

“A King for All”
(Epiphany)

Matthew 2:1-12

[TITLE SLIDE] Happy New Year! Christmas and New Year’s really seemed to fly by this year. By the way, next Saturday is our last task of the holiday season: we have to take all these beautiful decorations down and store them. It seems like a shame to have to put them away. Still, I am grateful for all of those who helped during our busy holiday season, especially those who served a meal for Little Brothers on Christmas Day. These are the meaningful ways we act, all throughout the year, as we remind ourselves, “Whose birthday it really is.” We give Jesus the best present ever when we serve as the body of Christ.

Would you turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, “I’m glad you here to worship with me”? It’s true. We’re all in this together.

I invite you to pray with me. Awesome and mighty God, thank you for your love, shown to us once again in the gift of Christmas and a brand new year. May your words be a light to our path as we again open the scripture and hear your voice speaking to us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Christmas may have been nine days ago, but since today is Epiphany, we have one more Christmas story to cover. These figures appear in our nativity set, and we commonly call them the three wise men. I know you all were listening carefully to our scripture this morning, so I’m going to surprise you with a pop quiz. Here we go.

Question 1: Who saw “the star in the east”?

- a) Shepherds, b) Mary and Joseph, c) Three kings, d) Both a and c
 - e) None of the above, f) Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my!
- ...because...

Question 2: What does “wise men” (magi) refer to?

- a) Men of the educated class, b) Eastern kings, c) Astrologers,
- d) Sages, e) Men smart enough to follow the star

Question 3: How many wise men came to see Jesus? (*At least two*)

Question 4: The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to...

- a) Inform Herod about Jesus, b) Find out where Jesus was,
- c) Ask about the star that they saw, d) Fill up with gas, e) Buy presents for Jesus

Question 5: The wise men found Jesus in a...

- a) Manger, b) Stable, c) House, d) Holiday Inn Express, e) Good mood

Question 6: What is frankincense?

- a) A precious metal, b) A precious fabric, c) A precious perfume,
- d) An Eastern monster story, e) None of the above

Question 7: What is myrrh?

- a) An easily-shaped metal, b) A spice used for burying people, c) A drink
- d) After-shave lotion, e) None of the above

Question 8: I think that this test was...

- a) Super, b) Great, c) Fantastic, d) All of the above

[TITLE SLIDE] So, how did you do? I've given this test before, and it never fails that someone complains, "But that's not what they told us at the outdoor drama!" True. Our traditions do not always reflect the Bible accurately. I freely confess, I chose the hymn, "We Three Kings," which is probably the most biblically inaccurate carol in our hymnal, but I love it, anyway.

I have some catholic friends over in Germany who do a better job of sticking to the script. They make their magi travel through the whole house before they get to be in the nativity. Seriously. My buddy Marc puts the camels and magi out during Advent, and they go from room to room, "searching" for Jesus, and they finally make it there in January on the day of Epiphany. I've never asked him why he doesn't make them travel for two years...

However, the point of the quiz was not to tell us that we need to change our nativity set. The point is to wonder: Who were these magi, and what were they searching for? Is this just a story to explain why we exchange gifts on Christmas? Or does their search also tell us something about what we are searching for?

Let's look at the scripture and see. Matthew 2 tells us that these magi came from the east, but it doesn't say what country. Most people assume it was Arabia or Persia, both of which are east of Israel. We don't really know. The point is, these magi were not Jewish. The original readers of this gospel would have realized that these people were pagans.

[SLIDE: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN] So, if they weren't Jewish, why were they looking for the "King of the Jews"? The answer very well could lie in the

book of Daniel, the Old Testament "lion's den" guy. Remember him? 600 years before Christ was born, Daniel and his friends were taken from royal Jewish families and made to be slaves in Babylon, which just happens to be in Persia. And guess what Daniel's job was? He was a wise man. A seer. Someone who could interpret dreams and signs. An astrologer. It is very possible that because of Daniel's influence 600 years earlier, these men came out of the east looking for the Christ child. Now, that's a legacy!

[SLIDE: SATURN AND JUPITER] Some scholars think what the wise men saw was the "Star of Bethlehem," a special great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which coincidentally happened again on the winter solstice last month. While the 21st was cloudy in Houghton, I saw some of the amazing pictures online, including this one, and was able to see the planets in the evening sky a few days before the actual solstice. I have to admit, a thrill ran down my spine when I considered that, 2000 years ago, this might have been the same sign that brought the wise men.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM] Whatever it was that these magi saw, they recognized a heavenly billboard that read, "There is a new king in town!" and so they went to Jerusalem to find him. Why would they go to Jerusalem? Well, if you want to see the President, you go to Washington DC. If you want to meet the Queen of England, you go to London. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and therefore the most likely place to find a new king. So the wise men went to Jerusalem first.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN AND HEROD] They found a king, all right, but not the one they were looking for. They met Herod, a poser king, someone who really was just a puppet of the Roman government. Herod wasn't even Jewish himself! But Herod was a powerful and murderous old man. The scripture says he was "disturbed" by the presence of these magi; some translations says "frightened." This really indicates Herod's state of mind. He was terrified of the hint of competition.

However, it was the wise men, not Herod, not the scribes or priests that went looking for the new king. Isn't that ironic? The Jewish leaders interpreted the scripture, and then stayed home. Herod the current king freaked out and wanted to kill Jesus, but he stayed inside his palace. In the end, it was the pagan magi who sought out the Christ child.

