

WISE MEN AND WORSHIP

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD HAS BEEN CELEBRATED SINCE THE YEAR 200 AD. EPIPHANY COMES FROM A GREEK WORD MEANING TO SEE. **IN THE CHURCH IT IS THE CELEBRATION OF CHRIST "REVEALED" TO THE GENTILES, WHO WERE THE WISE MEN.**

THERE ARE NUMEROUS STORIES ASSOCIATED WITH THESE MEN. THE BIBLE IS NOT CLEAR ON MANY FACTS CONCERNING THE MEN. WE ARE ONLY TOLD THEY WERE FROM "THE EAST". HOW MANY THERE WERE IS NOT CERTAIN. IT WAS JUST ASSUMED THAT THE THREE GIFTS GIVEN, GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH AND THUS THREE WISE MEN. HOWEVER ***THE GIFTS COULD HAVE REPRESENTED MORE THAN THREE PEOPLE.***

THE STAR - WAS IT A STAR, A COMET OR EVEN A PLANET ASSOCIATED WITH THE BIRTH OF KINGS? HOW DID THE WISE MEN "CONNECT" THE STAR WITH JESUS' BIRTH? JEWS WERE AT ONE TIME IN CAPTIVITY AND POSSIBLY TAUGHT BY THE JEWS ABOUT A MESSIAH. DID GOD REVEAL JESUS BIRTH TO THESE WISE MEN AND IT IS NOT RECORDED IN THE SCRIPTURE?

LIKE ANY STORY WITHOUT COMPLETE DETAILS, LEGENDS RISE TO "FILL IN THE BLANKS". IN THE SONG THEY ARE THE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT, BUT THE WORD 'MAGI' TALKS OF FOLLOWERS OF PERSIAN RELIGION AS WISE MEN, SCHOLARS. THEIR VISIT WAS THE NIGHT OF HIS BIRTH, THOUGH IN MATTHEW 2:1 AND 16 THE WISE MEN VISITED A HOUSE, MAYBE AS MANY AS TWO YEARS AFTER JESUS' BIRTH. ***WE MUST BE AWARE OF SOMETHING THAT FREQUENTLY HAPPENS IN SCRIPTURE, NOT ALL THE DETAILS ARE THERE AND WE MISS WHAT REALLY IS HAPPENING. EVEN THOUGH WE DO NOT KNOW WHO THESE MEN WERE. WE CLEARLY KNOW WHAT THEY DID*** – MATTHEW 2:2 AND 11 – "*we have come to worship him*" BY THEIR ACTIONS WE KNOW JESUS IS WORTHY OF THEIR WORSHIP, HE IS A DEITY, HE IS EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US.

KNOWING WHO CAME AND WHO DID NOT COME TO SEE JESUS, TELLS US IT IS NOT ALWAYS THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES THAT GAVE JESUS THE HONOR. *THEY HEARD RUMORS OF HIS BIRTH, BUT THOSE WHO CAME WERE THE SHEPHERDS, A LOWLY BUNCH THAT SMELLED LIKE SHEEP AND THE WISE MEN, MEN FROM A FAR-OFF LAND.* TODAY MANY "RELIGIOUS" PEOPLE SHOW LESS OF THEIR RELIGION IN ACTIONS AND WORDS AND LOVE TOWARD OTHERS THAN NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE.

IN THE STORY THE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, PRIESTS AND SCRIBES WERE QUICK TO GIVE AN ANSWER TO HEROD OF WHERE THIS CHILD, THE MESSIAH, WOULD BE BORN ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES. **LIKE PEOPLE TODAY WE CAN ACKNOWLEDGE THINGS IN OUR HEAD SUCH AS TRUTH, BUT NOT HAVE THE GRACE IN OUR HEARTS TO ACT ON IT.** THAT NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES NEVER CAME TO SEE JESUS, NOR DID THEY SEND ANYONE TO DENY OR VERIFY THE RUMORS OF HIS BIRTH!

