

Sermon Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Sermon Theme: Find the King to Worship Him

We’ve all been there where you just can’t find what you are looking for and everywhere you look reaffirms the fact you looked in the wrong place. If you are like me, you then start to blame everyone else around you for moving it...not putting it back where it was supposed to go...for not looking hard enough to help you. Then come all the suggestions for where you should look: did you check in the closet, look through all the drawers, is it under the couch, are you sure you looked everywhere in that room? Finally, you decide to look in this one spot—you were sure you already checked there at least five times—you move the blanket, and there it is. And when you find it—even if it’s just the remote to the TV—there’s a feeling of peace, almost relief, thankfulness, even happiness because you found it. But if you never looked in the right place to begin with—no matter how hard and determined you were looking in the other spots—it wasn’t going to make that object magically appear. At best you would find something else that was more interesting or at least distract you from the thing that you were looking for and hoping to find.

We are told in Matthew 2 that Magi from the east came to Jerusalem looking for something; more specifically, for someone. They ask, “**Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?**” We do not know very much about these Magi but some things we do know from ancient historians. The Magi was a group of people, most likely some type of priests, concerned with astrology—the science of the stars. But they also were sorcerers and practitioners of the dark arts. Today we would call them members of the occult, experimenters with witchcraft, and warn our children to run in the other direction if they saw them. Who these Magi are in Matthew 2, their names, how many of them are present, all sorts of legends and stories have been made up over the years to fill the missing gaps. But we simply don’t know. So instead, we focus on what God has revealed to us in the Bible. These Magi in Matthew 2 come from the East which might mean from the area of Babylon or Persia—modern day Iraq. We also know they are looking for the king of the Jews.

How they know to be looking for this king, the Magi say in v. 2, “**We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.**” How did they know what star to follow? Why did they decide to follow it? How did they know this star was significant and a sign meaning the king of the Jews was born? Again, there are different suggestions but we simply don’t know for sure. What we do know is God chose them. We do know God worked to lead them to this area of the world. In some shape or form God revealed to them that a king had been born for them.

But it seems that the star only led them to this general area of Israel; but, eventually they end up in Jerusalem. Which makes sense. They were looking for a king. Kings belong in the capital cities; therefore, search for the king in Jerusalem the capital city of the Jews. Eventually the Magi end up before King Herod in what seems to be Herod’s palace. Again, makes sense. That’s where kings should be. If anyone should have more information about a newly born king, it should be the present king. But it still wasn’t quite the right place. These Magi are searching and asking, questioning and looking but they could not find the king they were looking for.

Like the Magi many are looking for answers; really a king—someone or something—to rule their lives. Some people think it’s found in searching for the meaning of life and more meaningful purpose in life. So many are searching for answers for the future, answers for what they should do next, or validation of what they are doing right now. Others are searching for more peace and a little extra hope. There’s all sorts of suggestions, guidelines, new and improved plans to get you those answers. There’s entire book-lines, life coaches, YouTube video channels, wise-sage advice dedicated to help and direct you. And so one tries them; and you know what, they just might work. But then something seems missing because it’s not really what you should have been searching for.

One tries to find the king, the answers with their feelings and how they feel about a situation: if you are happy doing it, if it makes you feel good, then that should be your answer. But then it's not quite as good and stops making you happy.

Another tries to find the king in accomplishing certain goals in life, attaining a certain status, have a certain comfortability with their finances and the amount in the bank account. You might even reach the goal; you did it, congratulations! But now what? It's never quite enough (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Something is still missing.

Someone else makes a king out of their family and their relationships making them what is most important. But then your friends and family let you down or you let them down. Another makes a king out of being seen as a good parent, respected by their peers, known to be a hard worker and a good person. But there's always someone who is a better parent a more outstanding person, you can't please everyone, and no matter how good of person you might be—as everyone knows and says—no one is perfect.

Some try and find the answers in church and at least going through motions of worship with mouthing the words to the hymns and following along in the bulletin. One might have the intention and desire to love and serve God and be a better person; that should count for something! Go to church and you'll feel better, right? I hope so. But then you are done and you don't feel like you got much out of the service today. And then there's the other fact that God isn't interested in just going through the motions. Just sitting in the pew isn't finding the king (Matthew 15:9).

