

Wonder

Introduction

We are in a series called Christmas Mulligan....a chance to look at Christmas...forget the way we have celebrated it in the past and start over. To get out of the weeds and hazards the world offers and return to the path...the fairway...where God is waiting to guide us.

Every time you hit a mulligan you usually go back and focus on a fundamental...in week 1 we looked at simplicity...Living with Mary's heart and then Martha's Hands...

Last week we focused on Joy. The fruit that comes from abiding and knowing you are in the center of God's will.

SLIDE This week we look at another fundamental that has been lost at Christmas...Today we looking at experiencing wonder at Christmas. And much like week 1 we are going to learn about wonder from a story that is not really a Christmas story. It happened a few years later. We are going to learn about wonder from the wise men

The Wise Men

Story of Wise Men shrouded in mystery How many? Don't know Where did they come from? Don't know How long did their journey take? Don't know They show up mysteriously. Then leave mysteriously. There are 3 Facts that we do know

Matthew 2: 1-2 (ESV) 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, 2 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."

What do we know?

From the East. The King of the Jews has been born Jesus had His own Star That star rose and they followed it. They came for one purpose

We saw His star when it rose and have come to bring Him Gifts. NO! We saw His star when it rose and have come to scientifically explain it. NO! We saw His star when it rose and have come to see what He can do for us. NO! We saw His star when it rose and have come to hear the little drummer boy. NO!!!

What are we told....THEY CAME TO WORSHIP HIM!

This story is amazing enough. The key to adding wonder is to not add anything....These men from far away came to worship the Jewish Messiah....think about how incredible that is. Most today will not get out of bed to come worship Jesus...They traveled for months.

And if that isn't amazing enough, they were not Jewish. They were not believers...they were likely semi-pagan. Yet they spent a lot of money...invested a lot of time...and came to

worship this new king. Imagine their disappointment when they found out that there was no drummer boy.

This story is odd enough...we don't need to add to it. Jesus birth was a well kept secret written and hidden in the stars. Those who noticed were not from Palestine they were from Persia.

They were uncircumcised, Gentiles and they were without the promises of God. It is so odd. The revelation of the Jewish Messiah was heard by foreigners...Astrologers of all people. You would have expected this message to come from a prophet, but instead it was a star.

Not a huge comet.... Not a meteor shower...Just a special star amongst billions. If it was spectacular everyone would have noticed it. But somehow they knew this star amongst the billions was His Star.

Odd that they foreigners knew Scriptures. These men from Persia....modern day Iraq and Iran...they knew the promises of Isaiah.

Numbers 24:17 (ESV) I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

How did they know such a thing? Likely their ancestors were taught by Daniel...you know from the Lions Den? Daniel was exiled to their land in 586 BC. Elevated to power by God and given the job of educating the scholars. Think about that...600 years before the birth of Christ, God was preparing the world for the announcement to come....You don't have to add anything...the story is wondrous all by itself.

There is a story of wonder that I want to look at today. It is not really a Christmas Story. It happened about two years after that first night. It had nothing to do with the Inn, the Census, the Manger...It did however occur in Bethlehem....

I went to a mall recently and was amazed at people buying all of these gifts. In fact, we have made Christmas all about giving and receiving gifts. Why?

There were no gifts exchanged between people that night. The Christmas story has nothing to do with people giving gifts to one another. The only gift given that night was a gift from God...He sent His Son.... The gift given that night was not person to person, but rather God to mankind.

The Gold, Frankincense, and Myrror were a thousand miles and two years away. They are not part of the Christmas Story. They have nothing to do with that night. They are part of a terribly wonderful and sad toddler story that would happen a year or more later.

God became Man...He is the greatest gift ever and focusing on gifts to one another...diminishes Him.

If you have a copy of these Holy Writings, turn with me to Matthew 2.

Matthew 2

Matthew 2:1–4 (ESV) 1 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, 2 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.” 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

Matthew 2:4–6 (ESV) 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 “ ‘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.’ ”

Matthew 2:7–9 (ESV) 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” 9 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.

