

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 268

Wise Men Seeking Jesus

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 17th December, 2006**

Text: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him” (Matthew 2. 1, 2).*

One of the first things I ever remember when I was about five years old at day school, singing this:

“Wise men seeking Jesus,
Travelled from afar,
Guided on their journey,
By a beauteous star.”

That is just what I want to speak to you about today: “wise men seeking Jesus,” wise men finding Jesus. Because, beloved friends, they were not satisfied until they *found* Him. However arduous their journey, however many trials they had on the way, they were not satisfied until they came where the young Child was. That is where faith will always lead a living soul: where Jesus is. My prayerful desire today is that many of you might be led by the Spirit of God to come where Jesus is, for these wise men were divinely led.

Now beloved friends, I realise there are many mysteries: who these wise men were. The word is the *magi*. What does it really mean? I do not know about you – I have been interested to read all the opinions – but I am glad that our beautiful translation leaves it like this: *wise men*, because there are not any magi about in our congregations; there are not any magi here this morning, but I believe there are quite a lot of wise men, wise women, wise girls, wise boys, who cannot be satisfied till you come even where Jesus is. “Wise men.” We believe the Word of God is able to make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” How often the Lord Jesus spoke about the wise: the wise man who built his house upon the rock, the wise virgins who were ready! Now this is true wisdom. O to know our need of a Saviour, to know where true happiness lies, to know where true peace is to be found, to realise that the world with all its glitter can never give these things. O to be made “wise unto salvation.”

“Behold, there came wise men.” Whether they were magi, astronomers, astrologers, or what they were, I believe they were blessed

with heavenly wisdom in their hearts. Another childhood memory – we used to sing it most weeks in Sunday School –

“God give you true wisdom, ere death shall draw nigh,
To number your days, and to Jesus apply;
And O may you learn in His blood-sprinkled fold,
The knowledge of Christ is more precious than gold.”

“Behold, there came wise men from the east.” Again, there are all kinds of conjectures just which country they came from, but we are not told. And then the mystery of this star. There have been many, many things written about what the star could have been. I am sure many of you have found them interesting to read. The astronomers down the ages have agreed that round about this time there was some most remarkable appearance in the eastern skies. Some of the old divines thought what the wise men saw was the glory of God revealed when the angels descended from heaven and spoke to the shepherds, and glory shone around. Many of the old divines thought it was so great that in that far-off country they could see it. But look, beloved friends, one or two things are clear. This was not any ordinary star, any ordinary light, any ordinary constellation. Why do I say that? Because it led them so directly to the very place where the Lord Jesus lay. It was more like the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness which led God’s ancient people to the Promised Land.

“We have seen His star in the east.” The one thing that is clear is this: they were divinely led and that star clearly led them. It was divine leading and it was divine revelation. I believe there was something stirring in the hearts of these wise men. They were Gentile sinners. In one sense they were the firstfruits of the Gentile church being brought to Christ. There was something stirring in their hearts. It was not just curiosity; it was not just astronomy; it was not just an adventurous journey. There was something that was stirring in their hearts. The Lord has a blessed ability to find out a sinner here, a sinner there, and to begin to stir up something in that sinner’s heart. How much they knew, we are not told, but there was some sense of the greatness of their need and some sense of the greatness of the revelation, and there was some sense of the greatness of this Person who was born.

O but that sense of their need! It was so much, it was so great that they could not be satisfied until they had found Him. Are there any wise men here this morning who have a religion like that – you cannot be

satisfied until you find Him? Really, it is like the parable the Lord Jesus told, the parable of the pearl of great price. There was a man seeking goodly pearls and he was finding one, finding another, but he was not really satisfied. There was still something he had not got, one pearl of great price, and when he found it, he parted with everything he had that he might possess it. Have you a religion like that?

“I must have Christ as All in all
Or sink in ruin, guilt, and thrall.”

These wise men were not playing with their religion. They had to leave everything, leave all. They had to give up everything. Really they were like Bunyan’s pilgrim who had to flee from the City of Destruction with his fingers in his ears crying, “Life, life, eternal life!” It must have been very difficult, very costly, very dangerous to leave their own land and set out on a long journey, a very dangerous journey, but they had something stirring in their hearts. Surely there are some of you here this morning and you have something stirring in your heart. They wanted to find the Saviour. “Where is He?” they said. “Where is He?” They wanted to find Him and they could not be satisfied until they did find Him.

“Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” The point is, they *did* find Him and they were satisfied when they found Him. And true, seeking souls *will* find the Saviour. He Himself has said so. They that seek shall find. O but are you willing to leave all? Are you willing to go after Him? Are you willing to count the cost? I believe those wise men could have sung a hymn that we very seldom sing:

“Jesus, at Thy command
I launch into the deep;
And leave my native land,
Where sin lulls all asleep;
For Thee I would the world resign,
And sail to heaven with Thee and Thine.”

“Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” You see, this wonderful star was not any ordinary star. They were divinely led by the star of Bethlehem. We realise, of course, that in this gospel day, this gospel age, we have not got a star in the sky, a star of Bethlehem to lead us. We have

not got a fiery, cloudy pillar to lead us. What is it spiritually? What really is the equivalent of the pillar of cloud and fire? What is the equivalent of the star of Bethlehem? Well, it is this: the Word of God and the Spirit of God; not just the Word of God without the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit never leading contrary to His Word. But you believe that, don't you, that every sinner saved by grace is divinely led, divinely taught? Well, you say, everybody knows that. I thought I did until one day, I should think it was probably when I was a teenager, just those words: "They shall all be taught of God." I have never forgotten that. Well, everybody knows "they shall all be taught of God," but we do not really believe what we do believe! In our own hearts we think we have to do it ourselves, manage things ourselves, do our own bit. But it is that divine teaching that is necessary; but blessed be God, He gives it. He has promised it to the weakest, feeblest believer who seeks His gracious leading, His gracious teaching.

Never forget that word: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." You can look at it both ways. If you are a child of God, then you will be led by the Spirit of God; or the other way, if you are led by the Spirit of God, it is clear proof that you are a child of God. He will lead you out of the world. He will lead you away from self or any hope in self or your own righteousness. He will lead you to feel your need as a sinner. He will lead you to the throne of grace in prayer. He will lead you to look upward. He will lead you along. He will lead you through. He will lead you safely. Do you know what your prayer will be? That little hymn at the end of our hymnbook: "Lead us to Christ, our only rest." You will want to find a resting place in Christ, and you will not find it anywhere else until by faith you are brought even where Jesus is.

"Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem." Now I do not know what they were doing at Jerusalem, because the holy Child Jesus was not at Jerusalem, and the star of Bethlehem did not make a mistake. Do you know what it was? They followed the leading of the star, the divine leading of the Lord, until they were almost there. Bethlehem is only a few miles from Jerusalem, but as they were approaching, they thought, The holy city – this is where the palace is, this is where the King dwells, this is where He must be, the promised Saviour, the King of the Jews. They trusted in their own reason. The star of Bethlehem never led to Herod's palace at Jerusalem. But you find that. "To keep our eyes on Jesus fixed." How often we take our eyes away! To seek to be led by the

Spirit of God and led by the Word of God. He will not lead you to Herod's palace, but if you bring your own understanding in and your own evil thoughts and assess the situation, you do not know where you will end up. That is why people are held in bondage. That is why the wise men came to Jerusalem, the holy city, the city of God.

And the only ones in Jerusalem who were seeking the Saviour were these Gentiles from a far-off country. When Herod made enquiry where Christ should be born, people in Jerusalem knew. There was not any difficulty with the doctrine. Everyone in Jerusalem knew. They could all give the answer: "In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet." They all knew Micah chapter 5, verse 2, that Messiah was going to be born in Bethlehem. They could all give the answer. Have you ever thought about it – as far as we know, there was not one single person when this news spread all over Jerusalem, not one single person went down to nearby Bethlehem to find the newborn King! That is solemn.

And the world is like that even now. How few there are in Luton who this Christmas time are going forth to worship the newborn King! It was not far for them to go, but you know what it is. The Lord Jesus once spoke a solemn word. He said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." There was no-one in Jerusalem; the scribes, the Pharisees, they knew the Scriptures; they wanted religion, but they did not want Christ, not one of them going down to Bethlehem. It is this: "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own" – His own people, the Jews, Jerusalem – "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him." There was only a handful – the wise men, a few shepherds, Anna, Simeon – only a little handful, and so it is today. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." And these wise men were in it and so were the shepherds. They are in heaven this morning singing the Saviour's praises. Why? Because led and taught by the Spirit of God they sought the Saviour and found Him. May that be your blessed portion and mine.

"Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" It seems that the wise men were now put back on the right way. They had lost sight of the star of Bethlehem, because we are now told that "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." They had lost their way, and

sometimes you and I lose our way. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” Now this is it: “Lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.” The star of Bethlehem led them right to the Saviour. They had not got one step to think about themselves. It was when they took their eyes off the star, when they trusted their own carnal reason. And the star of Bethlehem, the Holy Spirit leading you by His own sacred Word, will bring you right where Christ is. And that is it.

At the prayer meeting recently my heart leapt; I think I said, “Amen,” when one of the brethren prayed concerning that being brought *right where Christ is*, not just turning back. We must have evidences, but not resting in evidences. That prayer was so beautiful, it just touched my heart. I thought, “That is what we need at Bethel.” These wise men did not say, Well, the Lord must have a favour towards us; He has given us a revelation that hardly anyone has ever had. It has been revealed to us that there has been a Saviour born. We must be objects of the Saviour’s love; we must be right; we must be sure of heaven. They were not satisfied until they had found Christ, and I do not want any of you to be satisfied until you have found Christ. Bless God for the smallest token of His love, but do not rest in anything short of a revealed Christ, a revealed Saviour. Whitefield, in the great days of the Evangelical Revival, speaking to his twenty or so thousand, used to say that “an unrevealed Saviour is no Saviour.” “Still press on to perfect day.” The apostle said, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

“And when they were come into the house.” Of course, Mary and Joseph would only have remained in the cold stable for a night or two, or three nights at the most. This was a little house in Bethlehem. “When they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him.” They did not worship Mary. “They fell down, and worshipped *Him*.” They were not disappointed. Now I want to pause here. This is important. The faith of the wise men is perhaps the greatest faith of anyone in the New Testament, perhaps only equalled by the faith of the dying thief. The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was specially honoured by those two displays of vital, living faith, one at His birth, one at His death. You think of it. They had a revelation from heaven, the star in the sky. They had given up everything. It had been revealed they were going to see a wonderful King. They thought it was going to be in Herod’s palace. They were bewildered He was not there.

