

## ***“THE COURAGE TO SEEK”***

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**Central United Methodist Church**

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**(Mat 2:1-12 NRSV)** In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, {2} asking, “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.” {3} When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; {4} and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. {5} They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: {6} ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” {7} Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. {8} Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” {9} When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. {10} When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. {11} On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. {12} And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **SEEKER OR SITTER?**

From 1965 to 1968, we lived on the Quechan Indian Reservation in Yuma, Arizona. Because of my father’s position as the Missionary for the Methodist church, he was often invited to speak at Methodist events across the West Coast. The invitation would always include all expenses paid plus money for airfare. Instead of flying, my father would cash the check and pack the family in the family car for the trip. This is the way we saw most of the historic sites on the west coast over a three-year period. Sometimes we would leave the reservation not knowing what our stops would be or where we were going to stay. It was always an adventure.

I’ll never forget being at Crater Lake standing next to a fifteen foot snow drift freezing to death because of the lack of clothing. We were living on an Indian reservation in the middle of the desert where the summer temperatures could approach 120 degrees and springtime temperatures

would be in the 80's and 90's. My mom had no idea that there could be this kind of snow in May!

Our adventures took us to places like the Grand Canyon, Yellow Stone National Park, Yosemite National Forest, Sequoia National Forest and The Great Salt Lake. We traveled on a tight budget eating sandwiches in the car and staying in cheap motels. Not everyone would choose to sightsee with such limited resources. There are people who are seekers and others are sitters. Some people would rather stay in the comfortableness of their home while others prefer the adventure, seeking out new people and places.

The Magi were seekers. Herod, the fiend in the story, is a sitter. When I observe the Magi making their way to Bethlehem I see a group of men who are willing to ask questions. They don't know where they are going but ask for directions and move toward their destination. Herod and the Jewish authorities know scripture like the back of their hand. They know where the Messiah is to be born. Prophecy tells them. But they are not willing to move because they are sitters. The Hebrew people are God's chosen people but they don't get it. Instead, it takes a group of non-believing Gentiles to find the Christ child, to seek him out and pay homage.

We call ourselves Christians. Many of us were born or raised in the church. We know the scriptures and understand God's word but we are sitters. God says, "***Go make disciples,***" but we sit. God says feed and clothe the poor and hungry but we sit. God asks us to do some things that make no sense. But we are guided by reason rather than revelation. Reason says, "***I've got this figured out. This way makes sense to me.***" Revelation, on the other hand, calls us to trust a Father who knows more than we do, even when common sense disagrees.

Jesus was born right under the noses of the Jewish leaders, but they were sitters, not seekers. They didn't ask the where question. They knew too

much. They weren't ready to listen to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Are we? Are we going to be sitters or seekers?<sup>1</sup>

## **THE JOURNEY**

Perhaps the chief requirement for being a seeker/Christian is a willingness to go on the journey. I'm afraid to many church people join up and worship on Sunday in order to settle in, settle down, as if church membership and worship was the end of the journey with God rather than the beginning. Our Lord is a demanding savior who leads us forward towards adventure and service. He is a savior who will not allow us to be comfortable less we forget that He came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Wise men and women still follow a star and seek a savior. There is a spark of grace in every soul. There is a hunger in the hearts of the world. The need is never satisfied until a connection with God is discovered.

Ann Sullivan approached her deaf and blind student Helen Keller saying, ***"Today I am going to teach you about God."*** Ms. Keller signed to her ***"Good, I've been thinking about him for a long time."***

Ex-Beetle George Harrison, in an interview shortly before his death said, ***"Everything else in life can wait but my search for God cannot wait, it has to happen right now."***

Larry King said, ***"I have a lot of respect for true people of faith. I have always searched. I envy people who have it. I just can't make the leap for myself."***

A mother said, ***"When my four-year-old pointed to a crucifix and said, 'What's that man doing, Mom,' I knew it was time to get my family back to church to learn the faith."***

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<sup>1</sup>This line of thought comes from Paul Anderson, "Finders, Seekers, Losers, Weepers" (Preaching, November-December, 1993), 39-40.

Those of us in the church need to realize that there are a vast majority of people who consider themselves unchurched or dechurched because they are disillusioned by institutional religion. And, yet, they continue to search for something and are willing to try almost anything from astrology to Zen, from sex to steroids, to find some meaning in their life.

