

## The Visit of the Wise Men: The Light of the Gentiles

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12,

Matthew 2:1-12

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January 5, 2003

One of my most memorable Christmas presents was a telescope I got in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It wasn't fancy or expensive. My parents got it at Sears and Roebuck for \$29.95 and I had to put it together myself. When I took it outside the slightest breeze would cause the telescope to tremble, and I had to constantly adjust it for the earth's rotation. Despite its cheapness, that telescope took me to *distant worlds*. I became a *time traveler*, exploring the ancient past, observing light that set out from stars light-years before. I'd seen pictures of planets but, with my telescope, I saw them directly; Mars, the rings of Saturn, Jupiter and several of its moons. I felt like Columbus must have when he first set his eyes on the New World. I *saw* new worlds. I was overwhelmed with joy, like the Wise Men when they saw the star had stopped over the place where Jesus lay. When I studied the heavens I saw pretty much what the Wise Men saw and wished I could ask them, "What did you see that pointed you to Jesus. A comet? A rare conjunction of planets? Or was it a supernatural light? Why did you follow the light so far and for so long? Did you ever wonder if you'd find what you were looking for?" So many questions I wish I could ask them.

From time immemorial wise men and women have studied the stars. Stonehenge on Salisbury plain in England, the great pyramids of Egypt, Mayan temples in Central America – all were built to study the heavens. The heavens were mapped, constellations charted, and the signs of the zodiac named long before the birth of Jesus. Some ancients thought stars and planets were *living beings* and named them after pagan gods: Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter. Others *realized* stars were immense orbs many times bigger than the earth but so distant that their light could hardly be seen. The movement of the constellations, planets, and stars not only told the ancients when to plant and harvest, they also foretold significant events. The appearance of a comet might augur the birth of an emperor. Conjunctions of planets might predict great victories or terrible defeats. So it was important to study the stars in order to discern coming events.

The Wise Men studied the heavens seeking "the great desire of nations". For Matthew they represent the very best of the pagan world. They represent men and women searching for God; searching for something

or someone worthy of their adoration. They represent people *today* searching for God without yet having found. Perhaps you know people like that – people who tell you quite frankly, “I’m not a Christian. I can’t believe what Christians believe.” “I’m searching,” they say. Remember the old Moody Blues song,

*I'm looking for someone to change my life,  
I'm looking for a miracle in my life.*

I love these searching people – good people. They’re some of the greatest people in the world to me; some of the most sensitive and caring. The Wise Men represent them. They represent a universal longing of people to seek answers to big questions and embark on a journey of faith that may take them to faraway places with strange sounding names.

I’m glad the story of the Wise Men is in the Bible because it shows that people who don’t have the Bible or the church can be led to Jesus if they follow the light they have. Have you ever wondered about people who’ve never heard of Jesus? Does God love them too? Did Christ also die for them? I’m convinced that God does and Christ has. I ask these questions because I was raised to *believe everybody who never heard of Jesus or didn't have a Bible is destined for a godless eternity*. That bothered me, really bothered me, and made me wonder if the Gospel really is “good news”. But the Bible saved me. I began to read the Bible with more discerning eyes. I began to find other Biblical stories, like the journey of the Wise Men, that show how the God revealed in Jesus Christ offers salvation to all human beings. The story of the Wise Men shows us that God is gracious and merciful and that Jesus Christ is the savior of the entire world.

The story of the Wise Men, and other Biblical stories like it, have led me to believe that Jesus is the answer to questions that have been asked *everywhere* and *in all times* by *all people*. The really big questions are “Who am we? Where did we come from and where are we going? What’s the meaning life?” Is life simply “a tale that is told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing?” Where do we find answers to those questions? The story of the Wise Men leads me to believe that anyone who looks for answers to life’s deepest questions will find their questions answered *in some way* by the revelation that has come into the world with Christ. “Jesus” is the “joy of man’s desiring” the “dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.” He

is the light that shines in darkness. Thank you, Lord, for the hope this story gives of the day “nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

The story of the Wise Men proclaims the good news that there are *no places* so dark that the light of Christ *has not* or *cannot* shine; no realms so distant that the revelation of God in Christ cannot reach; no times - whether in the distant past or the unknown future - where the light of Christ is not present. *Whoever* you are, *wherever* you live – follow the light you have and it will eventually lead you to Christ.

In Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan dreams he sees a man clothed with rags with a great burden on his back. He's greatly distressed and bursts out crying, “What shall I do to be saved?” The man looks this way and that, yet he stands still because he doesn't know which way to go. Then Bunyan sees another man in his dream, a man named *Evangelist* coming to the distraught man and asking, “Why are you crying?” The man answers, “I feel that I'm condemned and don't know which way to turn.” Then Evangelist points with his finger to a light dimly shining in the far distance. Evangelist asks the lost man, “Do you see yonder shining light?” He answers, “I'm not sure, I think I do.” Then Evangelist says, “Keep that light in your eye. Follow that light. Follow it wherever it takes you.” That lost man represents all men and women searching for God, searching for answers to life's most profound questions. That lost person may represent you. That lost person and the Wise Men represent a universal longing of people to seek answers to the big questions and to embark on a journey of faith that may take them to faraway places with strange sounding names. Do you see that light? You may say, “I'm not sure, but I think I do.” Will you follow that light? Will you follow it wherever it leads? I'm confident that it will lead you and me to “our hearts' true home when all our years have sped.”

Let us pray:     Holy Jesus, every day  
                  Keep us in the narrow way;  
                  And when earthly things are past,  
                  Bring our ransomed souls at last  
                  Where they need no star to guide,  
                  Where no clouds Thy glory hide.  
                  Amen