

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Outsiders Who Became Insiders, Matthew 2

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INTRODUCTION: Today we are going to talk about a familiar story—the story of the Wise Men. The Greek word used for the wise men is *mágoi*, and in some versions (NKJV, KJV, ESV), it is translated as “wise men,” while in others (like NIV and NASB), it is translated “magi.” In its original use, the word described a class of Persian men, maybe even priests, who interpreted signs. In the New Testament, the word described those who interpreted signs—particularly in the case of the Christmas story—the signs leading to the coming of the Messiah—the birth of Christ. In learning from the story of the magi, I hope you see a connection between the way the magi came to Christ and the way we come to Christ.

There are three points to my message today:

1. The magi were unsatisfied with mere head knowledge about Jesus.
2. The magi were interested in the Savior, not the surroundings.
3. The magi risked everything for Jesus.

Turn to Matthew, Chapter 2, verses 1 through 12—

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:1-12 ¹*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ²“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:*

⁶*‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

⁷*Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully*

for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”⁹ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.¹² And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

First, THE MAGI WERE UNSATISFIED WITH MERE HEAD KNOWLEDGE ABOUT JESUS.

We don't know a lot about the magi. But, there are some things we do know. One, they were an educated class of people. They knew enough about the stars. They knew enough about the scripture. And, these magi identified a star as a sign from God. This would have required years of gathering head-knowledge.

From the starting point of Jerusalem, if you pointed a compass East, you would find the place of Babylon and ancient Persia. I've heard some people say, "How did the magi know? Maybe it was magic." It was not. The Word had been in the far East far before the magi. The Babylonians had good access to the Jewish Scriptures, which contain the many promises of the coming Messiah. About 600 years before this story in Matthew 2, Daniel had served as a government official, and he prophesied the coming of the Messiah. Also, Babylon was the place where tens of thousands of Jews lived during the Exile (605–536 BC), so they had a presence there for many, many years. And, their teachings and scriptures must have stayed behind because the magi knew them. The magi likely had great resources to gather head knowledge about God's plan for redemption.

ILLUSTRATION: I've had this question for many years about how much it must have cost these men to travel about a thousand miles to see Jesus. The land was desert for about a thousand miles. A year and a half ago, a friend gave me a gift of a trip through the Grand Canyon. That gift was worth about \$3,000. It was quite a gift, and I had the time of a lifetime. But, that was a 7-day trip. How long would it take to cross the desert? It was not just a day-trip, but a thousand mile journey. How long would it take to cross the desert? How much would it have cost?

Well, the magi had to prepare long in advance for this trip. And, we get the idea there were three wise men because of their gifts. But, there had to have been more of them to make this journey possible. They would have had to take plenty of livestock, food, helpers for security. They would have had to know where the nearest oasis was so their livestock could get water. How much would it have cost? It would have probably cost them more than any one would have made in a lifetime.

We don't have an account of their lives prior to their journey to see Jesus, but for the story to hold true, they must have possessed the knowledge necessary to lead to more curiosity. I want you to hear this: Curiosity led to preparation. Preparation led them to the journey. The journey led to fulfillment—seeing the face of salvation—the face of Jesus.

APPLICATION: I would classify us as a people with resources much like the magi were in their day. Most importantly, we have access to the greatest resource—the Holy Scripture. Do you realize not every people group has access to the Bible in their language? Not everybody can read. But, we have churches on every street corner. Do you know there are over some 700 seminaries across the United States, countless theological books and commentaries, and not even to mention all the resources on the internet.

Like the magi, we too must start on a journey. And, the journey must be a journey of the heart. We don't need more and more head knowledge that doesn't lead to faith. If I were facing God today, and he asked, "Why should I let you into Heaven?" and I said, "Because I know ten thousand facts about Jesus..." Let me tell you, that would be the wrong answer.

Our knowledge about Jesus must lead to curiosity. Many of you have been educated. You went to school or you may have had some training in your vocation. Or, you were smart enough to educate yourself. And, it started with your curiosity, which eventually directed you to a career path. But, this required preparation before achieving success or landing a job.

