

## "Rise Up, and Follow the Star"

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A family was driving into Fredericksburg, Virginia, for a Christmas season get-together. As they passed by the Presbyterian Church there was a manger scene in the front. The youngest boy asked his mother; *"What is that?"*

*"That's Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus, there in the manger".* A few blocks further on they passed the Methodist Church, where a scene was depicting the journey of the Wise Men. *"Who are they?"* the young boy asked. His mother replied, *"Those are the Wise Men, who are looking for the Baby Jesus."* To that the boy observed, *"Well, they're not all that wise, they won't find him there, He's down the street at that other church."*

Open to Matthew 2. The annual observance of the birth of Jesus, our Savior is almost over. Epiphany, which we're celebrating this morning which means *"to show forth"* or *"to shine out"*, is actually this coming Wednesday, January 6.

During Epiphany, the accounts of the Wise Men's visit to Bethlehem, Jesus' Baptism and His Transfiguration, show us very clearly the truth that Jesus is God come to earth!

Verses 1-6, *"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.""*

One scholar estimates The Wise Men's trip must have taken 4 months, not including the time to prepare for the journey. Even though the wise men had followed the star from Babylon or Persia to Jerusalem, a distance of about 1,000 miles. Even though they had seen the star and had researched, they really didn't know where to find Him!

Because all their research was calling for a king to be born, it only made sense to them to stop in Jerusalem where the current king was ruling. The chief priests and scribes explained to the Wise Men what Scripture said would be the place for this important birth.

Herod, seeing an opportunity to get rid of this newborn king, gave the wise men a plan to follow for him to find the newborn and make it easy to eliminate Him.

Verses 9-12, *"After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down*

*and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."*

Many legends have grown up around the story of these Wise Men, one of which is that they were "three kings." The Gospel account doesn't say there were three of them, the idea of three kings came from the three gifts that were given - one king for each gift.

Names and personal descriptions of each Wise Man have even been assigned by some. Caspar – a young, beardless man, with a ruddy complexion. Balthazar - a bit older man, dark-skinned, with a new beard. Melchior – an old, grey haired man with a long beard.

The truth is, we really don't know who they are. Were they really kings? Probably not. Matthew calls them "Wise Men from the East, or Magi." They were probably astrologers, which explains why they would have noticed, and then been so excited about finding this unusual star in the sky. The idea that heavenly signs marked the births and deaths of great leaders was widely accepted in the Eastern culture.

What these men saw intrigued them, and excited them enough to leave their homeland to follow this star. For these Wise Men, this was the most important journey they would ever take!

These Magi made a dramatic commitment of time to search for this new King. Beloved, the gift of time is one of the most precious things we can ever give to Jesus!

There are some wonderful messages we can learn from these Wise Men. These men, met God in the midst of their normal daily living. God's not limited to meeting with us in a certain place, or at a certain hour.

God can and does speak to you anywhere and at any time. This story tells us to be constantly prepared, and constantly alert for what God's prepared for you in this life.

The Wise Men could have noted the appearance of the star in their charts, and done nothing more. They could have indicated that this phenomenon probably heralded something very special, and then gone back to their normal lives.

Instead, they committed to their conviction, and they put feet to their faith! When God presents you with a new opportunity, are you willing to get up and begin a journey of faith?

The story of the Wise Men helps us to see that there is something special, something remarkable that awaits us at the end of the journey.

So, what's God calling us to do as His people? We don't need to guess. The answers are found in the pages of this Book. Scripture's very clear. It told the Magi where to go and they were back on course.

They found Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea, and they laid before Him their gifts, and they worshiped Him. There's a lesson for us in the gifts that were given. In fact, it seems as if God Himself had inspired their offerings.

The Gold, represented His royalty. Frankincense, an expensive resin that was burned in the temple is a symbol of prayer, spoke of His divinity. And Myrrh, another expensive resin that was used in embalming, represented His death for you and me. These gifts were given with adoration of this newborn King.

But as religious as their gifts were, they also had a practical value the Magi may not have even realized. Look at verse 13, *“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”*

These gifts allowed Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to survive in a foreign country with no family, or source of income!

Just like the Magi, be ready to meet God in the midst of your everyday activities, and then rise up and follow the star. Be willing to give a commitment to Him. Be willing to put feet to your faith; and rise up and follow the star!

Scripture is God’s Word. Let His Word fill your very being in this New Year, and rise up and follow the star! Where’s the light of that star leading you ? Be open to the transforming power and leading of the Holy Spirit!

Prepare your heart for action, and Rise up and Follow His star! Let others see the Light and Power of Jesus Christ, the world’s Savior in you and through you!