

# **FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH**

**9244 Five Forks Road**

**Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612**

**Tel: (717) 762-2991**

*SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:1-12*

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*SUBJECT: The Wise Men*

*Series: Through the Eyes Of*

*THEME: Searching for Truth*

*SERMON: "Wise Men Still Ask Questions"*

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## **Introduction**

### **Monologue – One Wise Man – Bob Eberly**

Wow! It is hard to believe that I am almost four score and ten years old. It has been more than 50 years since I was fortunate enough to be selected to go on that long, westward journey to honor the one born to be "King of the Jews".

I was so young to be chosen for such a journey. Yes, because of my father's influence and position I had been trained to become a Magi from birth. I was always full of questions and I am sure my questions sometimes drove my teachers and mentors crazy.

I was able to study many things but became obsessed with history and astrology. It was during my study of the history of civilization that I learned to read Hebrew, and thus, learned about the history of the Jewish people.

As I studied the Hebrew writings, I discovered the Jewish people believed in, and were looking for, a Messiah. Their writings said the government would be upon his shoulders and that he would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He would reign on David's throne and save His people from their sins. The increase of His government and peace would never end.

So, when we saw a new star in the East, we were certain this new "King of the Jews" had been born and felt our country needed to honor him.

On the long journey my mind was filled with questions. Questions like ...

I wonder how the Jewish people are honoring him?

How could he establish a government and peace that would never end?

How could he save his people from their sins?

When we arrived in Jerusalem I was surprised and shocked that no one, including King Herod, was honoring this new king. More questions flooded my mind.

Why aren't the Jews honoring their new king?

Why aren't they excited about the kingdom he will establish?

Don't they want to be saved from their sins?

Do they even know they are sinners?

We finally found this "King of the Jews" in Bethlehem and presented our gifts to Him and to His parents. You can imagine how surprised we were to learn of his miraculous conception and that He was born in a stable. His parents were amazing people, and I could sense that this child was, indeed, special.

We returned home without telling Herod we had found this new king, even though he had instructed us to do so. We could just sense there was something evil about Herod. Many months later, news reached us in the East of how Herod had killed many, many children under the age of two in order to have this new King of the Jews eliminated. Herod did not want to give up his power.

And now just recently one of his followers came to us and told us what happened to the "King of the Jews".

He escaped Herod's slaughter because His parents fled to Egypt. After Herod died they returned to their homeland, and at the age of 30, this one called Jesus began telling people about His Kingdom and that by believing in Him they would become a part of "the Kingdom of Heaven". But again, he was rejected by the Jewish leaders and 3 years later was crucified on a cross. But three days after his death, He rose from the dead, and shortly thereafter, went back to Heaven. That child I saw was actually God.

This follower told us we can be saved from our sins and become a part of His never-ending kingdom by believing in Him. All that is required of us is faith. After serious consideration I choose to believe and as I sit here, an old man, my mind is still filled with questions.

Why does God love us so much?

How can I serve this God who loves me?

What is His eternal Kingdom going to be like?

Why don't more people trust Him?

Oh, before I leave, I have a question for you .... DO YOU BELIEVE IN JESUS?

If not, it is time for you to be asking yourself, and perhaps others, some serious questions.

**End**

Thank you, Bob.

Allow me to tell you about:

**Mr. Clarence**

One of my best teachers in school was my high school Physics and Chemistry teacher – Mr. Clarence. We called him, Sir. He was a tough, demanding teacher. He gave a lot of homework. We didn't like that at all. But, more students succeeded in his class than in almost any other subject. I believe it had a lot to do with his teaching methods.

Like many teachers, he knew his subject well and was very good at explaining the subject. But it was the way he handled students' questions that made him stand out. He welcomed and encouraged questions.

But whenever you would ask him a question, he seldom just answered the question directly. He almost always responded to your question with another question, and another question, and another. Suppose he was teaching about **density of materials**.

Mr. Clarence would give us a lecture on Density. Defining it. Telling us how to determine the density of a material – you know, the math calculations etc. He would explain why knowing about density mattered. Then he would give us problems to do, so we would become familiar with density.

Suppose a couple weeks later you come to Mr. Clarence and ask him, “What is the density of a lump of coal?” (You want to figure out how heavy your Christmas stocking will be this year.)