Matthew 2:10–12 (ESV) 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 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. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:13–15 (ESV) 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.” 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Matthew 2:16–18 (ESV) 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Matthew 2:19–23 (ESV) 19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

That moment in human history is incredible. God the creator of it all became a man. Don't add to it...its already amazing.

It would be like one of us becoming a fish and going into our fish tank to cure ich. To save the fish...and He didn't come as a shark....He came as a guppy. Jesus left His throne in heaven to come to earth to do the one thing that He could never do in heaven. There was a secret to His mission...A secret that would change the world.

But on that night, God the creator entered in to His creation...Fully man and Fully God.

Have you become numb to this story? Have you heard it so many times that it has lost its wonder for you? Have you ever shared the Christmas Story with someone who has never heard it before?

I have...Those people are everywhere...many of them are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhists, or those who have just never really encountered Christianity....Do you know what they say?

They can't believe it...they all say "NO WAY" not because they are rejecting it, but because the very thought of it is too much for them to handle. Almighty God became an unmighty baby? You guys must be nuts. God came to earth as a human.....You really believe that? Yes...and I tell them.

Jesus didn't just stick up for the little guy....the oppressed...the shunned...the outcast.... He becomes the little guy. He doesn't just fight for the needy and oppressed He becomes the needy and oppressed. He didn't just comfort the shunned and outcast...He became shunned and outcast.

At least their response is more normal...NO Way...I can't believe that...God came to earth as a human? No..Jesus was a prophet...a great man.. He was a great teacher who changed the world....but God...God as a human...no way. It is too wonderful to even consider they say. No one denies that Jesus was here on earth...The Jews, Muslims and half-hearted self proclaimed Christians all agree on that.... What they can't accept is the only important message at Christmas....God became a man.

Our Jewish friends... can't accept that God would ever stoop so low. The God that they know.... is too wonderful for even something like that. God would never leave His throne.....They may not yet believe in Jesus as their Savior, but at least they have a high view and wonder of God

Christians here that God became a man and came to earth and they say, "Yeah I know...when do we go to the mall?

Followers of Jesus should be leading the chorus...Shouting....NO WAY....God became a man...No Way! I know...it is incredible...It is amazing...I can't stop thinking about it...We need to tell

everyone...How does this happen? How does God come to live with us as one of us? Why does this happen? Why are we so fortunate?

The Gift of Christmas was from God to mankind. Jesus came to save the World....Yet many of us have lost our wonder....We need a mulligan...We need a do over...We need to forget what we have done Christmas after Christmas and tee it up again...We need to add simplicity....we need to add joy ...and when those two are established...the mulligan we must add today is wonder.

If you have a hard time worshiping Christ at Christmas...It is not a problem with the church....it is not a problem with the music selection or style...It is not a hymn or no hymn issue...it has nothing to do with the teaching...No if you can seem to worship Him at Christmas...you have a heart issue.You have lost your wonder...

Wonder always drives Worship.

Wonder....

Today is December 17. Do you know what happened in history 120 years ago this day? Anyone?

PHOTO Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first flight of an airplane at Kitty Hawk NC. On their 5th attempt, the plane under the control of Orville, embarked on a 12 second flight. Wilbur rushed to the local telegraph office and sent the following message – WE HAVE FLOWN FOR 12 SECONDS - WE WILL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS!

Upon receiving the telegram their sister, Katherine went to the newspaper office, told the editor of her brother's new flying machine, and informed him, they would be home for Christmas, if he would like to set up an interview.

He told her that was nice, and he would be sure to put something in the paper regarding the boys. On December 19th, the local paper placed the following headline on the 6th page of the paper: "WRIGHT BROTHERS HOME FOR CHRISTMAS"

The most important story of the year – man's first flight – and the editor missed it!

