniaya, Zeke, and Ezra.

Allan is Kenyan. M'Lynn is from, yes hear pastor Rashard shouting amen...she is from west texas. They have a wonderful story of how they met in Kenya when M'Lynn was serving as a missionary there. They've been just outside of Dallas Texas the past few years where Allan was serving as a student pastor there. He is coming here as a "director" of student ministry and will be stepping into our elder confirmation process at the start of the year so you'll have the chance to be a part of that process down the road. But please introduce yourself. His email is on our website. So many of ya'll know what its like to be new in town so let's help them feel welcome!

I'm going to pray over them now and ask the Lord's blessing on the ministry they are stepping into. May God give us a harvest of middle and high school families in 2020 and the years to come.

PRAY & then send them off.

OK if you have your bible get it out and turn to Matthew 2. This month of what we call Advent is very special for Christians. We reserve this month every year to slow down and consider the birth of Jesus and its implications for us. Today we are looking at one of the most enduring, yet peculiar symbols of Christmas. Today we are looking at the wise men.

If you grew up in a church setting like I did, the wise men were a part of any nativity scene either toy or live. And you can't have the wise men without what? THEIR CAMELS! That's right. Go to any live nativity right now and if it's a Major League nativity...oh they got a camel. These guys are a regular feature of Christmas but probably the ones we least understand. They only appear in Matthew's gospel and my question is...WHY? I mean the gospel writers had a lot of content to pull from. Lots of accounts...Matthew could have included maybe something about Jesus' grandparents and how they try to tell Mary & Joseph how to raise their kid like THEY know better than them. But no, we get these travelers from the east.

Well, for One thing, Matthew is telling us this because it happened. And they are writing accounts of things that happened. And for another, there is something **uniquely revealing** in this story about who Jesus is, what he came to do,

and what his message and ministry are all about. Nothing in the bible is filler. Nothing. So if its in here, it matters. Not just then, but now. To us. In fact, this short account reveals a few very different responses to Jesus.

That's the point of the gospels. To announce what Jesus did and then call you to respond. That's what today is going to be about. We'll walk through the passage you just heard read and we'll see responses to Jesus and the main point is basically this: **In your search for God, what will you do when you find him?** We will see a few different reactions to finding God today. Here we go

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."

Couple of things about the wise men you may not know.

- First, there is no count of 3 here. Don't go home and trash your nativity sets or anything. There were probably 12-15 wise men and then their staff which all total was probably a 60+ person caravan.
- Second, Who were they? "Wise men" from the east – they were most likely from Babylon. And they were sorcerers. trained in astronomy and prominent in their country because of their ability to interpret meaning from the stars. Important? Yes. Kings? No.
- Cool connection to the whole bible – There is a book in the Old Testament called Daniel. It's about a guy named Daniel. Who was Jewish but got carried off into exile to Babylon when Babylon conquered the Jews.

Well, God gave Daniel special wisdom and ability and Daniel eventually rose to a place of great power and stayed there through the reign of at least 3 kings maybe more. Really through their entire exile. He had authority over all the Magi. Here's what's cool. He taught them the Promises God made to the Jews. He Taught them Numbers 24.17 - Numbers 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel." Hundreds of years later, these Magi knew 2 things: The future KING was marked by a star & he would rule Israel.

- And I show you that as one example of the reality that the whole bible really is telling you one big story and its about the coming of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas.

3 When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Of course he was disturbed. When you come to a palace and ask where THE king is, it's going to alarm the one currently sitting on the throne. Herod is Herod the Great. But his greatness isn't a "Good" great, it's a bad great. He's a tyrant who was put in charge by the Romans to preside over the jews in this area. BUT, and herod knows this...he isn't the rightful king here in this land. He's usurped the throne. And because he's trying to hang onto power that isn't rightfully his, he always feels threatened. And his threat meter hit a 10 when these guys start asking around town about where the real king is.