Mr. Clarence would not tell you the answer. He would begin asking you questions. “What are the units of Density?” You would answer. “Volume and mass.” “How are you going find the mass?” he would ask. “Put it on a scales.” “How are you going to find the volume?” “Measure the dimensions and calculate.” “It’s an irregular shaped piece of coal. How can you measure those dimensions?” “I don’t know” “What method did we learn about to measure the volume of irregular solids?”

And on and on the questions would come. Until **we** discovered the answer. Mr. Clarence was concerned with teaching us how to think and acquire knowledge by asking questions. He taught us to ask questions, of ourselves and to others.

He seemed to understand an important principle for life:

**The questions you ask will determine the knowledge you acquire?**

**What questions are you asking?**

We are in our final week of our series: “Through the Eyes Of...” We’ve had heard from Joseph, Simeon, The Shepherds, Mary. And today we want to see this familiar advent story through the eyes of some “Wise Men.” Or as some translations put it, The “Magi”

We will try to respond to several questions this morning, but I hope this whole series has you asking a lot more questions, about Jesus, if you don’t know him. And also about yourself, if you do know him and want to learn more about following him faithfully into the new

year. I believe it was C. S. Lewis who said something like: **“The Journey of the Christian life is the humble search for truth and purpose.”** Continually Asking questions about life!!

The questions we raise today are:

**Who are the wise men?**

**What was their mission?**

**What did they find?**

**Why did Matthew include them in his account of Advent?**

**What questions are you asking?**

Matthew is the gospel writer who tells us about the “Wise Men,” so familiar to almost every Christmas pageant. If you have a bible, open it to Matthew chapter 2.

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

**Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup> “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”**

**<sup>3</sup> King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem.**

**<sup>4</sup> He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”**

**<sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:**

**<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,  
for a ruler will come from you  
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”**

**<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go**

and worship him, too!”

<sup>9</sup> After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

Matthew give us both, a geographical and an historical context, for his account of the wise men. Jesus was in Bethlehem with his parents. It is a small town or village about 5 miles from Jerusalem. Bethlehem of Judea was a royal city. It was the birthplace of King David.

And it was during the reign of King Herod.

King Herod is also called ‘Herod the Great.’ He was the ruling king of Palestine but was not a Jew. He was a gentile, appointed as king by the Romans. His “greatness” was not an indication of how good and noble he was as a king. In fact he is better described as an ‘unscrupulous tyrant’. He maintained power and control by getting rid of, usually by killing, anyone who disagreed with him or opposed his decisions. He was called “The Great” because of his building accomplishments.

Never the less. Herod was king at the time, living in Jerusalem, keeping an uneasy peace over the area by brute force.

It is into this setting that “wise men from eastern lands arrived.”

So: **Who are these wise men from eastern lands?**

We do not have a lot of details or specifics, but almost certainly, they were from the area of the world known as **Persia** or Babylonia, or, Arabia. That would be modern Iran or Iraq,

or Saudi Arabia. (Map with Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Persia, Arabia)

Most likely, then, they were gentiles, not Jews. Were they familiar with Jews and Jewish culture and religion? Maybe - because it was to this area that the Jews were exiled hundreds of years earlier – during the time of Daniel. Daniel in the lion’s den, that Daniel.

So maybe they were familiar with the Jewish culture and history.

They are also sometimes called **“Magi.”** It appears this comes from the Greek word meaning, **“those who have wisdom through investigation and interpretation of the movements of heavenly bodies.”**

Very likely they were people who studied the stars and their movements. And believed that there were theological implications of what they saw. They believed the gods were doing something with the stars.

They were people with great curiosity – in search of truth and meaning. And although our scriptures speak against looking to the stars for meaning, it appears, God has met them where they are and uses God’s magnificent creation to draw them to the Christ Child – Jesus.

You see, people in search of God start from all kinds of places – and God helps them find Him. That is still true today. Are you in search of God?

Were they kings? I don’t want to ruin a favorite Christmas carol for you. But they were probably not kings. Very likely they were wealthy, and from an elite class, socially.

How many were there? We don’t know that either? Often we assume there were three, because three gifts are mentioned. But we don’t know. But their entourage **made quite a stir** in Jerusalem – a large city – when they arrived.