In the same way, we must be curious enough to prepare for what the Lord has planned for our life. Sitting around talking about facts about Jesus will not get us anywhere. We have to make about a 1-foot change of knowledge from our head to our heart. How do we get this curiosity? How do we get this heart change? From the Holy Spirit. From the Lord.

It takes a heart change to be curious about things above—rather than things of the flesh. Some people—who know about Jesus—say, “I’m just not religious.” Even some of you here might know a lot of scripture. But, it takes a heart change to have the faith to follow Jesus whatever the cost..

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:5 ⁵ *Then the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”*

APPLICATION: Knowledge should lead to faith. We have a Savior to whom we can ask: *Lord, Give us more faith.* And, he is always faithful to answer. It always starts in our heart. It begins with love.

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 11:19 ¹⁹ *I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.*

EXPLANATION: And, this term “flesh” is not the negative use of the word “flesh” in the New Testament when we talk about fleshly sins. But, a heart of flesh is a heart that’s moldable, tender, and open to learning about Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 8:1b *We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.*

If the magi had been merely satisfied with their head knowledge, and if they had taken that journey just because of their head knowledge, it would have been nothing more than a vacation—a tour to see the Jesus they learned about. But, they were prepared to see Jesus because their hearts were prepared. But, until head knowledge intersects with love—the love of Christ, your love for Christ—you have nothing. But, when you allow the love of Christ to draw you to the Savior in worship, you will be filled with joy—like the magi.

So, we have: The magi were unsatisfied with head knowledge about Jesus—

ILLUSTRATION: I wonder about the other people in the Far East who knew about these men preparing for their trip. I wonder if it was like in the days of Noah when people laughed and wondered *What in the world are they doing preparing to*

go on a trip to go see a baby. They were unsatisfied with just head knowledge about Jesus.

Second, THE MAGI WERE INTERESTED IN THE SAVIOR, NOT THE SURROUNDINGS.

Royalty to royalty, rich to rich, poor to poor—rarely do these cross over.

ILLUSTRATION: Last week, I had my car worked on in a shop, and while I was there, I was paying the man who fixed my car. And, he told me a story. In 1972, he repaired British cars here in Nashville. He became a master mechanic, and he was summoned to England to go meet the Queen of England. And, he told me how gracious she was and how she thanked him for his work as a master mechanic here in the U.S. on British cars.

And, then about a month ago, my friend who is a British citizen, met the Queen of England. Apparently, she got interested in his Bible distribution group. And, she wanted to meet the people who were distributing Bibles. So, I can say, I have one degree of separation between me and the Queen of England—twice! But, you know what, I will never meet her. Why? Because we are light-years apart in every way. Royalty to royalty, rich to rich, poor to poor—rarely do these cross over.

But, the Wise Men must have been totally open to receiving this king regardless of the surroundings. Rich men might have very well said, “this is crazy...you mean we took a trip of a thousand miles to come to this humble house and to see this poor family ... We are going to be the laughing stock of the Far East when we return and tell this story.” But, they were willing to leave their comfort zones to meet this Savior regardless of what he looked like, regardless of what his parents had or didn’t have, and regardless of the home he lived in.

Why were they so open-minded? Because of their faith in God—They believed what they studied, and by the grace of God, they believed God’s Word enough to act upon it.

The scripture says the magi came to worship Jesus. When we pray to Jesus, we pray to him. We worship him, but we don’t see him in human flesh. Can you imagine if we had a baby here—and we were bowing down and worshiping this baby? That would seem unusual to us. But, it wasn’t unusual to the magi. They were prepared. They were filled with joy when God provided a way through the star. God has provided a way for us—through the Bible, but yet many of us still refuse to accept Christ’s love and gift of eternal life.

SCRIPTURE: John 5:39-40 ³⁹*You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me* ⁴⁰*yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

EXPLANATION: Jesus told the Pharisees—who had a lot of head knowledge from studying the scriptures—they missed the boat.