4 So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born. 5 "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet:

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

Herod isn't a dumb tyrant. Not being Jewish he doesn't know the jewish prophecies so he asks the Jewish leaders where this Christ...this anointed one...is supposed to be born. And they pull from the old testament prophet Micah to show exactly where he's supposed to come from. Because again its all telling one story. This is one of hundreds of prophecies about the messiah in the OT and do you know Jesus fulfilled every one of them? The chances are infinitesimally small that he could do that.

- Think of it this way. There are over 300 prophecies about the messiah. let's just take the most obvious easy to understand out of those- 17. The odds of one person fulfilling 17 prophecies: **1 in 480,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000** with 31 zeroes.
- That's like dividing the surface of planet earth up into square inches and painting one of them red. And saying pick a square inch and you pick the one I painted.

- Some of you math geeks...just the math alone should be staggering enough to make you investigate Jesus. Anyways...

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."

Now I can ask you what I ask my kids when we read this account at the dinner table. Do you think Herod actually wanted to go "worship" Jesus? And they will say "NO!" What do you think he wanted to do? Kill him! That's right.

9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was — the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy.

- Here's what I love about this. These guys were astronomers. And so God uses the stars to point them to Jesus. We see God meeting them where they are. Using the heavenly bodies to direct these who are seeking him. This isn't God condoning astronomy, but instead showing us that God loves to meet those who genuinely seek him. And that's how he is... with you!
 - What you begin to realize is that in your search for God, he finds you before you ever find him.
 - Had a college student a couple of years ago tell me she was talking with a friend who said "You know, I think I want to know God, but I don't

know how." So, the college student said well come with me to church and we'll see what's there. And at church that week we were beginning a series called "knowing God." The two girls look at each other like...Ummm, I think God might be trying to say something.

- God loves to meet those who are genuinely seeking him right where they are. In fact, he will even use less than good motives to bring people to himself.
- I know a guy who went to church because that was a great place to meet women...and he found Christ. Bad motivation, but God was gracious. I know people who went because it was the way to network with other influencers in the city. Bad motivation...but they found Christ. God was gracious to these wise men and he will be gracious to you. This is why we keep talking about inviting to Christmas eve. Because that person you know or that group of friends who are far from God but close to you – may be just one invite away from finding Christ.

11 Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- This is really the verse I want you to latch onto. It announces two very powerful things about Jesus.
- **His kingdom is not of this world.** This scene is so descriptive of the upside down nature of the kingdom

of God. The young child receives the worship of the powerful. The wealthy bow to the impoverished.

- In ancient times, when the oldest son always got all the wealth and the second or younger sons had no social status, how does God work? Through Abel, not Cain. Through Isaac, not Ishmael, through Jacob, not Esau. Through Ephraim, not Manasseh. Through David, not his older brothers. At a time when women were valued for their beauty and fertility, God chooses older Sarah, not young Hagar. He chooses Leah, not Rachel – unattractive Leah, whom Jacob doesn't love. He chooses Rebekah who can't have children; Hannah, who can't have children; Samson's mother who can't have children; Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, who can't have children. Why? Over and over and over again God says "I will choose Nazareth, not Jerusalem. I will choose the girl nobody wants. I will choose the boy everybody has forgotten."
- Why? Is it just that God likes underdogs? No. He is telling us something about salvation itself. Every other religion and moral philosophy tells you to summon up all of your strength and live as you ought. That's why they appeal to the strong, to the people who can pull it all together....Only Jesus says "I have come for the weak. I have come for those who admit they are weak. I will save them not by what they do but through what I do."
- Do you feel unwanted? Do you feel like the outsider here at church? Do you feel alone or on the fringes?

Do you feel shame or guilt like you are damaged goods? Do you feel like nobody sees you? Hear the anthem of scripture. **GOD SEES YOU, GOD WANTS YOU, AND GOD LOVES YOU! And all that which you may consider a weakness, is what he will use to allow you to boast all the more in his strength.**

At the climax of his life he ascended not a throne but a cross. His weakness really was our strength.¹ His kingdom is not of this world. And if you try and make sense of it through the power structures of this world, you will never understand it. Don't go clean yourself up to get right with God...don't try to impress God. Come to him dirty and broken and alone just as you are and receive the love of Christ. Our God isn't looking for resumes, he's looking only for repentance. Come to him. His kingdom is not of this world.

