

Message Series: **'ReDiscovering Christmas'**
Message Title: **'And Now, a Moment with the Magi'**
Scripture Source: **Matthew 2:1-12**
Date: Sunday, December 13, 2015
Teacher: John Garner

Let's Get the Story Straight!

When you hear the name 'magi' what thoughts or images come to mind? There is a fog of confusion swirling around these unnamed and uncounted individuals. The Bible doesn't count them or name them...like some Christmas carols do. Were there 3, were they kings? The Bible doesn't say in specifics. Yet here are some things we know about 'magi'. Probably some unlikely insights for us to consider.

They were mostly likely from Persia..."They became the teachers and instructors of the Persian kings...skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science...interpreters of dreams...in those ancient days all men believed in astrology...importance of stars...suggestions made about the star...11 B.C. Halley's comet was visibly shooting across the skies...some heavenly brilliance spoke to them of the entry of a king into the world..." (W. Barclay) These men were not Jewish. Yet, a strong resolve to figure out what was going on and where the 'King of the Jews' was, burned within their seeking minds and hearts. Some additional insights: "The Magi...were scholars engaged in astronomy and astrology...probably from Babylon...main center of astronomy in the ancient Near East...studied the stars dating back to at least the 8th century B.C. They kept an eye on celestial developments and kept detailed records...re: the star as comet...The star appeared suddenly and was visible for over a year...moved, the space of a couple of months, from the eastern morning sky to the southern evening sky..." (Colin Nicholl – The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the Star of Bethlehem)

Unlikely Conversations: Matthew 2: 1-8

The magi arrive in Jerusalem, the capital city looking for answers. Looking for a King. King Herod, that insanelly jealous and devious monarch goes into full 'pretend' mode, engaging with the Jewish religious scholars and the Magi and lying about his intent.

The birth place of King Jesus is identified as Bethlehem, a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Micah 5:2. You can imagine heart beats quickening, for different reasons, in both King Herod and the Magi.

Sacred Direction: Matthew 2:9-10

God guides them through the brilliance of a 'star' and identifies exactly where Jesus is. The Magi are thrilled with their discovery! "Overjoyed" illustrate...depth of emotion, freely expressed. Notice where they aren't and who isn't there...they aren't in a stable and the shepherds aren't there. A number of months have passed, and the family is lodging in a house.

Personal Connection: Matthew 2:11-12

Their response to the Christ child, to Jesus, is simple, direct, passionate and of substance and meaning. "they bowed down and worshiped him." They acknowledged his Lordship 'status' over them. And then, out of their personal resources they gave gifts, freely and generously, to Him. Gold - "the gift for a king...frankincense is the gift for a priest...the function of a priest is to open the way to God for people...the Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means 'bridge-builder'...this is what Jesus did...opened the way to God...myrrh is the gift for one who is to die...used to embalm the bodies of the dead..." , as Jesus did for us as Saviour. (W. Barclay)

Unlikely Spiritual Guides for...You and Me

So what can you and I discover or rediscover about Christmas from this unlikely story? What truths can intersect with your story? We can learn truths about God, ourselves and what it takes to experience the truth of Christmas in a deeply personal way...these are not complicated truths, yet they do require thought, faith, and personal action.

Christmas Truth # 1: God yearns to be in relationship with each of us. He did unusual things to **GUIDE** the Magi to Jesus. And God's Spirit still guides people toward Jesus through circumstances, sometimes very tough ones and often through the words and deeds of people. Romans 15:17-19 Illustrate:

At the heart of God's guidance is the Bible, God's instructive and life changing word.

Question: Are you willing to be guided and instructed? Are you willing to explore the Bible with a trusted person and learn who Jesus is and what he freely offers you...salvation, hope, meaning, and power?

Christmas Truth # 2: To experience God's love and power, we must be **RECEPTIVE** and **RESPONSIVE** to Jesus and his words. These unnamed individuals took God's guidance seriously and persistently sought to connect with Jesus...and having connected, they were personally responsive to Him...not to religion, but to Jesus.

Question: Are you ready to consider the teachings of Jesus and apply them to your life? Will you be a student of the Scriptures, in private and with others? Will you ask your questions, voice your doubts and not indulge a procrastinating approach to things spiritual? Compare Matthew 7:24-27

What holds you back from placing trust in Christ and learning to follow His lead, day to day? Fear, shame, guilt, pride? Can you put a name to your barrier...and ask God and others to help you break through the barrier? Please, don't stay spiritually 'stranded' and lost; seek connection with God through faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Christmas Truth # 3: We have something of great value to **GIVE** to Jesus. All of us do, including you. What stirs God's heart with great joy? When we offer who we are and what we have to Him, for his purposes in the broken and confused world around us. Romans 12:1-3, Psalm 51:17 Read Illustrate: I see all sorts of people giving and offering to God their time, efforts, resources and prayers in our ANIB event experience. I think that when we offer God who we are, from honest and humble hearts, He is thrilled. And He works through us and our efforts to connect with and enrich others. Illustrate: Project Share Christmas baskets.

And some of the most unlikely 'gifts' we offer God include our tears, failures, fears, and brokenness. Let God and work with God on experiencing healing and hope moving forward. And then sharing with others the hope and help received from God.

Getting Started or Re-started this Christmas

Is it a prayer to God this morning, asking for understanding and help to connect with God?

Is it a conversation with one of our pastors to listen to your story and questions? Ask us.

Is it a resolve to apply God's teachings to your life in specific ways and to be done with...

What do you need to be done with? Procrastination? Excuses?

Is it a fresh commitment to service and investment in this ministry...time, resources and gifts?

Is it a step of faith in God with some uncertainty in your life...and asking for wisdom?

What will you take to heart and apply to your life from the unlikely story of the Magi?

What could your 'start' or re-start' look like for you today? Jot it down in the next few moments.