APPLICATION: I think about the magi and the Pharisees—two men—both from an educated class, probably well-to-do. The Pharisees connected with the whole Jewish tradition, but the magi, who were not connected by bloodline, got it. Jesus' own people missed it, but the other people got it. Much like those Pharisees, today we put our hope in what we can know. We think our Bible studies save us, but yet we refuse to come to Jesus for eternal life. What is holding you back from coming to Jesus? Have you counted the cost? Have you prepared for the journey before you if you become a follower of Christ? Or, are you more interested in the surroundings? Are you more interested in what you can get by becoming a follower of Christ rather than what you can give up. If you are going to become a follower of Christ, you have to be willing to give up everything and quit praying God would make you rich. But, pray he would make you obedient, a humble disciple, a follower of Jesus, and to be Christ-like wherever you go. What do I need to give up to see Jesus more in my life? What do you need to give up to see Jesus more in your life?

ILLUSTRATION: I have a friend who traveled abroad to do some mission work in another country—much less comfortable than here. She was trying to discern whether it was the will of God to go back to serve. In a conversation, the Lord opened her heart to reasons why she wouldn't if the Lord made a way—*I like being comfortable...I have jobs and family and plans...I like being comfortable...* These words came out of her mouth. Clearly we all like these things, but the Wise Men gave up everything.

APPLICATION: In following Jesus, it's not about the where—but about the heart. It's not about what. It's about the heart. He doesn't want our money or our time if our hearts are not in it.

If you pay your tithe grudgingly, he's not interested. He wants to know where your heart is, and your giving needs to have a heart element in it.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:33 ³³*In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:24 ²⁴*...Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

To the magi, seeing the face of young Jesus was worth the long, dangerous journey.

Third, THE MAGI RISKED EVERYTHING FOR JESUS.

At Christmas, we tend to focus on the three gifts of the magi—*gold, frankincense, and myrrh*. But, what is really incredible is the magi gave up their livelihoods, their status, their safety, their plans, their lives, their futures to see Jesus. They really are the antithesis of the Pharisees who had head knowledge yet refused to come to Jesus. They realized, in order to come to Jesus, they had to give up much.

Jesus said it himself as he spoke to a rich man: *"Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God"*(Matthew 16:23-24).

He said this after he told the man, *If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me,*" The Bible says, though, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

So, we have what seems to be a contradiction right here. We have these magi who were known as a class of men who were wealthy. And, then we have Jesus later on in the scripture making it sound impossible for a rich person to come to Jesus

But, you know what Jesus says later Matthew 16?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 19:26 ²⁶*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

So, there's not a contradiction. There are possibilities when God gets a hold of the hearts of people. With God, the magi's journey was made possible. He provided the star and enabled them to see Jesus. Yes, Satan tried to thwart God's plans. Herod wanted to kill Jesus and use the magi as a means of information. But, even after the magi were faithful in going to see Jesus, he provided protection.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:12 ¹²*...having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.*

APPLICATION: When the Lord changes your heart and makes it possible to follow Jesus, he will provide a way. For the magi, he provided a dream. And, the magi believed, and they didn't go back to Herod. After the Lord changes your life, you must be careful to make no provision for the flesh—because in it is death. But, do what the scripture says in Romans 13.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 13:14 ¹⁴ *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

EXPLANATION: That's scripture for all of us. The magi could have gone back to the earthly king who wanted their service, but they did not. They chose to go home another way.

When we know Christ, we no longer have to try to please others. Yes, we still struggle with being people-pleasers sometimes, but the scripture is clear:

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 1:10 ¹⁰ *Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

APPLICATION: Here's a question: How can you meet Jesus and make sure you don't fall back into sin? How can your knowledge of Jesus go from your head to your heart? Here is the answer:

You must repent. You must believe. And, you must go another way.

CONCLUSION: Many of us know a lot about Jesus, and we still want to know more. From the magi, we learn we must seek to worship him. When we learn this is a gift of faith from the Lord, we will also learn he will always provide a way to this faith—a way to a life of grace—of repentance and mercy. On this Christmas Eve, accept this gift—accept the joy of seeing the face of Jesus.

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