

Wise Men Consultants
Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Perhaps you remember this ad for Sprint: A farmer, in his corral, is wiping his brow in disbelief. There, milling about looking for feed, are 200 dachshunds. As though reading his mind, Sprint's trench-coated cell phone specialist tells the rancher that the problem may be his cell phone. "What did you say?" he asks. "I ordered 200 oxen and got 200 dachshunds!" "Hmm. Static," says the Sprint guy before a dachshund stampede follows.

The wise men could have used a cell phone in their day. Somehow while on the way to meet baby Jesus, they lost their reception. Stories about the wise men have been repeated through the centuries since Jesus' birth. Some say there were 12 seekers, others 6, some say 4, but most think 3 since

3 gifts were given. The Biblical narrative gives no exact number, just the plural wise MEN.

What we do know is that on their journey, they got lost, showed up at the wrong place, were late for Jesus' birth, and had to sneak home. Sounds like a low rate consultation group to be giving direction to us for a New Year. Yet incredibly with only a star to guide them, they found Jesus and in their searching and finding of Jesus, they provide three clear directions for a New Year. Today let's look at their directions for a New Year.

The first direction: Study God's Word. Seek God's direction for your life. Today's story begins in Matthew 2:1-2. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea when Herod was king. After Jesus' birth wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the one who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star rising and have come to worship him." They could not have made the connection if they had not been studying the Old Testament prophets!

A little 3.5-year old boy named Matthew was eating an apple in the back seat of the car, when he asked, "Daddy, why is my apple turning brown?" "Because," his father explained, "after you ate the skin off, the meat of the apple came into contact with the air which caused it oxidize thus changing its molecular structure and turning it into a different color."

There was a long silence. Then Matthew asked softly, "Daddy, are you talking to ME?"

Sometimes the Old Testament intimidates us like the father's explanation to his son. But when we listen to what God says, we discover it is in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before Jesus is born that God says, "The king of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem." God's Word is the map that shows the way to Christ, or more importantly that Christ is already working within us and in our lives before we see that he is there. It was this God who had provided the star, the prophecy, and the place where his Son would be found, worshipped, and adored. In searching the scriptures, the Jews knew where the child was to be born, so they tell the wise men: "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly: It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land, no longer bringing up the rear. From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

God's Word still provides lasting guidance

and direction. In God's Word we meet Jesus on every page. As followers of Christ, this is where He leads us to meet Him, learn of Him and experience His love. I've learned that in studying God's Word, I can seek and find God's direction for my life each day.

The second direction is: Worship.

Remember your priorities – God is number one, so praise Him. The wise men came to worship Jesus with a great desire in their hearts. They were men on a mission. They come to Jerusalem and say “We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

We have, at times, a strong desire for something. We call it a craving. Pregnant women are famous for them, but most of us have them. God places such an intense desire within us for His Son Jesus Christ. It may come in a search for meaning in life, for some sense of purpose or peace, or a realization life is more than what happens on this earth. It may be a brush with death, but God places somehow, some way, some where an intense desire to know his Son, Jesus Christ. These wise men would not be denied, they had come to not only see the King of the Jews, but to worship him. And finally we are told “They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him.”

To worship means to express love to God, and in their worship before the Christ child, they hit their knees. They bowed down and worship. At this point, they have more size than the Christ child, more intellect, more wealth, and yet somehow they realize the priority of worshipping this one born King of the Jews, and they worship and bow down. Worship is coming into the presence of God and recognizing that He is the one of ultimate worth and value in life. That means worship of God takes top priority in my day, more important than my screens, more important than work, more important than sports, or shopping. Coming to worship whether it is in a weekend service or on the job expresses and experiences God as the number one priority in my life.

The third direction is: Offer. Give God gifts that reflect His worth.

In worship, they first gave themselves as they bow down. Then they gave their gifts. Such worship and offering flows out of an attitude of joy.

One of the amazing catastrophe true stories

story tells about an Australian mother with 2 young boys. As a tsunami hit, they were being pulled out likely to drown. She realized she could only hold on to save one son. But which one do you pick in a moment's notice -- the 5-year-old or the 2-year-old? Which would you choose?

She chooses the younger son, hoping that the oldest will somehow survive. As she let go. She sacrificed her older son, so that the younger son could live. Miraculously, the older son grabbed a piece of wreckage and eventually floated to safety. Incredible story!

There is another incredible story at work as the wise men come, of even greater proportions than a tsunami. God had to choose you or His first-born son. Who should live? Who should die? He gave His Son to be born and to die that you and I might live. Miraculously, this firstborn son though crucified, rises from the dead, and offers to all people to be God's sons and daughters and to receive the gift of life.

From our own Christmas giving we recognize that the gift is not nearly as important as the motivation for giving. What we offer reflects the worth we place on God. We may think whatever gifts we have to give to the Christ Child are useless and insignificant, yet they reveal the worth we see with God as the source of our life. “When they entered the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. So they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

The gifts the wise men bring were given not to impress with the wise men's financial strength, but in response to their worship of God. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are not your usual baby shower gifts – not in our day or in Jesus' day. They were not only gifts of great value and cost, but also gifts of great meaning. The gift of GOLD is the Gift for ROYALTY. Gold was a gift given to a king. A reminder that Jesus is not only a king of the Jews, but also the king of the world. The gift of FRANKINCENSE is the Gift for GOD. It is the incense burned in sacrifice, leaving a pleasing aroma to lift high unto the heavens, in praise of God. The gift is a reminder that is not just another baby, but God himself has come into the world. The gift of MYRRH is the Gift for BURIAL. Myrrh is the kind of spice used when burying a body.

Already at Christmas, there is a foreshadowing there is more to Jesus life than his birth, there is the sacrifice of his life to give us life on Good Friday, and the life restored and resurrected on Easter.

So let me encourage you to take a few moments this day to set some growth goals for a New Year:

Time in God's Word, this year I will Set a goal. Follow the guide included in our monthly new, or use something else. Ask someone to be your accountability partner. When you get into God's Word, the Holy Spirit strengthens your relationship with Jesus, who wants to be the Lord of your life.

Worship, this year, I will ... What is your goal to be in worship on weekends this year? In what other ways, will you take time to bow down before God as the number one priority in your life? What areas of worship will lead you to bow the knee? What areas do you need to watch out for that interferes with making God number one in your life?

Offer. This year I will ... What gifts will you offer that reflects Christ's value to you? We give back to God because He is the source of all that we have and am. If you haven't begun the adventure of tithing, of giving 10% of your income to God, let the adventure begin. If you have special talents, look for ways to put them to work. Offer your gifts. Offer yourself.

As the New Year begins, let's not merely make resolutions in the areas of studying God's Word, worship and offering, but to keep resolutions this year. It's what wise men, women, and children do. Amen.

Philip Tesch
January 8, 2017
North Highlands, California