Wise Men Still Seek Him
2 Christmas B

A popular bumper sticker several years ago indicated that the wise continue to seek after Christ. Can you name the wise men? According to tradition they are Balthazar, Gaspar and Melchior. The truth is no one knows their names or how many wise men there were. It has been assumed that there were three because there were three gifts. There is also no evidence that they were kings, but most likely they were stargazers – astrologers.

And a star it was that they found! The star appeared to be traveling in the Eastern sky and they followed it until it stopped. How far are people willing to go to find Jesus? The obstacles of traveling by foot or beasts of burden would have been many. Then add to that, the unlucky pit stop at the largest city of Israel – Jerusalem. They ask questions of Herod's court where they might find this child:

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed His star at its rising, and have come to pay Him homage."

At this point, paranoia sets in for Herod.

Herod the Great was an ancient character much like that of Saddam Hussein. He was appointed as governor of Galilee at age 25 by his father, a high court official. He liked to build and took on massive projects such as the Second Temple in Jerusalem which bears his name. Because he enjoyed the backing of Rome he was able to handle his enemies in whatever way he saw fit. This included his wife, and their three year old son whom he banished after taking a teenager as his second wife. He was well known for his brutality; particularly the story of the massacre of innocent male children whom he thought might compete with his throne. Before his death, he was so concerned that no one would mourn him; that he gave orders that distinguished men would be killed when he died just in case! The Emperor Augustus once said of Herod, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son."

What drove Herod's ambition? It was anything but wisdom. Scholars agree that he suffered from depression and paranoia much of his life. He lived with chronic kidney failure as well. He never could live down that he was half Jew - half Arab to those he ruled. His skill as a politician kept him in favor with Rome, but he constantly had to prove his Jewishness to the Sanhedrin. Given the verifiable time of his death in 4 BC, Herod would have been near the end of his life when he met the wise men. He pretends to have a desire to "worship this new king", and asks the wise men to notify him of the child's location. Then he does his own investigation as to the Messiah that was to be born and why his own astrologers and counselors had not warned him.

These two opposing forces – Herod and the wise men make for an interesting study on both their character and the effect Jesus' birth had on them. The lust for power, greed and glory on Herod's part, is in contrast to the long search of the wise men, whose mission was only to honor the child–king. All of Herod's advisors could not bring him closer to God's Son, the true king. Yet God provided a sign from the

heavens that would lead the truly wise. One evil force was bent on destruction and feigned homage while the other force of good would unite Jews and Gentiles in worship of the living God.

The wise were rewarded for their search of the child-king. Without divine intervention they may never have reached their destination and great joy.
The hymn, Amazing Grace, celebrates such a reward: *"Through many dangers, toils and snares, we have already come. There's no less days to sing God's praise then when we first begun."*
And in their joy these wise men brought gifts signifying royalty, worship and healing (gold, frankincense and myrrh). Their joy belongs to all of us. It reminds us that the search for truth often is beset by deception, agendas and threats but in the end, the wise will not falter until their course is finished, no matter how difficult the journey.

Perhaps it was a dream that first led them from their homes and countries to follow that star of Bethlehem. They searched the scriptures and they knew the prophecies of the Jewish Messiah that was to come. They left everything to go as nomads wandering, as pilgrims searching for the fulfillment of holy writ and as a means to see the hand of God working in history. Oh to have been there! Oh to have followed the dream! Oh to witness a child–king humbly born not of earthly royalty, but of Godly wisdom. This child would grow in that wisdom and one day rule the earth.

Ironically, it would be a dream that would lead them away from the child to safety. A warning to flee the coming wrath of a madman was given that they might leave and spread the Word that had come in the flesh. God in His mercy delivered the wise out of the hands of evil. For the wise men, the dream does not have a tragic end. Theirs' was the road less traveled where the wise still seek their dream and find it.

The poem, *The Road Not Taken*, by Robert Frost reminds us of the choice we also must make as we search the scriptures, follow the star, and do homage to the One whose kingdom is just:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Even the bible tells us that the path that will lead the wise is a “road less traveled”. In Matthew 7:14 **we read:** For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.
May we all as the wise men of old, take the road less traveled, follow the light that leads to Him, and worship the King. Amen.