

Epiphany

January 6, 2019

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

What Made the Wise Men Wise?

There are just so many parts of the Christmas story that I find absolutely amazing—the star, the shepherds, the angels, the innkeeper, the manger, the little drummer boy (even though the little drummer boy is not in the Bible). Today, I want to spend our time focusing on the three wise men. I just love these guys. First, because they teach us so much about the birth of Christ. Second, because they teach us so much about what it means to be wise. And the question I want to address this morning is this: “*What made the wise men wise?*”

If I ask you, “*Who is the smartest person in the world, what would you say?*” I googled it: “*smartest person in the world*” and came up with these five names:

1. Terrence Tao
2. Marilyn Vos Savant
3. Christopher Hirata
4. Kim Ung-Yong
5. Rick Rosner

I read these five names and the first thing I thought was, “*I don't know who any of these people are, so what does that make me?*” But I did my research and found out that these are the folks with the highest IQ. Rick Rosner is a TV producer with an IQ of 192;

Kim Ung-Yong is a Korean engineer with an IQ of 210 (What's "genius" IQ?—140); Christopher Hirata began working for NASA at the age of 16. Now he teaches astrophysics in California. He has an IQ of 225; Marilyn Vos Savant is a writer with an IQ of 228; Terrence Tao is an Australian mathematician with an IQ of 230. He's an expert in harmonic analysis, partial derivative equations, Ramsey ergodic theory, and random matrix theory. Terrence started taking university level mathematics courses at the age of 9. This is a smart guy.

But wisdom is more than just being smart. How do you define wisdom? Maybe we can say, "***Wisdom is the ability to apply your knowledge—to take what you know and put it into action.***" Wisdom is a combination of knowledge and positive action. And that's what we're going to see with the three wise men. They had the knowledge and they put it into action. Read along with me Matthew 2:1-12.

There are a lot of unanswered questions about the wise men. Where did they come from? We don't really know. It just says the east. How long did their trip take? The text doesn't say, but it probably took a long time. How many were there? We usually say, "Three." But the Bible doesn't give us a number. There were three gifts so we assume that everybody brought one gift.

But even though we don't have all the answers to all our questions, the Bible does tell us some important information that helps us understand why these wise men are wise:

First, the wise men knew the Word of God. They were waiting for God's coming king. They were looking for the signs. They had read the prophecies. So, where did they get this information? If you remember your Old Testament history, back in 597 BC the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took a bunch of prisoners back to Babylon. If you remember "Daniel in the Lion's Den" and "The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace", these stories come from that time. We are told that Daniel was, not just a wise man, he was in charge of all the wise men in Babylon. Now, go forward 20 or

more generations and you have the descendants of Daniel and the Jews who had been transported to Babylon. Probably, they have been assimilated into the culture and even hold positions of leadership and authority. But they knew the Scriptures—especially the first 5 books of the Old Testament. And in the book of Numbers it says-- "***I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.***" (Numbers 24:17) So, they were literally looking for a star. And when they saw the star they went looking for a king.

First, the wise men were wise because they knew the Scriptures. We can be wise that way too. If we take the time to read and study God's Word. Second, the wise men were wise because they took action. There are plenty of people with knowledge, but what good is knowledge if you don't do anything about it. The wise men did something. When they saw the star they believed. Think about how excited those guys must have been. Their fathers and their grandfathers and their great-grandfathers had been reading and studying these same Scriptures for more than 500 years. Now it was all coming true—in the fullness of time—a Savior was coming. Their joy was beyond imagining. And their joy and excitement is reflected in the gifts they bring—gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Somebody should have talked to them about what you bring to a baby shower-- not really practical.) But they were expensive. They were extravagant. They were gifts fit for a king.

Here's a question: "***If King Herod in Jerusalem and the Jewish religious leaders knew these same Scriptures, if they saw the same star (I mean, it was the Jewish religious leaders that told the wise men to go to Bethlehem) so why didn't Herod call for his chariot? Why didn't the religious leaders hop on their donkeys or saddle up their horses? You know, camels don't move too fast—in a flat out race they could have beaten the wise men to Bethlehem! So, why didn't they go?***" Here's the answer—they didn't go because even though they had the knowledge, they didn't have the faith. They didn't believe. Here's the irony of the

Christmas story. Jesus wasn't welcomed into this world by his own people, but by shepherds in a field and by wise men from afar. The religious and political leaders of his own time tried to completely ignore him and when they couldn't ignore him they crucified him.

I wonder how much time and energy we spend trying to ignore Jesus? Most of us have a basic understanding of what the Bible says. We know what it says about our own sin, about how that separates us from God, and how only in Jesus can we be forgiven and set free. We've heard it, we know it, but do we truly believe it? And are we willing to do something about it? What made these wise men wise was not their knowledge of the truth, but their complete faith in it. Do you have faith in God's word? Do you believe it? Are you willing to take that step of faith toward Jesus Christ?

I love what the Christian writer Warren Wiersbe says in his commentary on this passage. He says, "***The wise men were seeking the King; Herod was opposing the King, and the Jewish priests were ignoring the King.***" In these days after Christmas, where do you find yourself? Are you seeking Him? Are you opposing Him? Are you ignoring Him? The wise men were wise because they humbly sought the Savior. Let us be wise too—because wise men still seek Him.