

THE WISER MEN, MT.2:1-12

Casting Call #5

◆ **Intro:** In the Church calendar, the 12th day of Christmas brings us to Epiphany, on January 6. This is a day that marks the revealing (epiphany) of Israel's Messiah to the gentile world as a whole, represented by the Magi. And so we continue our Christmas celebration by pondering today what we learn from Scripture's record of the Wise Men from the East.

◆ In preparing to preach on this topic I dug quite a bit into possible explanations of the star that our Magi followed to find the Christ Child. And while it's interesting, it remains speculation, and possible theory, and we just don't know for certain how it happened. But Scripture doesn't seem interested in explaining it either, except that we know there was a prophecy by a magos from the east (Balaam) of a "star" that would arise from Judah one day. And the prophet Isaiah said Israel's "light" that would "arise" as nations brought gifts to Jerusalem. Clearly God was keeping his word. What we do have recorded for us is how gracious God is in being a revealing God, and how we ought to respond to his revelation or epiphany.

◆ In Matthew 2 we have two contrasting responses to God: a bad response and a good response. One wants to kill God (the Christ) and one worships God (the Christ.) It's surprising and ironic because the people we expect to be looking forward to their own Messiah are the ones who don't want him. And people we'd not necessarily expect to be interested, and who in fact would be despised by the Israelites, fall down in adoration! And of course

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it makes us wonder which we might be, but surely it points us to an obvious conclusion, namely Jesus is a priceless gift and it only makes sense to worship him!

◆**1. In the story of the Magi, we see God's gracious gift of revelation.** Epiphany is a gift God gives to the human world.

Literally epiphany means "an out-shining". Or a revelation. A revelation is something given, or shown to you. It is an answer.

A solution provided to those without the answer. In Christian theology we speak of two types: general revelation - the display of God in nature, the created realm; and special revelation -the display of God through his recorded word. Psalm 19 speaks

famously of both. The first half of the psalm says the heavens are telling of God! The second half speaks all about the beauty of God's laws, statutes, and decrees. The thing is, general revelation by itself can never bring a person into a relationship with the one true God. While it does display his handiwork, in our fallen sinful state we are blind to it's spiritual truth.

◆*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew*

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God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Rom 1:18-21

◆A. So because of our own sinfulness, though all nature screams the wisdom of God, human are incapable of hearing it in their souls.

◆Pause a moment to be sure you are looking incredulously at your others who just can't see the reality of God. Do not consider her hopeless who sees your faith as a mere nicety, but irrelevance. Instead, pray for heaven to open minds to God's reality, for you and I would be in the same place without this grace.

◆As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Eph 2:1-5

◆Now God was under no obligation to enlighten us with any special revelation, much less to send his Son in human form to enlighten us to our plight of the sin that keeps us from seeing and

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experiencing him. (That's a spiritual principle by the way; sin always keeps us from seeing and experiencing God and his goodness. Therefore, Revelation is necessary for salvation from sin. Man will never come to that conclusion on his own.)

Thankfully, God cares so much about us humans that he goes further and tells us about himself through revelations to prophets and angels, and the like.

◆ *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. Heb.1:1-2*

◆ And that's exactly what we see in the case of the Magi. General revelation captured their attention (the star) and led them to Israel, where special revelation (the prophet Micah) led them to Bethlehem. In Bethlehem, they meet God's supreme and final revelation: the Jesus the Messiah. But already much earlier, God's revelation to and through Israel was planting the seeds of faith in the soil of other nations. Let me explain.

◆ B. Who were the Magi? They were often the court astronomers, seers, historians, etc. whom the ruler would consult for guidance in the affairs of the nation. Daniel was a *magos*, appointed to King Nebuchadnezzar! In fact he was made chief of Babylon's magi because by God's revelation, he was able to tell the king not

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only what the king dreamed (without being told by the king) but also what it meant. Hugh Ross writes:

◆ As a student of Hebrew Scripture, highly respected for both his character and his wisdom, Daniel, the Jewish captive, served as Babylon's intellectual and spiritual leader. To this highly esteemed man God sent word, via the angel Gabriel, of the time when Israel's longed-for Messiah would come. (You can read it in Daniel chapter 7 which we will begin studying this month.)

◆ Philo, a Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Jesus, lived in the large Jewish community of Alexandria, Egypt. Philo wrote in praise of an Eastern school of magi among the Persians and their great learning and understanding of the natural world. So, because men, like Daniel and his friends, served in high positions among the magi of the east 500 years earlier, and shared with them the teachings of the God of Israel, it seems highly likely that the Magi that come seeking Jesus come from this legacy. Now we don't know the state of their religious beliefs, but we do know that God was calling them into his family!