When just one or two muscle cars drag race through the village of Roadside, where I live, it causes a stir. But it would take more than just 3 cars in New York City to cause a stir. Jerusalem was a city, so there must have been more than a few people in the group. But we don’t know how many there were.

To summarize, the “Wise Men” were most likely a group of fairly wealthy, learned, but still curious, Arab star gazers from Arabia or Persia, on a mission to a foreign land.

### **What was their mission?**

They stated their mission as soon as they arrived in Jerusalem – the capital of the Jewish nation. They asked:

**2 “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”**

1. These wise men had an earnest desire **to find the new ‘king of the Jews.’** They combined their knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures, and their understanding of the movements of the stars, to get them pointed in the right direction. And it made sense that a Jewish king would be found in Jerusalem – the capital city.

Like when I go to the grocery store. If you are like me, you can be standing in the meat section and ask a store associate, “Where is the white flour?” It’s just the next thing on my list.

But they look at me like, “That would be in the baking aisle. Here’s your sign.” Sometimes I wonder what the associates say about me when they get home to talk about their day. They probably don’t talk about my wisdom. But at least I may add some comic relief to their day.

Where would you expect to find the king of the Jews? In Jerusalem!!

2. The wise men also came with a desire to **“Worship”** this new king. It means they understood enough to know that this person, they were looking for, was someone important, someone worthy. He was someone who could enhance their understanding of truth, and the way the gods work in the world.

Their wisdom was not in their own intellect or their knowledge of the stars, but in their willingness to know and search for, until they found, the true source of wisdom.

God says through the prophet **Jeremiah 29:13**

**If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.**

Through the eyes of the Wise Men, Advent is about embarking on a journey, even if it is a long journey, to find someone you deem important and give that person the appropriate honor. Who are you looking for this Advent?

### **What did the Wise Men find?**

When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem they found a king of the Jews, but they were looking for a new born king of the Jews. Somehow they knew, Herod the Great was not who they were looking for. They consulted with Herod. They listened to Herod. But they trusted the sign of the stars. So they proceeded to Bethlehem and found Jesus. The infant king they were looking for.

Charles Spurgeon writes:

**A star is sent on behalf of all the stars, as if it were the envoy of all worlds, to present them before their king. This star was put into commission to await the Lord, to be his herald to men far away, to be God's usher to conduct these wise men into Christ's presence.**

**The infant Son of God, Creator of the heavens and earth, who holds the universe in his hands, directs the stars to draw people to Himself.**

**Such is the love of God for the world.**

God loves you so much, God will use all means possible to draw you to Jesus.

Well, the wise men found **two kings** – one, was a power hungry, deceptive, self-centered, stay in power at all costs, tyrant. He was dwelling in a palace fit for a king.

The other king, a vulnerable, little toddler, living in a humble house in a small village.

The prominent and wealthy men from the east traveled far and wide, not to sit at the feet of the one who sat on a throne, but to bow before an infant playing in a house in Bethlehem.

Through the eyes of the wise men, Advent is about a contrast between **two kingdoms**.

See, the kings and kingdoms of the world are considered to flourish, when the rulers are wealthy, power is maintained, even if by force. Control is kept through fear.

Such kingdoms have no problem with arrogance, self-centeredness, lies, deceit, and violence. Such kingdoms ignore the poor and downtrodden. They exploit the weak, as long as the wealthy grow wealthier.

The kingdom of Jesus is the **polar opposite**. In the kingdom of Jesus, the poor and the weak are the first priority. The last are brought to the front of the line, and humble are exalted, while the proud are brought low. In Jesus kingdom, the Lord and master is the servant, and stoops to serve the lowest of the low. What a contrast!!

The wisdom of the wise men is in their recognition of these differences – and choosing Jesus and his kingdom. Advent invites us to choose Jesus and enter Jesus' kingdom.

Author Daniel Darling expresses it so well.

**These were men of the world, wise and cultured and sophisticated in every way. They came expecting a young king on a throne, surrounded by servants and the trappings of royalty. What they found, instead, was a poor family in an otherwise quiet neighborhood. To the average onlooker, unfamiliar with the ancient prophecies and unaware of the guiding star, this was all so pedestrian.**

**But to those whose hearts were open to God's leading, who were truly seeking Jesus, they saw what the prophets predicted, what the angels serenaded, and what Mary understood: there toddling in a dirty tunic was the Son of God.**

**And so these prestigious men dropped everything and offered the only right response to Jesus: worship.**

Matthew writes:

**<sup>11</sup>They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

What a scene. It is no wonder artists, down through the centuries have attempted to capture it for us. And even today, Christmas card creators do the same thing. The wealthy, bowing before the impoverished. This is the upside down nature of the kingdom of God.