I wonder if the same could be said about us when it comes to Christmas. Look all around us... • The trees are decorated • The music is festive • The Season is Right – It is Christmas, and there are only 6 shopping days left! In all of our rushing around, in all of our gift buying, in all the things we have to do during this season – HAVE WE MISSED THE IDEA – Jesus has come to earth! We are living a sixth page story of the greatest event in human history.

Do you know what makes us miss the wonder of Christmas...to miss the opportunity to stand in awe...to seem unable to capture the magnitude of the moment?

Being too familiar with the story...The more we know the less we wonder...Familiarity is our wonder killer. Once we think we know something...once something becomes old news...we lose our wonder about it.

Wonder is a feeling of surprise and admiration...It is caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or unbelievable.

Wonder asks, "How can this be?" It is something that is hard to wrap our minds around.... Wonder drives our worship. I have experienced hundreds of moments of wonder in my life....the Grand Canyon...The City of Jerusalem.. The beauty of Dallas' skyline...The first baby I delivered...My wife coming down the aisle...the birth of our children....our surrender to Christ....The call to be a pastor...and many more...But wonder does one thing...it drives us to worship. Each of those moments I had the same response....God how could this be?

If at Christmas, we lose our sense of wonder...we cannot worship. The birth of the Christ Child becomes routine...Christmas becomes impersonal and stagnant...we find ourselves in the trees needing a mulligan.

The focus of this mulligan is our heart. When we can once again capture the magnitude of the moment...the amazing truth of God's love for us....the depth of the sacrifice made to save us....Something stirs in our heart.... God's glory is revealed to us and we can't help but fall on our faces in worship.

When I was praying about this sermon...I began asking God...What could we change...what could we focus on as we hit a mulligan that would bring to You the most honor? What Could I do that would bring the most glory to you? How can I help people put the wonder back into Christmas?

It is in that moment that I realized how stupid I was... The truth of what I was asking swept over me....I am on my knees trying to figure out how to make Christmas more exciting for you....

Trying to figure out how to Jazz it up for you...to share something unique that will get your attention...To come up with some clever idea that will intrigue you...you know...like maybe adding a drummer boy...

I had to ask God to forgive me. How sad am I. Do I really have to add something to the greatest moment in history?

The key to adding wonder to Christmas is to not add anything Almost anything I would say would detract from the message God became man God....became....a man How do you wrap your mind around that idea?

I just need to tell the story...the way God told it. Focus on the facts... the truth of Scripture and nothing else.

Fact #1. Wise Man's journey is one of faith

God's journey always involves faith. It is impossible to please God without faith...

Hebrews 11:5–6 (ESV) 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

People of faith have always been willing to respond to the challenges of the unknown. These men traveled in search of a King. They followed what little light was given to them. Not knowing where it would lead or how long it would take. Not knowing what would happen to

them along the way. No idea of how their lives would be forever changed. Not clear on exactly what God was doing but willing to take the next step of faith to being to find out.

Fact #2. Wise Man's journey is one of worship

Worship always involves sacrifice. Wise men we are told came for one reason...to worship Him. They came to honor and bow down to the King. They pursued God and found that they were alone.

They arrived in Jerusalem a few years after Jesus' birth, but they probably thought the city would still be buzzing from the news. They probably thought that they would be following the long lines of crowds who were coming to do the same thing. They probably thought that gifts from all over the world would be stacked high. The temple would be the epicenter of this incredible worship of their new king.

Imagine their shock when they get to Jerusalem and all is quiet. The Priests are going about their duties...Nothing out of the ordinary...they were not even aware that a King had been born. It must have been like Clark Griswold pulling into the empty parking lot at Wally World. So they incredulously ask....

Matthew 2:1–2 (ESV) 1 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, 2 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.”

Yet no one seems to have heard about this King..It is as if the world can't see Him...have you ever felt that? Did you feel like giving up? Thing about the wise men...dozens of them...finally reaching their destination and finding no one who knows...had they missed it? Did they travel this far because they miss interpreted the sign? Was the star just a normal star?

We are told that their arrival stirred up the whole city.