- **He is worthy of our greatest treasure.** The wise men give Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. And usually we go right to that part and there is plenty of speculation as to why these three things in particular and we could deep dive that another time.
- I want us for a minute to consider WHY they gave their treasure to him. I think this is big because listen there is no question God calls us to give of our treasure, specifically I'm talking about our finances, to the local church. I don't preach on this much and that's honestly something I need to do a better job in because Jesus talked about it a good bit. But what I see right here is

¹ Keller, Timothy. Hidden Christmas. (NY, NY Penguin 2016) 76-77.

THE motivation that should come behind all our giving to the local church.

- The wise men gave their treasure to Jesus for one simple reason...they believed he was worthy of their treasure. And my question is: DO YOU BELIEVE HE IS WORTHY OF YOUR TREASURE? Here's why he's worthy: Because he is SOVEREIGN and Because he is GOOD.
- The Wise Men recognize his sovereignty. He's the one who rules over heaven & earth. He owns it all. So we give him our treasure in HONOR of who he is. His sovereignty makes him worthy. But he's also good.
- The apostle Paul once asked the church in Corinth to give to ministry needs of another local church. And he said listen there is a need, but do not give out of compulsion. In other words, guilt or fear cannot motivate you. Give as you decide in your heart. Because God loves a cheerful giver.
- In other words, The gospel is a message that GOD GAVE. God finally GAVE us a way to be reconciled to him. And Paul says give in response to the gospel! So what happens that is so beautiful is that when we fix our eyes on Jesus, he will do this wonderful work of loosening our grip on our treasure as we tighten our grip on him. As Christ becomes our treasure, he satisfies our souls need for peace, contentment, and security in a way that earthly treasure never could.
- This even changes the answer to the question "how much should I give?" That question is a usually the wrong question. In light of the Great act of generosity of God toward us and in light of the Surpassing worth

of Christ the question is not how much should I give but how much can I give?

- The Christmas Missions offering is a great case study...100% of what we give is going to empower us to take the gospel farther here in Charlotte and around the world. Today we are taking that offering up and yes I believe you should give to it otherwise I'd never ask. BUT, not under compulsion. You gotta give cheerfully. You gotta give out of delight that God has given his greatest gift to you and now he invites you into giving that great hope to others. And you then give JOYFULLY.
- If you aren't ready to give to a local church, fine. Just Give somewhere to the advancement of the gospel And see what God does in your own heart as your grip is loosened on your stuff and tightened on him. Giving is an access point into the joy of Christ. And church the message we are trying to put forward at Mercy is that Christ is worthy of our treasure because he is Sovereign and He is Good.

12 And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route. 13 After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him." 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. 15 He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by

the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son.

This story is so powerful because of the contrasting reactions to Jesus from Herod and then from the Wise Men. I think they are powerful examples of contrasting reactions people have today when they discover Jesus. I told you the question today is when you find God, what will you do? How will you respond? And there not two but 3 responses to Jesus in this story that I think are helpful for us. Three responses people have to Jesus at Christmas.

1. **Apathy – He’s not the savior we expected.** You look back at verse 3 and you see Herod was troubled by the announcement and so was ALL of Jerusalem. Everyone is troubled by the questions and yet...no one knows the answer. That’s why herod has to assemble the priests. And, NO ONE else went to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. And the reason is: Almost nobody really cared! Why?

- The Jews were waiting on a Messiah who would come to deliver them politically and militarily from their oppressors. The idea of worshipping a baby in a manger simply didn’t fit their understanding of a messiah.
- And that is still true today. A lot of people struggle to understand how a baby in a manger helps their real life. Christmas is more practically about gifts and family time. If Jesus could pay my bills, or fix my dysfunctional family then maybe I’d lean in. But as quaint as the story is I just don’t see how the baby in the manger helps me.