THE WISE MEN WERE A GREAT EXAMPLE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE, OR OF PERSEVERANCE. THINK OF WHAT ALL WENT INTO THEIR TRIP. THE MONEY, THE TIME AND THE TRAVEL DANGERS FROM ROBBERS ALONG THE WAY. ***DO WE "TRAVEL" THE SPIRITUAL HIGHWAY TO FIND JESUS? TO SERVE***

HIM? AND TO WORSHIP HIM? SOMETIMES THE FLIMSIEST EXCUSE OR OBSTACLE WILL KEEP US AWAY. UNLIKE THE WISE MEN.

THE WISE MEN ARE A EXAMPLE TO ALL OF US OF FAITH, AND OBEDIENCE. THE SCRIBES AND THE PRIESTS, DESPITE ALL THEIR TRAINING IN SCRIPTURE AND PROPHECY DID NOT BELIEVE. YET, HERE ARE THE WISE MEN TRAVELING A GREAT DISTANCE WITH ONLY A STAR AS GUIDANCE. WITHOUT MUCH TEACHING WHEN THEY CAME INTO THE PRESENCE OF JESUS IN MATTHEW 2:11, *they “fell down and worshiped him”*. **DO WE WORSHIP JESUS WHEN WE SEE HOW HE IS CARING FOR US EACH AND EVERYDAY? DO WE HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF THANKFULNESS, NOT ONLY FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE, BUT A JOYFUL EXPECTATION OF WHAT HE WILL DO IN OUR LIVES, IF WE HEAR HIS VOICE?**

THE WISE MEN DEMONSTRATED THEIR GENEROSITY AND THEIR REVERENCE FOR JESUS IN THE GIFTS THEY HAD BROUGHT FOR THE NEWBORN KING. *THERE ARE TWO LINES OF THOUGHT ON THE GIFTS. ONE, THAT ALL THE GIFTS AND OFFERINGS GIVEN WERE “FIT” FOR A KING. GOLD, SOMETHING VALUABLE, FRANKINCENSE, AS A PERFUME, AND MYRRH, AN ANOINTING OIL. THE OTHER LINE OF THOUGHT WAS OF THE GIFTS HAVING A SPIRITUAL MEANING. THE GOLD, A SYMBOL OF KINGSHIP ON EARTH, FRANKINCENSE AN INCENSE AS A SYMBOL OF A DEITY, AND MYRRH, AN EMBALMING OIL AS A SYMBOL OF DEATH.*

WE SANG “*We Three Kings Are*” **THE WORDS REFER TO THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE GIFTS –** *“Glorious Now Behold Him Arise/King And God And Sacrifice”* **A SIMPLER MEANING IS GOLD AS VIRTUE, FRANKINCENSE AS PRAYER, AND MYRRH AS SUFFERING.**

THERE ARE SEVERAL STORIES OF WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED TO THE GIFTS. ONE STORY TELLS US **JOSEPH AND HIS FAMILY WERE ROBBED FLEEING TO EGYPT AND LATER THOSE ROBBERS WERE THE ONES ON EITHER SIDE OF JESUS AT HIS CRUCIFIXION.** A COUNTER STORY SAYS **JOSEPH AND THE FAMILY USED IT TO PAY FOR THE TRIP TO EGYPT AND LIVING THERE.** ANOTHER STORY IS IT WAS **ENTRUSTED TO JUDAS AND LOST.** A STORY OF **THE MYRRH WAS THAT IT WAS USED TO ANOINT JESUS BODY AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION.**

INTERESTING STORIES, BUT THE REAL “NUGGET” OF WISDOM TO TAKE FROM THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN IS THIS – THEY CAME A LONG DISTANCE TO WORSHIP A NEWBORN KING. THEY BROUGHT GIFTS TO GIVE HIM AS WAS THE CUSTOM OF THE DAY. IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, TODAY WHEN PRESIDENTS OR RULERS OF COUNTRIES VISIT ANOTHER COUNTRY THERE IS A GIFT BROUGHT OR EXCHANGED. WHAT CAN WE “TAKE” FROM THE WISE MEN AND THEIR ACTIONS WE FOUND IN TODAY’S READING?

IF WE **BACKUP TO ABOUT TWELVE DAYS AGO,** CHRISTMAS, WHERE IT BEGINS, EVEN FOR THE WISE MEN. CHRISTMAS IS A “FOUNDATION” A STARTING POINT FOR THE WISE MEN FOR IF THE BIRTH OF JESUS NEVER HAPPENED THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO REASON FOR THE WISE MEN TO TAKE THE JOURNEY THEY DID!

