

Theme: The Journey of Faith: Seek, Find, Follow

Welcome and Introduction

Today we are thinking about the long, arduous journey undertaken by the wise men and they travelled in search of Jesus. Their journey is a bit like the journey many of us follow as we look for Jesus and then try to follow him. It's a journey we can sum up as **seek, find, follow**.

We start our journey this morning with the wonderful events we have recently celebrated at Christmas time – the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, the wonderful gift of God coming to earth to share our humanity with us

So we're thinking today about the journey made by the wise men. Here's the story as Matthew tells it in his gospel:

Reading: Matthew 2: 1-12

Talk 1 - Seek

I wonder what it was that made the Wise men start their journey. I don't know what was in the sky, what they saw, that first night. I don't know what was in their minds; what they thought, asked, or talked about. I don't know what was in their hearts; what they felt, dreamed, or longed for.

But something stirred within them when they saw that special, bright star – the light God had placed in the sky to guide them - and they began to wonder, to imagine, that their lives were part of a much larger story. That star, that light, meant something really important, they knew, but what exactly? Could it be that the one who created life, who hung the stars in the sky, noticed them, knew them, lived within them, and was calling them?

Thinking seriously about these things started them out on a journey of faith. The Wise Men begin their journey by noticing something wonderful in the natural world which stirred up something deep within them, made them curious, made them think.

I think this is how many of us start the journey. The stunning beauty of a sunset, the glory of a landscape, the kindness, generosity or self-sacrifice of somebody else – all of these suggest that there is more to existence than just this brief life – all of these can spark within us a desire to seek the meaning of all things, the creator, the loving God.

It was like that for the Wise Men. So they packed up their camels with precious gifts and set off to wherever the star might be leading them.

Talk 2 - Find

And then, when they'd done most of the journey, often in the dark and with no clear idea of where it would end, the Wise Men find themselves at the court of Herod – just one of the many scary and dangerous places they've had to deal with on the way. They've gone to Jerusalem, the big city, because that's where you would expect to find someone really important. Their journey which has

begun through something inside, some deep awareness of creation and their part in it, now needs something else. Through the chief priests and scribes at Herod's court, the Wise Men learn that they must go to Bethlehem of Judea "for so it has been written by the Prophet". The next phase in their journey of faith involved a willingness to recognise God speaking to them through the writings which had been handed down from the Old Testament prophets.

Perhaps it's a bit like that for us. We look at the beauty of God's world and go "Wow! We sense his love stir our spirits, but we feel our minds need a bit more – then we need to hear the words of others and learn from them, seek understanding, read and hear the teaching found in the Bible, to allow God to speak to us through his written and spoken word.

Then the third part of the journey takes the wise men beyond the things they've seen and felt, beyond the words of teaching and prophecy they've heard – on to the house where the star stops and where they find the answer to all their questions. Now they meet Jesus in person, and they fall to their knees. The person whose presence is echoed in creation; the person pointed to by the words of prophecy and the teachings of others, is now present before them and the most natural thing to do is to worship him.

Perhaps it's a bit like that for us. The end of the search for faith isn't found in the beauty of creation – though that may spark our search. The end of the quest for faith isn't given to us just by the bible - though that's the only written map we need. Instead, the end of the search is met in a person – in a face to face encounter with the God who loves us and who makes himself available to us in the child of Bethlehem. We may meet with God in many different ways – maybe in a sudden flash of understanding after years of struggle; maybe in the quiet voice inside in the dead of night; maybe in the face or words or action of another person.

We may travel a different route than the wise men did but the stages of the journey are pretty much the same: God's spirit shines a light inviting us to seek him. That light draws us like the star towards him, and like the star, it guides, protects and steers us away from the dangers on the way.

So our story of the wise men reminds us that the light of God's love not only guides us as we **seek**, not only leads us so we **find**, but it also protects and keeps us when the going is dangerous and tough.

Talk 3- Follow

Yes, this may seem to be the end of the journey, but it's not. Having found the subject of their faith, the Wise Men learn that they're now in danger, and must return home by a different way. Faith changes lives, and lives of faith can be fraught with challenges, dangers and suffering. Jesus didn't promise to bring ease or comfort but he does promise to bring us renewal, wholeness and peace. One thing for sure is that things can never remain the same. Having encountered the Christ child, we can never just go back the same way. Even if we think we're going to continue with life as it always was, we'll find that it has somehow changed.

Epiphany is a time when God is revealed in the world. A time when God lights up our world. A time when the light of God breaks into our life for the first time or the umpteenth time in often surprising

ways. When we reach a point in life where the light of God's love reveals Jesus' true nature to us, we can either miss the point, like Herod, or we can respond in love and with all we can offer, just like the wise men. But if we respond like them, nothing will ever quite be the same again. We can never go back the same way. God notices us, knows us, lives within us, and calls us to follow him on a continuing journey – a journey where he sets the compass, he reads the map and he invites us, step by faltering step a little more like his Son Jesus.

We are led on that next part of the journey, as ever, by the light of his love. But now he asks us, as his disciples, as his apprentices, to do as he does. He asks us to reflect the light of his love to those around us. And so continues to reveal himself to the world around in all kinds of little epiphanies – the many little acts of selfless kindness we can all see around us if we take the time to pause, look up and see them. He invites us to see these things and, reflecting the light of his love, to join in.

The story of the wise men's journey of faith is pretty much the same as anyone's. Along the way, they seek, they find, they are changed and they follow. And so can we.

Conclusion

So how do we sum up the wise men's journey of faith? What does it tell us about ours? I think we can do it in three words: Seek, Find, Follow.

Seek – the light of God's love shows us the way to Jesus

Find - the light God's love brings us safely to him

Follow – as Jesus' disciples, we reflect the light of God's love to others.

This New Year, let's set off on an exciting, risky, new phase of our journeys of faith, expecting to see and reflect more and more of God around us. Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Sending Out Prayer

Lord, we have met with you this morning.

We have discovered more of your purposes for us,
and you have revealed yourself to us.

Send us out, in wonderful anticipation,
to follow wherever you lead us.

Amen.