Matthew 2:3–5 (ESV) 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

Do you know what faith does? True faith keeps you moving forward even when you have doubts. The wise men went to the Holy City. They talked to the King...to the High Priests...to everyone that they could find...they stirred up the whole city...and nothing...no one knows of this king. What would you do? God home? Turn around? Start arguing with each other? We tend to run from our faith when one person challenges us...look at faith in action and note the reward..

Matthew 2:8–10 (ESV) 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

These wise men let their faith bring them to Jesus. Their response was clear they knelt down and worshiped this toddler. They left their gifts almost as an afterthought...After

what they had seen, their gifts seemed inadequate...What from this world do you give to the creator of it all? What do you have to offer? No not a drum song...all you have is worship.

They met Jesus and left with more questions than answers...I think we all experience that....

Herod is in his palace in God's City and the Jewish king is in a humble home? In Bethlehem of all places..why here? Why are we the only ones who came? Why is God being so secretive? If so, what is the secret?

But they brought gifts anyway...gifts that seemed in many ways totally inappropriate....for God or for anyone else.

Each gift symbolized something....They brought Gold..representing wealth and to be given to a King. The brought Frankincense an incense that is used in Worship....they brought Myrrh a perfume to anoint the dead....A gift for a King...A gift for His deity...and a gift for the sacrificial lamb of God.

This is like showing up at a baby shower with an empty casket for an infant. I said four gifts...yes the last gift that they gave was themselves...and that is our mulligan. They sacrificed themselves...they took incredible steps of faith...sacrificed for an unsure journey....and they bowed down to greatness.

Is that where you are this Christmas?

God gave His Son as the greatest and only Gift of Christmas.

Yet gifts are exchanged....You see the only gift that you can give God is yourself. God gives you and me Jesus and we with hearts full of wonder...give God ourselves.

The greatest gift that you can give at Christmas is to once again give yourself to God. Jesus doesn't want your gifts, He wants your heart. He wants to have your attention 24/7. Before you tee it up again this week you need to ask yourself these questions.

What am I willing to give to Him? Am I willing to give Him my best? Am I willing to go on a spiritual journey to find Him? Am I willing to empty myself and worship Him? Am I willing to give up my comfort to follow Him?

The wise men were....well wise....the question is..are you?

Fact #3. A Wise Man's journey is one of change.

Matthew 2:12 (ESV) 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

They experienced what everyone finds to be true...

Once you find Jesus you can not go back the way you came. Once you meet Jesus you will never be same..that encounter changes everything. It changes you. You go back to your country...but you back by another way.

People who are taking steps of faith are always and often redirected by the Holy Spirit. Faith requires obedience and a willingness...actually an expectation that things are going to change. You don't know the full extent of the journey...God just gives you enough faith to obediently take the next step.

Joseph's travel plans changed that night too. An angel tells him to go to Egypt. They would need money to get there...gold actually...

God not only pointed the way...He provided the way.

Closing

The wise men were wise because they had faith, they worshiped and they were changed forever.

Jesus came as a human infant and as a young toddler, He was already stirring things up.

Too young to understand but already an enemy of the state. Not yet really able to speak but targeted for assassination... Unable to crawl but already a fugitive fleeing for His life. Secretly traveling by night but bearing the greatest secret ever.

What secret did God plant in this child? A secret so terrifying that it could hardly be whispered without shaking the heavens. The secret?

God became one of us to do the one thing that He could not do in heaven...he came to die.

So how do you find wonder this Christmas...You find it in the eyes of those who don't yet know it...and as you share the truth...you find it building up within you.

Tell someone the story...it may be their first time....God came to earth...NO WAY! And He died for you...NO WAY!

For the next ten minutes, we are all going to meditate on a few truths from God's word. We are going to have a Mary moment...alone with God at His feet soaking in His word...For the next few moments...Give God the only gift He desires...yourself.

Philippians 2:5–11 (ESV) 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5–11 (ESV) 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and

on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

No Way? Yes Way....Let's Pray