

Sermon

Title – The Visit of the Wise Men

Matt 2: 1-12

Preached at St James' Lower Hutt

By Rev Murray Wills

5 January 2025 at 8am

May the words on my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you Lord our rock and redeemer.

Today we hear the story of the Magi visiting Jesus and bringing gifts, the kind of gifts they would have normally brought for a royal birth – the birth of a King.

When we look outside – particularly in the Hutt Valley on a clear night we will see stars, however we also have light pollution from the streetlight and other sources of light.

Who here has been to Tekapo or to the countryside in the Wairarapa and looked up at the sky?

Without light pollution the sky is spectacular. And so, it was in Jesus's day with no electricity. In the ancient world many people, particularly to the east of Palestine had developed the study of the stars and planets. They believed that everything was connected and that if something remarkable was happening on earth, you would expect to see it reflected in the heavens.

Alternatively – something remarkable in the stars must mean that a remarkable event was happening on earth.

And so it was that something remarkable happening in the sky led the 3 wise men or astrologers probably from the East following a star or heavenly event to the Baby Jesus.

Scholars have various theories of what may have been happening in the sky at that time, and one of these includes Jupiter (the royal or kingly planet and Saturn, sometimes thought to represent the Jews). Certainly, it is most likely that there was a significant celestial event scholars or wise men from the east would have had great interest in seeing where it led. Following yonder star.

Magi can refer to magicians, or astrologers, or experts in interpreting dreams among other things. They could well have been wealthy enough to bring gifts fitting of a king.

"**We Three Kings**", original title "**Three Kings of Orient**", also known as "**We Three Kings of Orient Are**" or "**The Quest of the Magi**", is a [Christmas carol](#) that was written by [John Henry Hopkins Jr.](#) in 1857.

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy Perfect Light

Or the more modern version written by John Clark:

We three kings of Orient are
One on a tractor, two in a car
One on a scooter
Tooting his hooter
Following yonder star
Oh, oh

Star of wonder
Star of light
Star of beauty, she'll be right
Star of glory, that's the story
Following yonder star . . .

As we heard in the story the Magi interpreted what they saw in the sky and before they found Jesus they visit Herod.

'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?
They say For we observed his star at its rising, and have
come to pay him homage.

This statement by the Magi is pretty explosive, especially to Herod. This is a time of violence and exploitation.

Jesus, the Wise men say is the true King of the Jews, which means Herod therefore is an imposter.

Matthew also wants us to be clear that Jesus' rule is not limited to the Jewish people, at the heart of many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, were predictions that his rule would bring God's justice and peace to the whole world.

A new messianic time or beginning of a time associated in Matthew with healing, inclusion, restoration, gathering, and peace. Certainly, a worrying time for Herod and his sons who would follow him and they attempt to hold onto power, and when Herod the great dies, the chief priests and scribes too will emerge as Jesus' primary adversaries.

It's not surprising that the 3 wise men after a dream eventually left by another way and did not tell Herod where Jesus was.

There was a strange expectation at that time of the coming of a King, even the Roman's knew about it. There was a belief by the Jewish people that about that time one from their country would become governor of the habitable earth.

So, it wasn't really that extraordinary that 3 wise men show up following at star. When Jesus Christ came the world was in an eagerness of expectation. People were waiting for God, and they had a desire for God was in their hearts. It was into this waiting, expectant world that Jesus was born.

Matthew finally ends his Gospel with Jesus commissioning his followers to go and make disciples from every nation. This is our commission!

It is up to us to introduce Jesus to a waiting, expectant world, which I believe we certainly live in. This year, 2025. How about choosing buddy and thinking of a couple of ways you could either

1. invite someone to church,
2. invite someone to join one of the ministries that we have in place (ecology, lenten studies etc)
3. Think of a new mission to invite them to.

Amen

Readings

The Visit of the Wise Men

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,[b] and have come to pay him homage.' 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[c] was to be born. 5 They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for from you shall come a ruler

who is to shepherd[d] my people Israel."

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' 9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped,[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.