

Title: Christmas: God Loves the Outsider

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Date: December 6, 2020

INTRO. At the Orlando airport this past week, coming back from a conference, I witnessed a set of parents, about my age, with their three small children. They were totally exasperated! The kids were tired, fussy, and unruly. The parents were stressed and embarrassed. The parents were short tempered with the kids, and the kids weren't behaving very well as we boarded the plane at the terminal.

- Irony of their shirts: Disney, "Happiest place on earth!"
- It did NOT look happy when they were boarding the plane.

We've all heard it – and we can all sing along in our heads even now to the 1963 Christmas classic by Andy Williams: "*It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*"

- "*It's the most wonderful time of the year...with the kids jingle belling...and everyone telling...be of good cheer...it's the most wonderful time of the year.*"

BUT, what if: you have no family? Or you are overseas and can't come home? Or there's been a recent death? A divorce? Estrangement? Jobless? Abuse?

This is the TRUE historicity of the original, very first Christmas – according to Matthew 1 – (It didn't begin happily...and it wasn't easy)

Jesus came from a dysfunctional family lineage:

- Tamar – Canaanite woman who posed as prostitute to deceive her father in law.
- Rahab – Gentile and prostitute before she met God.
- Ruth – Moabite, descendants of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters.
- Bathsheba – committed adultery with King David. "The other woman."

There is the embarrassment of the perceived scandal between Joseph and Mary.

- He contemplated putting her away.
- Mary surely knew no one would hardly believe her.
- "*We talked to angels*" they said – yeah right.
- No room for them in the Inn.
- Born in a slummy area among barnyard animals and livestock.

The Shepherds were the first to hear the news – not the upper class.

- Not the social elites.
- Poor, night-shift shepherds were told the news first.

Question – I wonder if God is trying to teach us from the very beginning?

YES! – *I love people who have uncommon, broken, embarrassing backgrounds and stories.*

- The wonder and majesty of Christmas is that Jesus Christ can reach anyone!

Let's Remember the Story of the Magi in Matt 2:1-12

When Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary, the king who ruled the region of Judea on behalf of the Romans was the Jewish King Herod (2:1).

- History tells us that he was a man who loved opulence, fine things, and major building projects (evidenced by the fact he rebuilt the Temple).
- Herod was also terribly insecure. Anyone who challenged him would be killed. He even destroyed family members who he perceived as threats to his throne.

One day, a group of unusual looking men arrived in the city of Jerusalem – they were called magi, or wise men. They came from a far eastern land.

- We don't know a whole lot about these men.
- Some say they were astrologers – men who studied the sun, moon, stars, solar system.
- Bible simply calls them wise men (2:1) (2:7).

The first words out of their mouth is: *Where is he who was born King of the Jews? We've seen his star rise, and we've come to worship him* (2:2).

- Again, there is a great deal we don't know – but the text indicates they had information/sources that led them to believe the real king of the world was born.
- They wanted to be in on the celebration.

As the wise men asked around for Jesus' specific location – everyone in town was troubled (2:3). The king and the people were disturbed. Had another king been born? Was this the real king? What did that mean for Herod?

- Herod demands his key leaders come and give him insight.
- The priests and scribes gather together and comb through the OT prophets.

Yes, Micah 5:2 predicted in the small, rural land of Bethlehem – a great ruler would be born – he would change the world by loving and leading people like a Shepherd.

Herod gathered the wise men once more and said, “Okay, our Scripture indicates this child will be born in Bethlehem. Go and find him. And when you do, bring me word so that I can worship him too” (2:7-8).

- The wise men left to search for Jesus.

But the star again went before them (2:10). The star that had brought them this far would finish the journey by leading them to the exact house where the child was.

- When they saw the star – they had exceedingly great joy!

They followed the star directly to the house where Christ was (2:11).

- They fell down and worshiped.
- Gave him gold – Christ is King (royalty).
- Gave him frankincense – Christ is Priest! (deity).
- Gave him myrrh – Christ is Man! (humanity).

Big Idea. Christ's birth reminds us that God is committed to reaching sinners who seem far away.

Think about this – the identity and character of the wise men shows us God can use anyone!

- Without condoning astrology, Matthew's narrative challenges our prejudice against outsiders to our faith.
- Yes, we MUST preach the Gospel to all...
- Even pagans can (and often will) respond to Christ if given the opportunity.

First, imagine the controversy of the magi following the star →

- You guys are crazy.
- The distance they willingly traveled.
- No one else is going with them.

Maybe the magi knew the world also laughed at: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel.

Maybe if we don't have opposition at times, we aren't following God devotedly.

“Wise men” – reportedly smart people!

- But honestly, how many turn back when the journey gets controversial/difficult?

Second, for the magi, the journey was not easy, but it was worth it. Remember the obstacles the magi faced on the journey.

- Estimates are it took them 12-18 months to travel the distance.
- Darkness.
- Weather.
- Robbers.
- Thirst.
- Language.
- Fatigue.

Third, it's sad to think of the spiritually complacent leaders who did not make the trip.

- The magi made the trip.
- But the priests and scribes did not.
- Many have head knowledge...but not heart knowledge.

Note the role-reversal between the wise men (formerly pagans) verses The Jews, Herod, Priests, Scribes (historically the people of God).

- Those we least expect to worship Jesus may worship him (magi).
- Those we least expect to oppose him may seek his death (Herod).

Head knowledge is not enough!
We must have heart knowledge, too!

Fourth, the wise men remind us of the spirit of true worship.

What is true worship?

- Jesus is at the center (focal point).
- I humble myself before him.
- I lay down my treasure/gifts in his honor.

Fifth, even the wise men had to submit to Scripture. They needed to hear Micah 5:2 to be fully on their way.

- Romans 10:14, *how will they hear without a preacher?*

The sin of taking Jesus/Scripture for granted was not the sin of the pagans, it's the sin of the religious folks and the Bible teachers. Wow!

CONCL. For one special night in history – God directs BOTH nature and nations.

- Nature (the star).
- Nations (the magi).
- God ordained every detail of this story!

God has ordained every detail of your life, birth, family, school, and work for a sovereign purpose.

No one is too far gone! Jesus has come to make outsiders become insiders.