- And what we’ve been saying all month is that Christmas is here to awaken the wonder of all that Christ is to you. It is He who alone can prepare you for death! Restore God to you! He can do those things you feel you need But He says there’s something more important than stopping world hunger, or fixing your family. That is coming to know Him in faith. Let me show you this **vs. 13**: He would leave to go to Egypt just like Moses, and like that deliverance from slavery, he would deliver us from slavery to sin and death. There is a slavery all of us are captive to and from which he alone can deliver you! **2. (v. 6)** He is the ruler and the shepherd. The ruler of the universe, and the only way to be saved. And he is the only one who can shepherd your life in a way where you can finally find satisfaction. The search for meaning and purpose and security...it all finds its end in Christ.

This is why apathy is the one response you cannot have. You can reject him or you can accept him. But he leaves no room for you to ignore him because eternity hinges on what you think about him.

2nd Response - **Hostile Rejection: Threatened by another king**
Herod understood that he did not have the right to the throne, (definitely not in the Kingly line; and he was definitely was not a practicing Jew). Any time someone has usurped authority, the most terrifying thing is for the one who has rightful authority to come back. This is what Herod is experiencing.

If you are a student of world history, you know that when 2 parties are fighting one another, peace is achieved in one of three ways: Surrender, Compromise, Death. Surrender: one person acknowledges the other as the rightful ruler. In compromise, both parts surrender, and learn to peacefully co-exist. If neither side will back down, then one of the two must be eliminated. There is no other option. Christ does not surrender or compromise. He is the rightful heir. So, Herod tried to kill him..

Romans 8.7-8 says every human heart is hostile towards God. The human heart wants to be king and someone else, Jesus, is saying that he is instead. Inside every heart is a little king herod that wants to rule and is hostile towards anything that threatens it's sovereignty.

"Where is the true king" is the most disturbing question possible to the human heart.² And we put up all kinds of defenses against it. To keep ourselves on the throne.

- Some of us use religion to bring God into our lives & placate him so that we can still have the throne. We live moral lives in hopes this will satisfy God and maybe even put him in our debt. To ensure he will give us good lives. He gets a corner of OUR kingdom.
- Others run from him entirely and live with no concern for God.
- BOTH are attempts at keeping God off the throne.

Even Christians struggle with this. We say Jesus is on the throne but the reality is...it's still hard to pray. Why? Because

even after our surrender there is this residual hostility toward God. a tugging toward the throne. We must surrender.

3. Joyful Acceptance – Seek God humbly, and see Jesus for who he really is

The wise men weren't the most biblically knowledgeable people in this story. That was the religious elite. There weren't the wealthiest or most powerful. That was herod. They knew that there was a divine king worthy of worship and they were sincere in their quest to find him.

If that's you today, like the wise men recognize the Gift Christ is to you. They didn't worship him as the boy who would become king. They said where is he who has been born King? How did they find Jesus? God used a star. God used angels to bring the shepherds to him.

YOU HAVE SO MUCH MORE Than they did! You have his word! Matthew laments time and again at how the Jews missed the messiah when others like the wise men, who had far less, saw him. Don't miss Christ today. His Holy Spirit is working and maybe today he is knocking. Drawing you to faith. Don't resist him. Instead join the wise men and experience the JOY of finding Jesus. Verse 10 they were filled with great joy at finding the king! Fall down and worship with the wise men in verse 11. This is how you know your searching is genuine. Some people search for God like a thief searches for a policeman. Looking for him so they will know when to run and hide. Cause they don't want to give up something they know doesn't belong to them anyway. Recognize that an honest

² Keller. Hidden Christmas. 71.

search for God means that when you find him...you must worship him!

That's why these men of prominence are bowing to a 2yr old. They've found God and so have you. Worship him today. I want to close offering you a comfort and a challenge:

Comfort – NOBODY is too far gone. Whatever your background is, what your past mistakes are, your deep dark secrets. I don't care if you've been on the paid staff of hell itself. If you repent and come to God through faith in Christ and what he's done for you, not only will he forgive you, but he delights to work through people like you.

Challenge – give him everything.