

WISE PEOPLE STILL GO TO BETHLEHEM
Matthew 2:1-12

Christmas Day Message
December 25, 2012
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The story of the Wisemen coming to see the baby Jesus is a familiar one. These men may have been astrologers who had noticed something unusual in the skies and were drawn to follow the bright star that appeared.

They may have been nobility, kings if you will, who knew in their hearts that a new and different kind of king had been born. Yet whoever these men were the Bible calls them Wisemen...that the Wisemen went to Bethlehem.

And today wise people still go to Bethlehem. They still take time to meet Jesus face to face. They still bow down and worship him faithfully in church each week. Oh, these wise people are not necessarily ones we would call sophisticates, know-it-alls, or the stuffed shirts. Rather, they are people who are very humble in their wisdom because they know that only in Jesus is there real truth.

What we need to be reminded of, I believe, is that the wisest people in this world are not necessarily the ones who have the most academic degrees; not the ones who have studied under certain well-known teachers; not even the ones who received the best grades. In the case of the Christmas story it was also people like the Shepherds who were drawn to the stable.

Now the Shepherds were considered to be the unsophisticated class of people. They were the common workers of the world at that time. They were always close to poverty in that they had little money or possessions. And yet the angels proclaimed the news of Jesus' birth first to them, and these wise people went to the stable to worship the Christ-child.

I remember my first community where I was called to be pastor, Maynard, MN, how some of the members of the two churches I served were ones who had only completed the 8th grade in school. They had not completed high school but had rather left school to work full time with their fathers and mothers on the farm. This was not an uncommon occurrence 60 or 70 years ago.

And yet the thing that I learned very fast in that community was that even though some of these people did not get very far in school, that a number of them were very, very wise. These wise people were ones who had a good understanding of life. They were ones who had learned well from experience. They knew what it meant to help their neighbors.

They also understood very well that their whole life depended on God in the growth of their crops and in the care of their families. They were the ones who had the wisdom to worship Jesus each and every Sunday. They knew that all their blessings, as well as the real and lasting truth, are found only in Jesus Christ.

Yes, my friends, wise people are the ones who still go to Bethlehem. They are still the ones who look to Jesus for truth. They are the ones who still worship and serve him faithfully. Yet there are people today, unfortunately, who somehow think of this message of Jesus as being too simple, too child-like.

There are some who claim that the message of Jesus is all a myth because it does not make sense to their quote “intellectual” minds. There are some, as I have heard it expressed, who claim that Christians are all simple minded and unsophisticated for even bothering to worship a little baby born in a manger; for believing in Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

I remember the story the late Dr. Gerhard Frost, one of my seminary professors, told about Albert Einstein. Dr. Frost happened to live near Einstein on one of his seminary sabbaticals when he studied at Princeton.

He learned from a custodian at the university who cleaned Einstein’s classroom how everyday there were many problems and equations that filled the blackboard. And everyday written next to them were the words, “Please erase.”

Down in the corner of the blackboard, however, there was the equation, $2+2=4$ and next to it was written, “Do not erase!” The great Albert Einstein knew that all the equations in the world, all the problem solving abilities, mean absolutely nothing at all if one does not first know the most simple equation.

And this, of course, is also why Christmas is so important. All our theology, all our great thinking is nothing if we fail to go to Bethlehem. We cannot forget about God’s gift to us in the manger.

Dr. Karl Barth was a Swiss theologian who is considered one of the greatest Christian scholars to ever live. One time he was asked, “Dr. Barth, you have written many books on Christian theology. Can you summarize in one sentence the chief message of Christianity?”

“Yes I can,” replied Dr. Barth. “It is from an old song my mother used to sing to me as a child; ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’” Karl Barth knew that wise people always go to Bethlehem. He knew that the greatest knowledge in the world is absolutely nothing without Jesus and the love he brings.

And those who want to be wise today; those who want to learn the great truths; those who want to find meaning and purpose need to still go to Bethlehem and hear the witness of the angels: *“For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

These past few years a number of major magazines have featured articles on how baby boomers, those born from 1946 to 1964, are searching for true meaning in their lives. Many are looking for some religious or spiritual experience that helps them make sense of their lives and gives

them some answers to their questions. They are looking for a wisdom and foundation that is deeper than the superficial promises of this world.

The problem, however, is that so many are looking for meaning in places other than in Jesus Christ. It is the reason why some have termed that these past years have been some of the most spiritual in history—but they have not been the most Christian.

The only real and lasting truth, my friends, is that wise people need to still go to Bethlehem and to the message of Jesus. Only Jesus gives the true answers, purposes and meaning for life. True life is found in Jesus' example of love and service to others.

I don't know if any of you have any presents or toys at home this morning that still need to be assembled. One thing I know from experience is that understanding the directions and getting these things together so that they actually work is not always easy.

I still remember sometimes when I was a child how I had parts strewn all around and how the assembly of a certain toy seemed chaotic and out of control. But then my father or mother would sit down beside me on the floor, would read the directions carefully, and would show me how it is done.

And that is the message of Christmas. God looked on this world and how we were messing up our lives. He saw how we were trying to put the wrong pieces together. He saw how we were trying to make everything work right.

And so he came to us in his son, Jesus, to sit beside us and show us how it is done. He came to help guide us in putting the right pieces together so that we might have the abundant life.

How about you and I this morning, my friends? Are we trying to put the pieces of our lives together by ourselves? Are we trying to rely on our own intellect or power? Well, just remember that truly wise people still go to Bethlehem. And this happens not just on Christmas but throughout the whole year.

Remember, my friends, truly wise people look to Jesus for truth and life. For in Jesus Christ there is the wonderful assurance of grace and salvation. A blessed and Christ-filled Christmas and New Year to you all!