

# what will you do with the truth?

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**Scripture Passage** Matthew 2:1-12

Imagine with me. We know them in the Christmas narrative as the magi. Each morning as they climbed on their camels to begin another day, the rising sun at their back, people stared at this strange trinity of travellers as they passed through their villages. Mothers hurriedly pushed children back into the safety of their homes in the irrational fear that even their passing through a town and looking into their eyes would leave behind the residue of some deadly incurable magic. Children are told, close your eyes! Don't look into their faces! Who knows what evil can come from merely a glance from them?

Over time they were given names that sounded as though they came from the pages of some Tolkien manuscript. Names like Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

They were driven both by a quest, and a question. Their quest was to follow a star to its destination. They came also with a question. Their extraordinary characters ask a crucial question that move us closer towards Bethlehem and forward towards faith. Where is he so that we can come and worship him?

The Gospel of Matthew records their sacred pilgrimage.

**1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."**

**3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:**

**6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'[b]"**

and woven into it is an identical inquiry that we must not fail to see. It comes from a ruler called Herod.

**7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.**

**8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As**

**soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."**

We need to understand how two different people ask exactly the same question. We want to worship Jesus, but with entirely different motives.

The magi were searching for Christ to worship him.

But Herod, a man whose heart was dark with power and riddled with fear and paranoia, he wanted to find Christ to kill him. The character of Herod reminds us that when power is insidious when it is not grounded in goodness and ultimately in God.

So Matthew says, an important line which we seldom think about, and having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the magi returned to their country by another route. We will come back to that.

So lying in the manger even as a baby is the one who not only one day will be King, but even as a baby is the one who is already king. The whole cosmos turns and pivots on who he truly is. This king is already full of grace and truth. Later he will declare that he is The Way the Truth the Life.

This trinity of travellers come to worship him as King. They come to bow to him as the truth that they have been seeking. In contrast, someone who has been given the earthy title and designation of 'king', an evil ruler called Herod, also declares his desire to come and worship him. But his words merely mask his true intent, which is not to worship him as king and truth, rather it is to murder him. King Herod cannot stand the thought of competition. Any competition and so this rival king, even when still a helpless baby, will have to be eliminated.

#### **Matthew 2: 16**

**When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.**

We seldom read this part of the narrative especially at Christmas because, frankly, it is an unpleasant and distasteful story of infanticide. It is called the slaughter of the innocents. It offends us as it should. It makes us turn away in disgust.

## **2 WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE TRUTH?**

Why is it recorded? Why is it woven into this story of how the love of God came down to touch the earth? Why is this clean and innocent story of Silent night, love's pure light, spoiled and desecrated with the cries of murder and the slaughter of children? It seems so out of place.

These two opposite responses woven into the Christmas story. The wise men seeking Jesus as king to worship him and King Herod seeking Jesus to kill him are intended to challenge us to think about how we respond today to the truth of God. Especially as it is incarnated and expressed in Jesus. The Word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

How we respond to Jesus as king and what we believe about Jesus as the truth reveals more about us than it does about him. The narrative that intertwines the question of the wise men and also the dark motives of Herod expose the state of our own heart and the condition of their world.

The same is true for us.

Whether we know it or not, each of us is on a quest. Out of his experience in nazi concentration camps Victor Frankl agreed that the search for meaning is life's fundamental pursuit. That in one way or another we are all asking, who am I and why am I here? The tragedy for many people today is not that life is too hard. It is just that life is such a bore! They have no idea why they are here! For many people in our society, they have so much to live with, and yet so little to live for! This is the recipe for a life wandering in meaninglessness. The loss of meaning slowly filters down through our society and takes its deadly toll.

Modern Western civilization is really the first society to have no agreed-on answer as to the purpose of life. In the midst of much material plenty we suffer from spiritual poverty.

God has left us clues to follow. Like a trail of breadcrumbs. And the trail begins in Bethlehem. He declares that in the ultimate sense. He is the way, truth and life. When he declared that he as the truth, then the ultimate meaning of life cannot be found apart from Jesus.

Like the search of the magi. This impassioned and relentless search for meaning for our own lives culminates and reaches its goal when we discover Jesus who defined himself as the way, the truth, the life.

This quest is more than philosophically important. It is as vital to us as the air we need to breathe. So the question is, what will we do when we reach Bethlehem? How will we respond when we come to the manger?

The wise men teach us how to respond. They teach us that we come and bring the gifts that we have carried all of our lives, and we lay them at the feet of Jesus. This is what we were made for!

But don't forget Herod! His dark motives are also there for a purpose. His evil story is left in the pages of Scripture to teach us that the struggle of our society does not come from an absence of knowledge. Rather the struggle of society stems again and again from the suppression of truth.

The dark heart of Herod is the personification of the darkness in society.

This is what Romans is describing when it says.

### **Romans 1:18**

**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.**

Perhaps as the residue of God's image in each of us, people innately know that child pornography is wrong. As we heard last Sunday about 8 year old girls in brothels in Cambodia, we know that is so so wrong. The abuse of people is unacceptable. It is just wrong to kill prostitutes in the Downtown Eastside. Polygamy does not really need to be defined and defended by the Charter of Rights. People who want these things want to satisfy the darkness within them.

The moral struggles and dilemmas we face today with their enormous social, relational and financial costs. For the most part do not stem from the absence of knowledge, rather they stem from the suppression of truth. We have a society that like Herod has sought to kill truth by suppressing it.

### **3 WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE TRUTH?**

It is this willful suppression of truth that results in an assault upon everything sacred in the pursuit of everything profane. This loss of truth, like the loss of innocence, filters down into our day-to-day lives and takes an enormous toll upon society. We so easily squander the sacred to protect the profane. We make what is holy into something ordinary. And we regard the mundane as consecrated. We sacrifice the eternal for the immediate.

But when truth is revealed and confronted, it always exposes the state of our heart. It always exposes what degree of truthfulness or darkness really exists in our own hearts. Simply put, it reveals what is in us.

Truth naturally rises in our lives. Each of us instinctively knows what is true. We have to work hard to block truth from finding its way into our hearts and lives. It takes effort to close our minds to its penetrating power. Truth never moves, never changes, rather it relentlessly reveals and exposes our intent.

So we are all on a quest, in one way or another it is a quest for meaning, a quest for purpose. It is a quest for truth. We may be like wise men, searching it out. We may be like shepherds just trying to get through another cold and dreary day in life.

We may be like a Mary and Joseph, somewhat uncertain about what lies ahead. But we join them on the road to our Bethlehem.

The ultimate question is, how do we respond this Christmas to the truth about Jesus being King?

Remember the detail in the story. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the magi returned to their country by another route.

That teaches us, when we come and meet Jesus as truth, we cannot return unchanged, untouched, unmoved. We cannot simply retrace our steps and go back to the way things were. We have to return by another way.

So their quest over and their question answered. Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar or whatever their names really were, climbed on their camels and headed back towards the sunrise. Not far out of Bethlehem, they came to a fork in the road. On

their way towards Bethlehem. they had come down the road on the right.

They paused. Without saying anything, they knew that Herod was not to be trusted. They looked at each other. Each was thinking the same thing, and so they silently turned their camels towards the road on the left, and they started for home, taking another way home.

So ask yourself: as you worship Christ this Christmas, how will the truth of Jesus this Christmas change your life?