

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Title: “The Joy of Seeking Christ”

INTRODUCTION

At the birth of Jesus there was an explosion on joy. The angel announced to the fearful shepherds:

Luke 2:10 - “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

The reason joy is such a huge part of the birth of Christ is because it is such a huge part of the life the Christ came to give us. And the joy of Christmas is nothing less than the joy of knowing and loving Christ.

1 Peter 1:8 - Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

“Inexpressible and glorious joy...” Does that characterize your life? This joy is ours, even in the face of suffering. And as others see this joy in us it causes them to wonder about the source of that joy, and we have the opportunity to point them to our Lord.

QUOTE: Martin Lloyd-Jones in his book *Spiritual Depression* says this: “I have no hesitation in asserting again that one of the reasons why the Christian Church counts for so little in the modern world is that so many Christians are in this condition of (spiritual depression) ... The greatest need of the hour is a revived and joyful Church ... Unhappy Christians are, to say the least, a poor recommendation of the Christian faith.” Why would anyone want to be close to a God who made His people somber and joyless?

So we’ve talked about the joy of *savoring* Christ, the joy of *serving* God and the joy of *sharing* Christ. Today I want to conclude this Christmas series talking about the joy of *seeking* Christ. It’s interesting how God puts a longing in our hearts to seek Christ.

The New Testament tells us of some very unlikely characters who came seeking the Savior and it resulted in their great joy. Turn with me to Matthew 2:1. This incident occurs sometime later. We’re going to see that Joseph, Mary and Jesus are now in a house, not a barn. So this could possibly have occurred when Jesus was a few months old, some believe even older. Read Matthew 2:1-2.

Matthew (in vv.3-8) goes on to explain that this created a stir in Jerusalem from King Herod on down to the people. So the king calls the religious leaders together insisting that they tell him about this Christ who was to be born. The Jewish leaders know their Bible and they tell Herod that the OT prophecies indicated that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. Herod is intrigued and he calls the Magi back in wanting to know exactly when the star appeared. Then he gives them a strange order. “Go and find this child so I may worship him.” Interesting! Let’s pick up reading. Read vv. 9-12.

It’s interesting how God puts a longing in our hearts to seek Christ. It’s not something that comes to us naturally. It is part of the awakening that God does in the human heart that causes us to seek Him ... and the seeking always ends in joy.

1. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CAUSE US TO SEEK CHRIST (vv.1-9).

These "magi," who are called "wise men" in the KJV, have mystified Bible students for ages. They seem somewhat out of place in the Christmas story.

ILLUSTRATION – It’s sort of like being photo bombed. That is when someone sneaks into your picture before you know it, and a perfectly framed photo ends up having someone standing in front or behind making a goofy face. That’s what it means to be photo bombed. And we might feel that way about these wise guys who seem to just sort of

jump into the picture of the biblical account of the birth of Christ. But of course it is no mistake. Their story is here for a reason.

Matthew's Gospel gives very little information about them: who they were, where they came from, how they arrived ... all a big mystery. They show up, leave their gifts, and then they're gone.

There are many "myths" or misconceptions about these men, some of them reflected in the Christmas carol we sing this time of the year: "We three kings of Orient are. Bearing gifts we traverse afar - field and fountain, moor and mountain - Following yonder star."

- First, we're not told in Scripture there were three of them. People presume that there were three of them because there are three gifts mentioned. There could have been just two or ten. We're not told.
- They were probably not from the "Orient." More than likely they were from the lands just to the east of Palestine, what is present-day Iran.
- They were probably not "kings." They were, however, associated with royalty. They were probably priests of an ancient religion known as Zoroastrianism, which had some similarities to Judaism, outwardly at least. They were big into astrology which explains their fascination with this star that suddenly appears.

But something drove these men from a different land and culture to seek the Messiah, the King of the Jews. What were these circumstances? We're not told specifically, but if we stop to think about it we can piece the picture together.

God probably revealed Himself to them just like He does to all whom He draws to Himself:

- Through Scripture – Where did they get access to the Scripture? These Magi are from the very region where five to six hundred years before God sent His people, the Jews, into exile. Of course some of them took their Scriptures with them ... perhaps portions of the OT we have today. These Scriptures contained prophecies of the coming Messiah.
- Through nature – God used His creation to guide them in their search. The Bible says that the heavens declare His glory, and I believe, due to the unique behavior of this star, that it was the Shekinah glory of God revealed in a star, like when the people of Israel were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
- But that still leaves a big question. There are no specific prophecies about the coming of the Messiah related to a star (except perhaps a vague reference in Numbers). Perhaps God did for the Magi what He is doing today for many in Muslim regions of the world ... revealing Himself in dreams that cause them to seek Christ.