Did you pray about it? We've probably all heard and many have asked that question. Which isn't in itself wrong, by any means. We go to God in our prayers and seek his guidance. Yes, prayer is powerful and effective and God wants and invites us to go directly to his throne of grace for mercy and peace (Hebrews 4:16). But prayer can seem to be treated almost like this magical incantation that you say and all the problems and struggles in life will go away and all your questions will be answered. Even just prayer isn't going to find you your king.

And so we are still left searching. It may even be that you aren't even sure for what you are searching but there's just that feeling that something is missing. The various things already mentioned or others might give you some temporary peace...it dulls the pain and struggles for a little bit of time...you find some momentary joy. But the gratification doesn't last long enough and never really lives up to what you expected or wanted. And what happens—all too often without realizing it's happening—when searching in the wrong places it can pull you away you from what you really need.

The magi from Matthew were searching for the king. They were close but still were looking in the wrong places. But God guides them using the chief priests and teachers of law. The answer isn't in the announcements of recently born. The king is found in God's

Word. Quoting from the Old Testament book of Micah the Magi have the answer revealed. The king would be found, **“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”** And when the Magi hear the news they go. Again the Lord works to guide them: the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them and stops where the child was. And when they saw the star the Magi were overjoyed because they knew what it meant. When they arrive, they know who this child is: their king. Offering gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh they worship him.

Like the magi we can be so close and, yet, still so far away looking in the wrong places. Are you waiting for a star to shine in your life to give you guidance? Are waiting for some sign that is going to show you: go down this route; make this decision and life is going to be better, improve, and fill that void. I won't say never, but there's a very good chance that isn't going to happen. That's not how God operates in our lives today. He doesn't need to because he's already given you all the signs to where we find our King.

God knows how lost we were in sin, how thoroughly distracted by sin, sinful lives, and lies we're not even sure what really need or looking for. So Jesus didn't wait for you to seek him out. No, the Word became flesh to bring you to him. He didn't wait until the people would accept him more and to be more popular; that's not the type of king he came to be. When the people Jesus was sent to save had rejected him and nailed him to the cross, it was exactly what needed to happen. Rejected by his own people, forsaken and abandoned by his Father in heaven, with a crown of thorns and the cross for his throne your king died for you and for your sin.

But he doesn't blame you, hold it against you, or expect something from you in return. He forgives you. For your misguided searching, sinful priorities, sinful life—all of it is forgiven in Jesus who still wants to have a relationship with you. The light in the darkness, Jesus, picks you up from your own stumbling feet that trip over and fall into sin. That light guides you back from the paths that distract you and leads you away from him. He pulls you away from the edge of the cliff of eternal death in hell. He does this with the very same tool he used to guide those Magi: his Word. With the Bible Jesus guides you and brings you to him.

And it's by that Word that we see with these Magi, Jesus isn't only the king of the Jews. He is your king too who wants to rule in your heart and life. Jesus shines his light of his Word to reveal the truth so that you believe he is your King who saved you from sin and death; the King you need. Your King wants a close intimate relationship with you so he wraps you in his perfection in the water of baptism making you God's child and heir to

his kingdom. He draws you ever closer to him with the Lord's Supper to tell you again that your sins are forgiven in him.

With sins forgiven and Jesus as our king, like those Magi, we worship him. That's why we come to church. It's here where your King comes to you in Word and Sacrament. But worship isn't only about what you get out of it; it's always what you put into it. It's here where we worship him with songs of praise and prayers to him. We worship him with the gifts we bring in the offerings we put in the plate and the lives of service to his glory. He doesn't need them but we give them to honor and praise him for his goodness and love. We worship him with being a mom, dad, child, with living in this world in how we serve those around us. We worship him as he uses us as guides for others to show them the King to worship him. Thanks be to God you don't need to be keep searching for your King. Your King is right here in His Word. Amen.