◆ So, praise God first for graciously being a revealing God allowing mankind to see the reality behind their existence, and the hope of it's continuing by finding relationship with God!

◆ 2. What is Mathew telling us about God's revelation?

◆ A) We are not being told we can find God's revelation in the stars. Let's just get that out of the way. Matthew is Jew

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writing to Jews. The Jewish scriptures condemn astrology outright. No Jewish boy would think of consulting a horoscope, and no Jewish woman would ever keep track of whether she was a Capricorn or a Leo. These are nonsense and although the writers of the OT scriptures are well aware of constellations and even mention them, the prophets of the OT mocked sorcery and condemned astrology.

◆if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendour, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high. — JOB 31:26-28

◆Let's make a distinction. Astronomy: study of the laws (nomos) of the stars (aster). Astrology: study of the message (logos) of the stars (aster). In the ancient world the two disciplines were investigated by the same persons. Astrology believed the earth to be center of the universe, and the heavenly bodies to be living powers like gods that can determine things. Do not think that Matthew is saying it's legitimate for you to consult the stars. Far from it. Fortune tellers, magicians, people who claim to speak with the dead, sorcery - all of these are a breach of the Christian faith, an insult to the true God of heaven, and a dangerous dabble in the dark spiritual world. (We can dig into that another time.)

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◆...when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.
— DEUTERONOMY 4:19

◆B) We are being shown that God uses general and special revelation to draw all nations to himself. God uses the natural world and our lives in it to awaken our longing, convict us of our need and our relative smallness in existence. Study the structure of DNA or the mathematics of planetary orbits that Kepler calculated, and you become aware that the universe is ever so highly designed. Perhaps there is an intelligent designer! God grants us direct scripture to bring us to the answer in Christ. Why not do the same yourself? Since God uses general revelation, why not use it yourself?

◆Enjoy the sporting world. Learn to be a master angler, or a expert hunter. Climb the rock walls, and marvel at the mountain beauty. Dive the continental shelves. Tell the tales of creatures you've encountered or the slopes you've skied. There is a universal longing inside of us to experience the marvel and greatness hidden in the majesty of the wild kingdom. But at the same time let your thrill of the natural realm be an epiphany to you and others of it's source in the spiritual realm. That is, seek God while you delight in his

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creation, turn your thoughts toward him in praise and worship as you walk the woods. Speak with him in the canoe on the creek, or on the trail in the hills, or in the beauty of the golf course –for this is what that was all meant to do! Use it as a witness tool, a reveal, an epiphany with your friends as you simply give voice to what you see of God.

◆C) Another thing about God’s revelation that we see in the Magi’s brief encounter: The center of all God’s word is the Christ! Jesus is the Final Word, the Supreme Revelation and the Universal Revelation. We call this Christo-centricity. Lets return to that Hebrews text and read further.

◆In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Heb. 1:1-3

◆This is the center of true religion. God’s Son, our Creator and our Redeemer, our purification from sin. The people of Jerusalem needed the Son though they didn’t know it. The people of the East, of Babylon and Persia needed to know

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the Son just as much, and thankfully God was revealing it to them as well. So you see, the center of our faith is not a race, or a nation, or a history, or political party. It is a person. Because Christ is the center of Christianity it is a horrible mistake when we make other things the center of our faith. Things like our race, or nationality. Things like our style and tradition. The prophecies of the Messiah, interestingly, often include reference to “all the nations”. The Church of Christ is made up of black people, and white people, Indians and Europeans, Islanders and Orientals. The center is Christ, not any of us! The magi are illustrative of the multi-ethnicity of the Church, of it’s reach across racial barriers, and even religious darkness. Even those you or I might consider unlikely, God calls to the cradle of Christ and the foot of his cross. Barbarians, Romans, Americans, Muslims, Hindus, atheists. All of us are these apart from gracious revelation!

◆**Conclusion:** To sum up God’s revelation, and the depth of Epiphany I’ll simply say this: ...Everything you are looking for in the stars is really found in the person of Christ. Pray to him when you need a solution. Bow to him when you are overcome by fear. Call on him when your loved one is sick. Discuss with him about your future. And in addition, go tell it on the mountains! He is the “good news of great joy that shall be to all people.” None of them will ever discover this without it being released to them!