It's time for God's people to go on a journey to find the Christ child, the child whose love is already in your heart. It's time to help others discover what God has already given them in Jesus Christ. Are we going to sit or seek?

### **TAKE A RISK**

The Magi believed in the sign they were given. More importantly, they risked following the star in order to find its meaning. They left their homes and familiar surroundings to venture into the unknown. They were not sure where they were going but they knew the only way to find out was to go. They were not sure what would be waiting for them when they arrived but they knew the only way to discover was to risk the journey. Like Abraham of old, they set out not knowing where their pilgrimage would end. They had no idea what waited for them along the way. Like Moses, they committed themselves to the sign God gave them in the rising star and kept on going.

We need the same kind of soul-set if we are going to engage the future for God and His Kingdom. There is a journey we must risk in order to discover the answers we seek, a journey that must be made if we are going to experience love in its fullest form, a journey that involves growing in order to become the whole persons God created us to be. There is a journey that must be risked if we want to hold the faith that holds us. The destination is Bethlehem and we must reach it if we are to know the Messiah and behold God's glory in His presence.

In the book, *Wit and Wisdom from the Peanut Butter Gang*, Children and young teens offer their perspective on parents, siblings, school,

food, friends, and other aspects of life. Their view on life is often right on target. Listen to these wise words from twelve-year-old Leslie:

***Life is filled with ups and downs but most of the time I'm going sideways.<sup>2</sup>***

That's what happens when you play it safe, when you fail to take risks or risk failure.

Wallace Wilkins in *The Futurist* magazine bemoans the fact that we are such a security conscious people that

***Many of us have grown up with prompts and reminders to be careful. When people part company, for example, they often say 'TAKE CARE.' That utterance can be subtly disempowering. Taking care is one of the reasons why individuals and organizations take so long to change. Imagine how differently you might have developed if your friends and family said to you, 'TAKE RISKS' [rather than take care].<sup>3</sup>***

The wise men show us the way, the way of risk. They show us how to live towards something more. They help us find the courage to seek. More vital, are we willing to risk it all in order to know Christ and to share Christ with others.

## **MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH**

It's hard to imagine the Magi moving forward in faith. I'm not sure they understood the concept. But they did believe that they were moving towards something special. If belief is the beginning of faith then the Magi were well on their way especially after they found the Christ child and knelt in his presence.

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<sup>2</sup>H. Jackson Brown, *Wit and Wisdom from the Peanut Butter Gang: A Collection of Wise Words from Young Hearts* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup>Wallace Wilkins, "Take Risks When There is no Danger" (Future View, May 1999), 60.

Try this experiment with me.

- Write down any 3 digit number (The number can't mirror itself like 979 or 454)
- Reverse the number you just wrote down
- Now subtract the lower/smaller number from the higher/larger number (If the subtraction yields a 2-digit number (99), add zero in front of it (099)).
- Now, reverse the result and add it to the preceding answer/result
- If you followed the instructions carefully, you should all have the same answer: 1089
- Wherever you started, with whatever number, you all end up at the same place: 1089

The point being, we all start in different places when we decide to follow the star.

- Some of us start out in big homes and others begin in public housing.
- Some of us start out in the arms of a loving family. Other begin with absentee parents and outright rejection or abuse.
- Some of us start with the heritage of faith and a solid church family. Others begin with no spiritual direction
- Some of us start early in life seeking faith and wholeness. Others begin late in life.

No matter where your journey begins, if you faithfully follow the star the destination is determined. You will come into the light. You will experience the one who is the ***“The Way, The Truth and The Life.”*** You will come to the Christ Child, to the rabbi who taught and healed all across the countryside, to the son hanging on the cross, to the risen savior standing by your side and calling you into the light.

## FINDING JESUS

Consider this, in most of the Gospel stories Jesus come to the people. He comes to those who are marginalized, sick and hungry. He reaches out and intrudes into their lives. He even moves into their villages and homes. But in the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi come to Jesus. They take a long journey—almost two years, farther than anyone else in the Gospel as far as I know—to get to Jesus.

Their journey is a model for each of us. They are the model for those who attempt to move towards God, who are searching for something better in life. The Magi found that something when they saw the child with his mother. Do you have the courage to seek? I don't know about you but I would rather be a seeker than a sitter. As someone once said,

So on I go not knowing, I would if I might.  
I would rather walk in the dark with God  
Than walk alone in the light.  
I would rather walk with God by faith,  
Than walk alone by sight.