THERE ARE A FEW QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR OURSELVES ABOUT CHRISTMAS, THE WISE MEN, AND WORSHIP. **WHAT DO WE SEEK FROM CHRISTMAS? WHERE DO WE LOOK FOR IT? WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE FIND IT? THE WISE MEN'S STORY HAS THE ANSWERS!**

HAPPINESS IS A FLEETING FEELING AND CERTAINLY DOESN'T LAST ALL YEAR! **JOY IS SOMETHING DEEP DOWN/WITHIN** THAT CAN NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM US, ONCE FOUND. MANY THINGS OF CHRISTMAS CANNOT COMPARE TO FINDING JESUS IN THAT MANGER. WHEN WE TURN TO GOD AND SEEK HIM WE WILL FIND JESUS. LIKE THE WISE MEN, WE WILL BE **LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT THING!** IN THE EARLY PART OF THE STORY THE WISE MEN WERE LOOKING FOR THE NEW BORN KING. THEY DID EVENTUALLY FIND HIM AND FOUND JOY. **ONE OF THE MOST SUNG SONGS AT CHRISTMAS IS "JOY TO THE WORLD" THAT IS WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT, ENCOUNTERING JESUS AND FINDING JOY!**

THE SECOND QUESTION IS "WHERE DO WE LOOK?" FOR MANY PEOPLE IT IS NOT AN OBVIOUS ANSWER. JUST LIKE THE WISE MEN, WE TOO, CAN LOOK SOMETIMES IN THE WRONG PLACES. THE WISE MEN BEGAN AT HEROD'S PLACE, DEFINITELY NOT THE RIGHT PLACE! HOWEVER, **LOOKING TO THE STAR, GOD'S SIGN FOR THEM, THEY DID FIND JESUS!** IN THE LIVING BIBLE VERSE 10 OF MATTHEW IT SAYS WHEN THEY SAW THE STAR "THEIR JOY KNEW NO BOUNDS"

THIRD, WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE FIND WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR? THE WISE MEN WHEN THEY FOUND JESUS HAD JOY AND GAVE GIFTS, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY **THEY WORSHIPED JESUS**, THE NEWBORN KING THEY HAD SOUGHT OUT. WE ALL DON'T CARRY AROUND GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, OR MYRRH. WE DO, HOWEVER POSSESS GIFTS WE CAN GIVE. **JUST LIKE THE WISE MEN WE CAN, IN WORSHIP, GIVE JESUS OUR LOVE, OUR PRAISE, OUR TREASURE, OUR TIME AND ALL THAT WE ARE.** THE VERSES IN ROMANS 12:1 SAYS IT ALL "*you are to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice--the kind He will find acceptable. **This is truly the way to worship Him.***"

THERE IS ALWAYS A COST TO WORSHIP. WITHOUT SELFLESSNESS, SACRIFICE, OR SIMPLE ADORATION OF JESUS IT IS NOT WORSHIP. THE WISE MEN WE ARE TOLD ENTERED THE HOUSE, SAW THE CHILD, FELL TO THEIR KNEES AND WORSHIPED OR HONORED HIM. THEN THE WISE MEN OPENED THEIR TREASURE FOR THE NEWBORN KING – JESUS.

IN THE STORY OF THE WISE MEN WE SEE THEM AS MEN OF FAITH, PERSEVERANCE, AND GENEROSITY. THEY SOUGHT THE RIGHT THING, LOOKED IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AND DID THE RIGHT THING ONCE THEY FOUND IT. THEIR WORSHIP WAS INDEED SELFLESS, SACRIFICIAL AND SIMPLE IN ACTION. MAY OUR PRAYER BE THAT FOUND ON A BUMPER STICKER "WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM".

BEFORE CLOSING, HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF IT HAD BEEN THREE WISE WOMEN INSTEAD OF THREE WISE MEN?

1. They would have asked directions sooner and arrived on time.
2. Helped deliver the baby.
3. Cleaned the stable.
4. Made a casserole, and . . .
5. Brought practical gifts. AMEN.