But they have had a revelation from heaven. They have come to see this wonderful King. They come to a house, open the door and there is a poor man, a poor woman and a little Child. *They were not offended.* “They fell down, and worshipped Him.” There is not a greater act of faith than that, to go to Bethlehem and see a helpless Child and fall down and worship Him as Almighty God. Now how many of you this morning have that faith? And as they worshipped Him as Almighty God, I believe they saw their hope, their salvation, their heaven there. They found peace there; they found joy there; they found a resting place there.

And of course the dying thief, what could he see? A poor Man suffering, dying, supposedly as a criminal upon a cross of shame. And he too worshipped Him as the King of the Jews. He said, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” Who taught the dying thief that He was Lord? And who taught the dying thief that He had a kingdom? And who taught the wise men that this helpless Child was true, Almighty God?

O but what is worship? “Go worship at Immanuel’s feet.” I would say this: when we meet, we meet for the solemn and sacred worship of God. You will not always have a blessing; you will not always have a word from heaven; you will not always have a token for good; but count those seasons precious when you know just a little spirit of worship in your heart. “O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!” “When they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him.” They worshipped Him. “And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” So they must have been wealthy men, and perhaps they were kings, in fulfilment of Isaiah 60. 3, that kings should come to the brightness of His rising.

Just one or two things about the wise men finding the Saviour, led by the star of Bethlehem. One thing about these very, very precious gifts that they gave to Mary and Joseph. It was the Father in heaven’s provision for this sorrowful journey that almost immediately they had to take into Egypt. I do not know how you are, beloved friends, but each year when Christmas comes I seem to ponder something different. I have been pondering quite a bit this Christmas the flight into Egypt. It is not often thought about, not often spoken about. “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” What a trial the flight into Egypt must have

been to dear Mary and what a trial to Joseph. Is this really the Son of God? Were we really told this by an angel from heaven? And if this is the Son of God, the infant Jesus, why does His Father in heaven not care for Him? Why immediately is it sorrow, trouble, distress? Why do we have to flee? Why of all places do we have to go so far and into a wicked land like Egypt and stay there? These thoughts must have gone through the hearts of Joseph and Mary, and they must have been tried and tempted even concerning the truth. Think it not strange if Satan tries and tempts you concerning the truth as it is in Jesus.

But the point here: this wonderful provision. Bethlehem for Mary and Joseph was sorrow and poverty. But this wonderful provision of this unexpected wealth. “They opened their treasures, [and] they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” Have you noticed, they presented them to the infant Saviour, not to Mary? They presented them to Him.

Of course, the church of God has always seen the beautiful, mystical meaning in these three gifts, and rightly so. They presented Him with gold because He was a King. Gold is an emblem of royalty. They presented Him with gold because He is a King. They presented Him with frankincense because He is God. Frankincense was used in the worship of the temple. There was only one use for frankincense and that was in worship, in worshipping God. So in presenting the frankincense, they acknowledged that He was Almighty God. And then the myrrh – a strange present for a baby boy, myrrh. You know what myrrh was: it was used for a burial. When the new babies are born amongst us, and family and friends bring a present, it would be an awfully- solemn thing if a present like this was brought, something for the burial. “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” “And they presented unto Him ... myrrh,” because Christ was born to die.

O the mystical meaning of the gold and the frankincense and the myrrh! A King, a God, but He came that He might die. He came with a divine purpose, with a covenant engagement. He came to Bethlehem that He might go to Calvary. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” Our great need as lost, ruined, guilty sinners was redemption, but the wonderful, sacred birth of the Saviour in itself could not redeem us. There must be that holy life bringing in an everlasting

righteousness, and then there must be the sin-atonement death on the cross, that the ransom price might be paid, and a voice from heaven concerning all the Lord's people, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

The gold and the frankincense and the myrrh. "They worshipped Him," and they gladly gave them to Him. We have not got the gold and the frankincense and the myrrh, but the gospel calls us to give ourselves, to give our all to Him. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." But they gladly did it. They not only gave Him the gold and the frankincense and the myrrh; they gave Him themselves.

"Wise men seeking Jesus,
Travelled from afar."

O but they found Him, and finding Him they were satisfied.

One last thought. It was not the Lord Jesus who was enriched by the gifts of the wise men; it was the wise men who were enriched by Him. And Christ does enrich His people, and they were enriched by Him. They brought their treasures, but they found the Pearl of great price, and they journeyed back to their own land, their own homes, with the Pearl of great price in their hands and the Pearl of great price in their hearts. "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious."

"There came wise men from the east," seeking Jesus, finding Jesus.