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“Wise Men Fall Down and Worship Him”

Text: Matthew 2:1-12 (Ephesians 3:1-12)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus is a cherished part of the Christmas story. It is sometimes called the “Christmas of the Gentiles.” It has been included and memorialized in many of the well-known and best-loved hymns and carols. Our manger scenes would seem empty without the three well-dressed men and their camels. And the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh can be named by many, even if they don’t really know what those latter two are.

But as well-known and treasured as this story is, there is a lot of mystery to it as well, perhaps adding to its mystique. *For who were these guys?* Wise men is the title most often used. **Magi** is the biblical word - but what does that mean? Astrologer? Magician? King? Something else? All have been suggested. *And where did they come from?* Babylon? The Orient? **From the east** is all we’re told. *And how many were there?* Three is the typical answer, assuming each brought one of the three gifts mentioned. But again, we’re not told. We just know they are *plural* - more than one.

But maybe the mystery is there because they are not really who this story is all about. Just as the other part of the Christmas story is not really about the shepherds and the angels. It’s about Jesus. And as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, that Jesus came not just for the Jews only, but for all people. That all people be heirs of the kingdom and partakers of the Gospel by grace through faith in Jesus. So God brings Jews and Gentiles - shepherds and wise men - to see and worship Him in His Son. To see in Him the King and Saviour of the world.

And so really, the Christmas story of the shepherds and the wise men has continued down through the ages, as God has led a countless number of people through the centuries **to fall down and worship Him**. Including you. For you it wasn’t an angel or a star that led you, but it was God’s doing nonetheless. Through other means - His Word, or preaching. But you are here just as they were. And you see Him by faith just as they did. For they didn’t see a baby that was spectacular - who was glowing or had a halo around His head or that miraculously didn’t cry or soil a diaper - they saw a baby boy just like every other baby boy. But a baby boy that *by faith* they believed was different than every other baby boy. For this baby boy was not just Mary’s son, but God’s Son. The King and Saviour of the world. And they fell down and worshipped Him.

And that's why *I'm* going to call them wise men and run with that title for them today. Not because of who they were or because I think that's the best translation of "Magi" (it's probably not) - **but because of what they did**; because they fell down and worshipped Him. Because the Scriptures tell us *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10). That's what wisdom is. That's what wisdom does.

Now, were those Magi smart guys? Well-educated? Have a high IQ? Probably. But knowledge is not the same as wisdom. There are a lot of smart, well-educated people today who aren't very wise. And the opposite is true as well - there are a lot of people who never finished high school who are very wise. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing. In fact, maybe you can say wisdom is knowing how to use knowledge. And when not to use it. For just because you know how to do something doesn't mean you should. In fact, that's led to a lot of troubles, hasn't it? In the world and in our lives. A lot of evil has come from knowledge not rightly used.

And so wisdom is something quite different than knowledge, and, the Scriptures teach us, comes from the Lord. And so, for example, science has learned how to clone; it has that knowledge. *But should we?* Doctors know how to do in vitro fertilization - *but should we?* Industry knows how to make weapons of mass destruction - *but should we?* Or let's keep it simpler and a bit closer to home: people know how to post embarrassing photos of themselves on the internet - *but should they?* Teenagers know how to get around the rules their parents make - *but should they?* And I'm sure you can think up myriad more examples . . . but you get the point.

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* How we *use* our knowledge and determine what should or should not be done comes from Him. And when we use our knowledge apart from God's wisdom and His Word - that is what the Bible calls foolishness. And there have been some very smart people who have been very, very foolish.

So what made the wise men wise was that when they entered the house of Mary and Joseph that day and saw the child Jesus, *they fell down and worshipped Him*. They didn't say: this is just a house and not a palace; these are just common folk and not royalty, and so this child must not be a king. No. Not their knowledge and not what the world teaches is so drove what they did - they listened to the Word of God, even though it may not have made a lot of earthly, worldly, sense. This child? *This child? And they fell down and worshipped Him.* Wise men.

And so you too. You've probably heard the line "Wise men still seek Him." But real wise men know that the most important thing in the Christmas story is that **God has come to seek us**. It was God who came to Adam and Eve after they hid from Him and from each other after they sinned. It was God who sent His prophets to call His people to repentance. It was God who sent the star to lead the wise men to Jesus. And it's God who

comes to you - not just with the story of His Son, but with His Gospel and His Spirit and His love and the promise of His forgiveness. That you not just know the story, but that you too *fall down and worship Him*, and receive from Him the gifts He comes to bring you. The gifts that are here for you. This Church your Bethlehem, and this altar your manger.

So what you've brought here today with you are not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but your sins of thought, word, and deed. *Not very good gifts!* the world would say. But, oh, they are! They are exactly what your Saviour wants. For He has come to bear them for you and take them away from you. He wants you to cling to Him and not to them, and receive from Him His forgiveness, life, and salvation. For really, everything else you have is His anyway. He's the one who gave it to you. And He doesn't really need anything else you can give Him. Not even the offering you give each week. You give it not because He needs it, but because you need to give it. You need to let go of it and everything on this earth, *and fall down and worship Him*. **Worship** - which means to receive from Him His gifts; what He has come to give to you. And that is more precious to Him than any gold, frankincense, or myrrh could ever be.

The world calls all that foolishness. And sometimes we think it too, thinking that we have to come up with new ways to worship Him; ways to look good and wise in the eyes of the world. Nope. That would be like the wise men leaving Mary and Joseph's house, thinking that couldn't possibly be the One.

So instead, it is the Word of God that determines what we do, how we think, and that teaches us true wisdom. The Word of God that says *all that believe and are baptized shall be saved* (Mark 16:16). The Word of God that says *I forgive you all your sins* (John 20:22). The Word of God that says *This is My Body* and *This is My Blood* (Luke 22:19-20). And to this the foolish say: Nah! But wise men say: Amen! And fall down and worship Him, opening ears and hearts and mouths to confess our sins and receive these gifts. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

And then this wisdom flows out from here in your lives as well. For you live by the Word of God and this wisdom not only here, but in all your life and in all your decisions. It shapes how you live and how you use the knowledge of the world. Such knowledge is a wonderful gift of God that comes from believers and non-believers alike. Science, math, history, art, music, and much more. Learn it! Appreciate it! But be wise men, too. Know how to use such knowledge; what are its boundaries and limits. What it can tell us and *what it can't*. And so don't fall down and worship it - fall down and worship your Saviour, born for you, crucified for you, risen for you, and now here for you with all the fruits and gifts that He won for you.

That doesn't mean you're going to look wise now; in fact, many will think you quite foolish. Rubes. Weak-minded. Easily duped. But as the angel kept saying through the

Christmas story: *Do not be afraid*. For when Jesus comes again in glory, all will be revealed - who were the wise and who were the foolish ones (Matthew 25). And on that day, Daniel says: *those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever* (Daniel 12:3).

So next time you see a nativity scene - with Mary and Joseph and Jesus, angels and shepherd and wise men - know where you are: with the wise men. For the Christmas of the Gentiles - that's your Christmas too.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.