

“Seek Jesus First” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
January 6, 2019, Epiphany of the Lord  
Matthew 2: 1-12

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

What are you seeking? What are you searching for?

Wealth. If I just had more money, I could enjoy life more.

Worry free life. I want our country back on track. The political system is broken.

Relationships. I wish my grandkids would spend more time with me.

Spirituality. I want to feel closer to God.

What are you seeking? What are you searching for?

What were the magi seeking? It was not money or fame. They had all the money they needed, or they would not have been able to travel to follow the star. Most likely there were many people in the magi's traveling caravan. They needed to carry their food and shelter with them. There were probably soldiers with them to protect the caravan from robbers. And there would have been people to put up their tents and cook their meals. No, the magi didn't need money. What they were looking for was a messiah.

The magi were seeking a messiah that the founder of their religion had prophesied. They were Zoroastrians. Interestingly, this messiah would be born to a virgin and would be divine, a god. Their messiah was to defeat Satan's temptations and increase the amount of good in the world. For the reader in Matthew's day, this virgin birth story would be understood to be a fulfillment of both the Zoroastrian prophesy and our Old Testament prophesy, making Jesus king of both the Jews and the Gentiles.

What about the other players in this story? What was Herod seeking? What was he searching for? Herod was searching for a way to maintain his power. Herod had a reputation for using any means he thought necessary to maintain his power. History records that he killed his wife out of jealousy. He had three of his sons put to death and killed a number of other family members. All of this before he had the children in Bethlehem age two and under put to death just so he could eliminate a perceived threat to his power.

It was interesting to me that the scripture says: **When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him.** Herod had brought political stability to the area, but at great cost. Those in Jerusalem had a double worry: how would a violent ruler react to the news of another king in his territory and, second, what would happen if Herod did lose his power. The folks in Jerusalem wanted stability.

What did the chief priests and scribes that Herod inquired of seek? What were they searching for? From all we can read in the Bible, they were seeking to maintain the status quo. They liked the cozy relationship between the Temple and the Roman government. They wanted to maintain their status and their position in the social hierarchy. They probably joined all of Jerusalem in

being afraid of the news that the magi brought to King Herod for fear of upsetting the balance they maintained between religion and government.

I've always puzzled why the chief priests and scribes didn't go to Bethlehem to investigate for themselves who this was that brought travelers from afar seeing this new-born king. If the religious leaders were really waiting for the messiah to save the people, why didn't they rush out to Bethlehem? I can only assume that they were concerned about their power and maintaining the status quo.

We all are seeking something – but for what reason? In the religious arena, some just want to be comfortable, not challenged in their spiritual life. I am so tired of the phrase 'spiritual but not religious.' These people say that are seeking something, but most of the time it's something they can control. It's a god that is convenient for them. A god that makes no demands on their lives. Much like the chief priests and scribes, these folks don't want to upset their comfortable lives with the demands of Christianity. The 'spiritual but not religious' are certainly not like the magi who sought the infant king and gave his family expensive gifts. That would mean giving up your lifestyle to go on a quest for God – how inconvenient!

There's an old story about a Middle Eastern king who was very wealthy and was seeking to be spiritually wealthy as well. One night the king was awakened from sleep by a fearful stumping on the roof above his bed. Alarmed, he shouted: 'Who's there?' 'A friend,' came the reply from the roof that continued. 'I've lost my camel.' Perturbed by such stupidity, the king screamed: 'You fool! Are you looking for a camel on the roof?' 'You fool!' the voice from the roof answered. 'Are you looking for God in silk clothing, and lying on a golden bed?' These simple words filled the king with such terror that he arose from his sleep and dedicated his life to serving others.

What are you seeking? What are you searching for?

Today, most people are not seeking a humble, poor baby in a stable. They prefer the royal courts of Herod to the stable that Christ was born in. However, salvation doesn't come from money or earthly security. Salvation and a reason to live come from Jesus Christ, the son of God, who came to earth to show us how to live as God wants us to live.

What are you seeking? What are you searching for?

This lesson about the magi and their belief that Jesus was a king, the divine messiah they were seeking, teaches us that Jesus is our king and we also need to put him first in our lives. The magi endured the long trip from Persia to Bethlehem to meet Jesus, the king. They traveled through dangerous territory. They risked their very lives to find Jesus. They rejoiced when they met him and paid homage to him.

Today, I ask each of you and me – are we willing to put Jesus first in our lives? Are we willing to risk our very lives to find him and serve him? Are we willing to pay homage to Jesus?

As you know, I usually end my sermons with a challenge for you to ponder during the week or I give you something to work on. My challenge to you this week is for you to ponder my questions: What are you seeking? What are you searching for? I pray that you find you are, like the magi, seeking Christ and are willing to pay homage to him and put him first in your life.