So you can see that the real Seeker here was God. This is an account of God drawing some very unlikely people to Himself.

2. THE JOY THAT COMES FROM FINDING JESUS (v.10)

Matthew 2:10 - When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Literally "they rejoiced with great joy." It's the same words used in Luke 2:10 ... "Good News of great joy..." The Amplified Bible says they were "thrilled with ecstatic joy." The word literally means "mega-joy." I remind you that this joy is an internal experience that comes from the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives, then it overflows in an external way as we glorify God in our praise and gratitude.

If you look carefully you notice there three kinds of people represented here:

- **Those who are desperate for the activity of God (vv.1-2).** The Magi here in Matthew 2 are examples of those whose hunger and thirst for God is awakened by a loving God and they seek for Him with a desperation that will ultimately be satisfied.
- **Those who are threatened by the activity of God (v.3).**

v.3 - When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

After all, King Herod was given, at his coronation, the title, "King of the Jews." Why are these guys snooping around asking about another "King of the Jews." And we see later that this threat caused Herod to do some atrocious things to secure his position ... the killing of children.

- **Those who are insensitive to the activity of God (vv.4-6)**

Now this is flat-out amazing to me. But the more I think about it the more I see it can so easily happen to most of us here in this place today. Do you see what happens? The king wants a report ... and he wants it immediately. Where is the Messiah to be born? The Jewish leaders know their Bibles well. They pull out their "Super-Saint Study Bible" and they say, "See, it's right here. Bethlehem is where the Messiah is to be born. That's where it will all come down."

And yet where are they? They're not in Bethlehem; they're in Jerusalem. Why were they not camped out in Bethlehem, watching for the activity of God where it is predicted to happen? Particularly since some guys have shown up saying, "We saw His star in the east." Why didn't they jump up and run to Bethlehem? Why are they still sitting there in Jerusalem?

My suspicion is that they were so locked in their religious rut, so desensitized by a religious routine, that they no longer had any day to day communion with God. It was like they were on another planet, spiritually speaking.

I'm amazed that in this story there are so-called pagan people who are hungry for God and travel perhaps hundreds of miles to Bethlehem from Persia, and that there are people, supposedly God's people, who are so out-of-touch with what God is doing that they would not go ten miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to rejoice in what God was doing.

I know how easy it is for us as Christians to get stuck in our rut of going to church, but the joy is gone because our love for Christ has grown cold and we no longer seek Him like we once did. The joy will return when you allow your life to be captivated by God and you are caught up in what He is doing in this world.

Well, the Holy Spirit is teaching us one more thing here.

3. THE LOVE THAT FLOWS IN WORSHIPPING JESUS (vv.11-12)

Joy always comes mixed with love. Remember...

1 Peter 1:8 - Though you have not seen him, you love him... and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...

Now this love flows from:

- **My head**

It's clear that these seekers had applied their minds to the search of spiritual things. The Bible tells us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

- **My heart**

They allowed their hearts to be moved.

v.10 - When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Adore Jesus with your heart. Let your heart fill up with joy.

- **My hand**

v.11a - On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

"bowed down and worshipped" - literally "to fall down." This is the humility displayed in worship.

v.11b - Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Joy always causes us to open our hands to release our treasures to God. Joyless people are stingy, selfish people.

And giving should reflect our worship as we understand who Christ is:

- **Gold** - a gift fit for a king. In their land it was fitting to approach a king with the gift of gold. They didn't know it but they were affirming that Jesus was, indeed, King Jesus.
- **Frankincense** - this was a costly perfume used in temple worship ... incense. They didn't know it but they were affirming that Jesus was our Great High Priest.
- **Myrrh** - a strange gift. Like giving someone a coffin for Christmas. This is a burial spice. They didn't know it but they were affirming that Jesus was the Savior of the world who would die for our sins.

Joy and love and giving all go together.

CONCLUSION

Now at the risk of sounding too "Christmas card-ish" I want you to look again at v.12.

Matthew 2:12 - And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When you experience Christ in this way you can never go back the way you came. We were created to worship, not ourselves, not false, lifeless idols, but God Himself. Nothing else brings true meaning and purpose to life. And when God awakens the longing in your heart to seek Christ, you will find in Him the joy that you really need. Your life will never be the same.

Now I want us to go from the beginning of Christ's life on earth to the end of His life on earth. In fact it was the night before Jesus was to be crucified. He gathered with His disciples to share in the Passover meal that He would infuse with new meaning. The Good News of great joy that would be for all the people would come at a very high price that only God could pay.

LORD'S SUPPER

Matthew 26:26 - While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Matthew 26:27 - Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."

Matthew 26:28 - This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.