And the Wise Men offered costly worship.

**They sought** the truth by following the star and reading the ancient prophecies.

**They obeyed** the voice of the angel who told them not to return to Herod.

**They bowed** at the sight of Jesus

**They gave** precious gifts as an act of devotion and worship.

**Advent through the eyes of the wise men is about an important journey that results in costly worship.**

We don't know the precise meaning of the gifts the wise men brought. Many possibilities may be correct. But we can conclude that **Advent is about giving gifts**. Giving gifts as an expression of adoration and devotion to Jesus.

At Advent, God gave the best gift possible to human kind. God gave humanity the gift of himself. I believe gift giving can be an expression of our compassion for those around us who are in need. So we need not shy away from gift giving at Advent. **But to whom?**

True worship includes giving - joyous, generous giving, primarily to those **in need**. Thank you to so many of you who have given generously to those in need in our community.

But **why did Matthew include the Wise Men in his account of Advent?**

Matthew is not condoning astrology. Matthew is reminding us that God can meet a seeking person, even with impure motives, and uncertain beliefs, and point that soul to God's

Son. As this Advent season concludes, let us rejoice and be grateful that God meets us, and points us to His Son, Jesus.

Matthew is also reminding us that the presence of these men from the East – outsiders, Gentiles – is confirmation of God’s promise to send a Messiah who will not only be king of the Jew’s but a Messiah, a Savior for the nations.

Advent through the eyes of the wise men reminds us **The Gospel is for everyone.**

Not just those like us, or who keep us comfortable, or who agree with us. The gospel is for us **and** for people we may consider outsiders.

Matthew’s inclusion of the Wise Men reminds us, Jesus is also the Savior of the wealthy and learned. Those who may think they are self-sufficient, and have the knowledge to handle life on their own. Even such minded people need a Savior. Jesus’ kingdom really is a global kingdom. So:

**What questions are you asking?** I offer several possibilities to think about.

### **1. When you are confronted by Jesus this Christmas, how do you respond?**

With humble **Adoration?** The wise men sought Jesus at great personal sacrifice and would not give up until they could bow before him in costly worship? Have you been expressing adoration to Jesus?

What about Herod’s response? **Anger?** Herod was threatened by the presence of Jesus who disrupted his quest for personal power and selfish ambition. He saw Jesus as an intrusion into his kingdom. Does the humility and sacrifice of Jesus, make you a bit uncomfortable, or even angry, because you sense Jesus is calling you to a life of humble service that intrudes in your life and with your ambitions?

Has your response been one of **Apathy?** Isn’t it curious that the scribes and priests who knew the Scriptures, knew where the Messiah would be born, seemed to have no interest in accompanying the wise men to Bethlehem? I wonder why? Were they so busy with their own

activities, that even the thought of meeting the Messiah, their Savior, the Lord, was of no real interest to them? But wait, have I exhibited similar apathy to Jesus and his kingdom priorities this advent season?

Another question to ponder.

**2. Can you trace your own journey to Jesus?** How did God work in the twists and turns of your life to bring you to his Son? I invite Parents, grandparents, guardians, to do this. This may be a wonderful opportunity to share, with your children, your own spiritual testimony. Have you ever shared your spiritual journey to Jesus with someone else, your family?

**3. How is worship of the Christ child this Christmas releasing generosity in your heart?** So many of you have been so generous. Giving to help those in need around us. Gift cards, food, money. Thank you.

I believe in the weeks and months ahead, Jesus followers will have even more opportunities to be generous to those in need. When you heard on the news just this week, that you might be receiving another stimulus check, where, in your mind, did you start directing that money?

The **Wise men arrived with the treasures of earth in their hands. Did they leave with the Treasure of Heaven in their hearts?**

That is the great question for each of us as we think about Advent.

**Pray**

**This week, may you experience the joy and reverence of true worship as you come face to face with Jesus, the Son of God, and Savior of the world.**