



Scripture Story: Matthew 2.

Commentary: *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 6.

following yonder star



Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

“The wise men had seen a mysterious light in the heavens upon that night when the glory of God flooded the hills of Bethlehem. As the light faded, a luminous star appeared, and lingered in the sky. It was not a fixed star nor a planet, and the phenomenon excited the keenest interest. That star was a distant company of shining angels, but of this the wise men were ignorant” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 60).

keytext

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

(Matthew 2:2, NIV)

what do you think?

Imagine the wise men arriving in your town at Christmas

in today's world as if transported through time. These learned men have studied the night sky and the prophetic writings of old. They arrive expecting to find Jesus easily. To their amazement they find none who know about His birth.

As news crews converge, the visitors look about and see colored lights, repeated images of a large bearded man wearing red, people scurrying from store to store, and numerous signs declaring Happy Holidays. Although they deeply believe that a holy day has indeed arrived, they see no sign of Him. "Who are you? Why are you here?" asks an excited reporter. "We are Magi. We have come in search of Jesus, to worship Him," replies one of the regally robed travelers. "Do you know where we may find Him?"

How would you respond?

did you know?

The precise number of wise men is unknown. Three is presumed because they presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Those items were the most valuable of that day, all gifts literally fit for a king yet also holding symbolic value. Gold, an always highly valuable commodity throughout history, was an appropriate gift for a king. Frankincense was used in making incense, a gift appropriate for a priest. Myrrh was an embalming agent, used by the Egyptians with their mummies. These gifts symbolize Jesus was King, Priest, and Savior who would die to save us from the consequence of sin.

INTO THE STORY

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. . . .

"He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.' After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. . . .

"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 and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. . . .

"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'

"After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.' So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

(Matthew 2:1-3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16-23, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Why was Herod disturbed at news of the birth of Jesus?

Why do you think the wise men were led first to Jerusalem before being led to Bethlehem?

Herod attempted to deliberately deceive the wise men by stating he wished to worship the Child himself. Instead, warned by God in a dream, they headed home after finding Jesus. Herod felt they had outwitted him. Do you think they did? Explain.

Have you ever had a dream you thought was a divine communication to you? If so, explain.

punch lines

“But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:9, NIV).

“His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you’” (Luke 2:48, NIV).

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:8-10, NIV).

“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6, NIV).

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4, NIV).

other eyes

“Wise men still seek Him.”
—Author unknown.

**“O star of wonder, star of night,
/Star with royal beauty bright,
/Westward leading, still proceeding,
/Guide us to thy perfect light.”**—John H.

Hopkins, 19th-century Episcopal priest and hymn writer.

“As in Paradise, God walks in Scripture, seeking man.”—St. Ambrose, 4th-century Bishop of Milan.

Sabbath

Matthew 2:3 notes that Herod and all of Jerusalem became alarmed at the words of the Magi. Had they truly accepted the fact that Jesus had come as prophesied, that would mean their lives would be affected, their plans impacted. So, too, our lives and plans are affected by His coming, then and soon-to-come. The fictional modern-day reporter, and the stunned millions who saw the report, would doubtless be just as vexed as were the Jewish priests at His first coming who simply could not conceive that the time had come for deliverance. Do you see the Child Savior at Christmas and each day of your life? Do you share the viewpoint of many that Christ is increasingly being removed from Christmas and from the national culture in general? Explain your answer.

Sunday

As you read the account of the birth of Jesus, much happens in a very short time that directly and strikingly fulfills prophecies that had been given long before.

First advent prophecies fulfilled:

- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
- Slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem (Jeremiah 31:15).
- Coming from Egypt (Hosea 11:1).
- Messiah to come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).

We're counseled by Ellen White that "the end will come more quickly than men expect" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 631). With spiritual eyesight, and an eye toward those who failed to realize His first advent, we'll see the signs of His coming. We'll be the wise men and wise women seeking His second advent. Will you be among the wise? How have you sought Him today?

Monday

The wise men were looking for Jesus, led by their study, the Holy Spirit, and an angelic beacon specially provided to show them the way. Convinced they were on the right path, they incredulously realized they were virtually alone in their awareness that the fullness of time had come. What lessons can be learned today from that scenario?

The wise men looked to the east and saw the sign of His coming. So, too, will those alive in the last days look to the east and see the sign of His second coming. Ellen White states in *The Great Controversy*, pages 640, 641: "Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Savior and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. . . ."

Tuesday

The *Flashlight* quote in which Ellen White reveals that the Christmas star was actually a band of angels presents a wonderful opportunity for Seventh-day Adventists. However, there are stories each Christmas that suggest the star was a comet, an alignment of certain planets, or a supernova. This opens up a natural opportunity to talk about the role of a modern-day prophet. Many people seem especially attuned to spiritual discussion at Christmas and can readily see the plausibility of angels being involved, given their involvement with the shepherds when they proclaimed His birth. Have you ever interjected the knowledge you have into such conversation? How do you seek Jesus today? Do you find Him in the words of the Bible? the embrace of a loved one? the smile of a parent? the expectant eyes of a child? the beauty of a glorious sunset?

Wednesday

Our *Other Eyes* section reminds us that we not only seek God, but He also seeks us. Is there a connection between the idea of people searching for Jesus and the knowledge that He is even more interested in seeking us? One day we will seek Him no more for we shall behold Him face-to-face.

Thursday

Do you actively seek Jesus yourself? Where do you look for Him? Are you in places where you'd expect to find Him? List several ways in which you believe Jesus can be found.

Friday

In the game "hide-and-seek," children often place themselves where the seeker can't help finding them! How are you positioning yourself so God can find you? What changes can you make in your life so that you can be found by God more easily?

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages* has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages, chapter 6.

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.