LEARN WISDOM FROM THE WISE MEN

1. Wisdom confronts us
2. Wisdom comforts us
3. Wisdom compels us

The visit of the Magi, or wise men, is so familiar. We might breeze by it figuring we have already know it well enough. Or we become sidetrack with unanswerable questions: How many wise men were there? Where did they come from? How did they know what the star meant? What exactly was the star?

Today, though, let's revisit the story. And although you know it well, we can still gain much wisdom as we contemplate these familiar events and apply them to our lives and put them into practice! We are not going to speculate on those unanswerable questions. Rather today, let's **LEARN WISDOM FROM THE WISE MEN**. This wisdom confronts us, comforts us, and compels us.

Those wise men were certainly people of means. Look at the gifts they brought: **gold**, **incense**, **myrrh** - not stuff that you would pick up at the Dollar Store. They were no ordinary travelers. Look at the stir their arrival in Jerusalem caused. They were prominent enough to have an audience with King Herod himself. I think it is safe to say that whatever this world had to offer - wealth, wisdom, influence, power, fame, prestige - all was in the reach of these wise men.

But none of that could satisfy what they needed most: how could they be right with God? No amount of wealth could buy him off. No amount of wisdom could persuade him to excuse our sinfulness. No amount of fame could attract his kindness toward us. How could they be right with God?

Even before they set out on that journey, they knew that their own desire, effort, or skill could not bring them to God. Rather he would come to us. He would come through the Jewish people, through King David's family line. He would come to bring us into his kingdom. He would come and that star announced his arrival. So on seeing the star they pursued their relationship with God to honor their newborn King. They left the comforts of their homes. They made the hard and dangerous journey. Even with all their wealth, traveling in those days was no luxury cruise. They spared no cost in this pursuit to honor this King. And when the clear Word of God, recorded through the prophet Micah, directed them to the small town of Bethlehem, they did not turn up their nose or try to find a more **reasonable** interpretation. They took God at his Word and were not put off by the smallness of Bethlehem or the humbleness of the house that Mary and Joseph were staying in.

How that confronts me with my own spiritual laziness and shallow satisfaction with the earthly! What do you pursue in life: a secure future, good relationships, getting ahead, having enough, being happy with what you do have, finding joy in the beauty around you, living healthy, learning more? All those things can good, God-pleasing pursuits.

Yet when I compare my heart to the wise men, a grave deficit inside confronts me. A large part of my heart is satisfied to stay where I am spiritually, even though I have plenty of time and energy to pursue other things. Those pursuits are not wrong in and of themselves, but they so easily run ahead of pursuing my relationship with God. It is so much easier to measure progress and success in earthly pursuits and to be put off by the humbleness of the spiritual. But that would be like the wise men looking up at the star back home and saying: **Look, God has announcing the birth of our Savior. What good news! We will honor him for this hour and then get back to our daily business.**
But what did they do? They left behind the comfortable and pursued their relationship with this new-born King. How that confronts you and me with our spiritual laziness and lack of zeal for the Lord! This spiritual laziness deprives us of more fully enjoying the true comfort Jesus brings. It deprives of that joy that overflowed from the wise men when they saw the star again after leaving Herod. Yes, dear friends, the wisdom that exposes our spiritual laziness confronts us so that we see all the more how much we need the wisdom that comforts us, truly comforts us.

**Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?** the Magi asked. But take careful note: the Magi were not Jews. The Lord had chosen the forefathers of the Jews – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - to carry the promise of the Savior. He had rescued the Jews out of Egypt and gave them his law at Mt. Sinai. He had established the Jews and given them David's family as their kings. He had sent his prophets to the Jews and the Scriptures were written down in their language. No wonder the Magi referred to him as the King of Jews.

But remember the Magi were not Jews, yet they came to worship the King of the Jews. Jesus was certainly born a Jew from David's family. He came according to the prophecies given by God to the Jews. Yet he came not only for the Jews. He came for those Magi. He came for you and for me as well.

Here is the wisdom that comforts: When my heart accuses me for the failure I am, when the guilt of my spiritual laziness exposes how weak and helpless I am, when the futility of my earthly pursuits brings home my own worthlessness, and the hopelessness of hell envelops me, then what comfort to know that Jesus came not only for the Jews, not only for the Magi, but even for me! And he came for you. What wisdom that is - the only wisdom that truly comforts!

Linger with the wise men as you kneel in that Bethlehem house. Here is your Savior. Here is your God who came to rescue you. Here is Love incarnate. Here is your Hope, your Salvation. For just as the wise men beheld Jesus in the flesh, so also he brings you his body and blood in the Lord's Supper for you to eat and to drink. You see, he wants you personally to know and believe with all sureness that he came for you. What wisdom!

What comfort this wisdom brings! This good news moves us, you could even say compels us, to honor our King.

Please do not misunderstand that word compel. I am not using it in the sense of forcing us against our will, coercing us, driving us like slaves, making us do it under compulsion. It is not that in any way at all. Rather I am using it like St Paul did when he wrote: **For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: one died for all; therefore, all died. And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.** What wisdom! Christ's love compels, moves, motivates, empowers us. His love transforms our will so that we willing, gladly, eagerly want to. His love strengthens us, moving us to act, propelling us forward. It is compelling in the best sense of the word.

Look at the reaction of the wise men to his love. They gave their treasures to him and then followed the Lord's command when he told them to go home another route and not return to Herod. That is how they honored their King because of his great love that came to save them.

So also, my friends, that wisdom which comforts us with the good news that this baby is our God and Savior, that same wisdom powerfully moves us, compels us, to eagerly, gladly, willingly give him our best and dearest gifts and to follow the Lord's direction, obeying his commands revealed in the Scriptures. That is how we honor our King.

Even as we pursue the earthly things the Lord gives us to do, we want to do it in a way
that gives our King the best and follows his direction. We want him honored in all that we do whether at church, at work, at home, at school, out shopping, out fishing, dining out, playing sports, playing music, playing games, exercising, watching TV, and everything else. We want to honor him in all our pursuits because of his love for us.

You see, the wise men were not driven by the threat of punishment or by the promise of reward. All the motivating techniques of this world fall into one of those two categories: punishment or reward, the stick or the carrot. Other religions use those as well to motivate their followers. Many even view Christianity as motivating people with the threat of hell for bad behavior and the promise of heaven for good behavior. But that is not what the Bible teaches. That is not the wisdom that compelled the wise men or you and me.

Rather our Savior acted first. He first loved us. He first came for us. He first laid down his life in our place. He first comes to us through his Word and sacraments. And his great love that came for us changes us so that we willingly, gladly, eagerly give him our best and follow his ways, just as the wise men did. We do so, not compelled by any sort of punishment or reward, but because of his love for us. That is true wisdom.

So my friends, marvel with the wise men at this King who loved you so dearly that he came to redeem you with his blood so that now he reigns in your heart. That never grows old, no matter how often we hear it. Learn wisdom from the wise men. This wisdom knows that our sin confronts us, but Jesus' love, which is so much greater love than our sin, comforts us and compels us. What wisdom that rejoices in his love in all that we do, gladly giving him our best as we eagerly obey his commands. Amen.

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