

# “The 4th Wise Man”

*Matthew 2:7-12*

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What is it that you are seeking? Everybody is seeking something. That's why Google is one of the most profitable companies on earth. People go to Google every day to search for information about an astounding array of subjects. People are seeking more info on the latest crisis in the news. They are seeking the latest numbers of the pandemic. They are seeking information about how to help with the rising mental health crisis. I heard something interesting this week that the pandemic has only accelerated what we already knew was happening. Everybody is seeking something.

What are you seeking? Maybe it's not information. Perhaps you are seeking the truth. Or peace. Or hope. Maybe you are looking for that great new product that is going to make your life everything you'd hoped it would be. At least, that is what the ads suggest. Maybe you are looking for a new mate. Christianmingle.com promises to find God's perfect match for you.

Speaking of mates, a young woman was sitting in a coffee shop Telling her friends about her idea of the perfect mate. ***"The man I marry must be a shining light when with friends. He must be musical. Tell jokes. Sing. And stay home at night!"*** A little old lady at the next table overheard and spoke up, ***"Girl, what you just described is 🤖my computer."***

A perfect mate is hard to come by. With the exception of my wife, of course. 🤖Never say I can't think quickly in the pulpit? What is it that you are seeking?

Everybody's seeking something in life. It's clear what Herod was seeking. Herod was seeking to preserve his power. We've discussed before about Herod's character . . . or lack thereof. Herod was a bloody tyrant.

King Herod lived in perpetual darkness. He was ruthless: murdering his wife, his three sons, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and many others. His crowning cruelty of course was the murder of the infant boys in Bethlehem in a vain attempt to maintain his power by killing the newborn King of the Jews.

The philosopher Plato once wrote, ***"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid OF THE DARK: the real tragedy of life is when [ADULTS] are afraid OF THE LIGHT."*** Herod was afraid of the light. And so he sought to extinguish it, ***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"*** (1:2-4).

The world was in darkness. Ignorance and evil prevailed, as they do even today. But darkness will never have the last word. **That is the message of Epiphany. Light has come into our world.**

I once asked a confirmand to summarize all the gospel in a few words, she responded like this: ***"In the Bible, it gets dark, then it gets very, very dark, then Jesus shows up."***

Herod was seeking to preserve his position of power. Power is still a dangerous motive in people's hearts. There are Herod's in company offices. There are Herod's in service institutions. There are Herod's in many homes. There are even Herod's in the church. Like Herod, they're all driven by a need to maintain power.

Let's move on before someone thinks I'm speaking about them.... The chief priests and teachers of the law, on the other hand, were simply seeking to maintain the status quo. That's all they wanted to do was to simply preserve tradition. Hasn't that been the role of religion to maintain tradition? It's both the strength and the weakness of the church that we love for things to remain the same.<sup>1</sup>



Maybe that is why the church is so resistant to change. Sometimes we have to bring the church kicking and screaming into today's world. That's how it was in the first century and that's why they hung Jesus on a cross. He upset the status quo.

In his wonderful book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, author Philip Yancey tells about the impact that a film had on him as a young man. The movie was Italian director Pasolini's controversial movie *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*.

It's interesting how Pasolini came to produce this movie. Pasolini was trapped in an enormous traffic jam when the Pope was visiting Florence, Italy. So, Pasolini checked into a hotel room where, bored, he picked up a copy of the New Testament from the bedside table and read through the Gospel of Matthew. ***“What he discovered in those pages so startled him that he determined to make a film using no other text than the actual words from Matthew's gospel . . .”***

What emerged was a film that presented Jesus—using only Matthew's text—to the young people of the 1960s a Jesus that was very much like themselves—anti-materialistic, anti-hypocritical, pro-peace, and pro-love. Yancey had never experienced Jesus like this. ***“For me,”*** he writes, ***“the film helped to force a disturbing reevaluation of my image of Jesus. In physical appearance, Jesus favored those who would have been kicked out of Bible College and rejected by most churches . . . Those in authority, whether religious or political, regarded him as a troublemaker, a disturber of the peace.”*** Obviously, the only way to deal with such a troublemaker was to crucify him.<sup>2</sup>

That's what we do with troublemakers, isn't it? Silence them with a cross or a gun or prison or simply social isolation. We love the status quo as much as the chief priest and the teachers of the law did.

- (1) Herod sought to maintain his power;
- (2) the religious leaders sought to maintain their traditions.
- (3) Finally, there were the Wise Men.

They were foreigners, probably gentiles (not Jewish) but they were seeking the new born King of the Jews. It's a shame that the Wise Men couldn't have used Google . . . or Siri or a GPS on their camels would have been nice. Instead, they were dependent on a bright light in the heavens to lead them. It led them first to Jerusalem.

Henry Van Dyke wrote one of the most famous fictional accounts of the Magi, *The Story of the Other Wise Man*. In this story Van Dyke speaks of a 4<sup>th</sup> wise man who searched for years for the Christ child, but was never able to catch up with the others. This wise man had three jewels, a gift of great wealth which he intended to give to the newborn king. But in his journey he came across people who had great needs. He could not pass them by without trying to help. He ended up using the three jewels (he had intended to offer the Christ child) to care for the needs of these persons he found in need.

This 4<sup>th</sup> magi searched for Jesus for the rest of his life, only to realize at the end of his life that he had both found him and worshipped him each time he gave himself and his gift to one who was in need.

Through his compassion this 4<sup>th</sup> wise man pushed back some of the world's darkness. **And that is our task as well. We are to live in the presence of Christ so that with time we will be able to reflect his light through the service we give to others.**<sup>3</sup>



- (1) Herod was seeking power;
- (2) the chief priest and teachers of the law were seeking to maintain the status quo;
- (3) but the Magi were seeking the newborn King, so that they might worship him so that their worship might lead to action.

You do realize that's why we Worship? We Worship so that we might be infected by Love We Worship so that we might ingest Love We Worship so that we might become Love Out there, in this cold, dark world! And so I ask one last time, what is it that you are seeking?

Friends, my guess is that you have come here this day genuinely seeking God. You realize the dangers in life of seeking anything else. The dangers of seeking power, wealth, pride, even an attachment to the way things used to be. Like the Wise Men, we **MUST** lay our every motive in life before the child of Bethlehem.

Amen?!

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.joewright.org/sermons/xfig.html>.

<sup>2</sup> (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, and Katherine Ketcham, *The Power of Empathy* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2000).