[TITLE SLIDE] These wise men were not Jews. They were from the "wrong" country, the "wrong" religion, the "wrong background", for heaven's sake, they even went to the wrong city! However, these men desperately searched for Jesus. The scripture says that they knew Jesus had been born a king. Not born a "prince". Not "eventually, one day, when the time is right, he'll be a king", either by succession or by some military coup. Jesus was divinely ordained to be king from the moment he came to earth. The wise men knew that, and they sought him.

[WISE MEN'S GIFTS] After they left Herod, the wise men did eventually find Jesus at home with his mother Mary. Don't ask me where Joseph was; the scripture doesn't say. Maybe he was out buying diapers and bottles. (That's probably where I would have been.) The magi entered the home and worshiped Jesus on the spot. And they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts are odd presents for a toddler. A Washington Times article a while back quipped, "if the three wise men had been women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth." Sadly, Mary did not receive any such help.

The wise men, at the end of their desperate search, gave their precious gifts to the Christ child. Gold – because Jesus was a king. Frankincense – an offering normally burned in the temple – because Jesus was God. Myrrh – an embalming oil or spice, used at a burial, because Jesus was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

[SLIDE: TWO CROWNS] The magi were looking for someone special, more than just an earthly king. They were looking for the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the one true Lord of Lords. That is why they spent two years searching. That is why they were so desperate to find Jesus.

I want to ask you this morning, how desperate are you to find Jesus? What are you willing to give him? These wise men went great lengths at their own risk to find Jesus and give him costly gifts. They were looking for the one to worship, to give their lives to, and they were not holding anything back: not their money,

not their time, not their traditions or background or culture or even their nationality.

There are some who think Jesus is not the king for all; they think he is just a king for some. They think, "If you fit the right mold, if you have the right training and background, it's OK for you to worship Jesus. But if you don't, well that's just too bad." The story of the magi flies in the face of that. These men wanted answers; they wanted to know Jesus. And they found him.

[SLIDE: DIVERSITY] Do you know that Jesus is King for All? The search for Jesus is not limited to the people with the right credentials. All people can worship Jesus! You simply have to have a heart that is ready to receive him. You have to be desperate enough to search diligently, maybe for years, to find him.

What about you? Are you searching for Jesus? Do you need to give him your figurative gold, frankincense, or myrrh? Do you need to submit to him as King, worship him as God, and confess your belief that he died to save you? Jesus is the King for All, and he can be your king, too.

[TITLE SLIDE] Maybe you have sought him and still are seeking him. That's great. Who else is following in your footsteps? Think about it, we have a lot to thank Daniel for in this story. His faith likely led these magi to travel in search of Christ. Daniel helped us know we would find our King, our God, our Redeemer in a small house in Bethlehem 600 years later. And it leaves me wondering, what am I willing to do to find the King of Kings and lead someone else to him? Christmas was eleven days ago, but it's never too late to find Jesus. And I pray that you will, and that you will lead others to him, as well. Happy New Year!

Prayer of Confession (by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com)

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! (In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!) Glory to God! AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Benediction

Go into God's world, bearing the light of hope and peace. Bring the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ to all the people. Go in peace. AMEN.

MEMORY VERSE:

John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you see Jesus as a "King for All" or just a "King for Some"?
2. Which of the three gifts – gold (ruler), incense (deity), myrrh (sacrifice) – do you identify with? What would you give to Jesus?
3. How far would you go to see the King of Kings?
4. How does your life help lead others to Jesus?

“A King for All”
(Epiphany)

Matthew 2:1-12

[TITLE SLIDE] Happy New Year! Christmas and New Year’s really seemed to fly by this year. By the way, next Saturday is our last task of the holiday season: we have to take all these beautiful decorations down and store them. It seems like a shame to have to put them away. Still, I am grateful for all of those who helped during our busy holiday season, especially those who served a meal for Little Brothers on Christmas Day. These are the meaningful ways we act, all throughout the year, as we remind ourselves, “Whose birthday it really is.” We give Jesus the best present ever when we serve as the body of Christ.

Would you turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, “I’m glad you here to worship with me”? It’s true. We’re all in this together.

I invite you to pray with me. Awesome and mighty God, thank you for your love, shown to us once again in the gift of Christmas and a brand new year. May your words be a light to our path as we again open the scripture and hear your voice speaking to us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Christmas may have been nine days ago, but since today is Epiphany, we have one more Christmas story to cover. These figures appear in our nativity set, and we commonly call them the three wise men. I know you all were listening carefully to our scripture this morning, so I’m going to surprise you with a pop quiz. Here we go.

Question 1: Who saw “the star in the east”?

- a) Shepherds, b) Mary and Joseph, c) Three kings, d) Both a and c
 - e) None of the above, f) Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my!
- ...because...

Question 2: What does “wise men” (magi) refer to?

- a) Men of the educated class, b) Eastern kings, c) Astrologers,
- d) Sages, e) Men smart enough to follow the star

Question 3: How many wise men came to see Jesus? (*At least two*)

Question 4: The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to...

- a) Inform Herod about Jesus, b) Find out where Jesus was,
- c) Ask about the star that they saw, d) Fill up with gas, e) Buy presents for Jesus

Question 5: The wise men found Jesus in a...

- a) Manger, b) Stable, c) House, d) Holiday Inn Express, e) Good mood

Question 6: What is frankincense?

- a) A precious metal, b) A precious fabric, c) A precious perfume,
- d) An Eastern monster story, e) None of the above

Question 7: What is myrrh?

- a) An easily-shaped metal, b) A spice used for burying people, c) A drink
- d) After-shave lotion, e) None of the above

Question 8: I think that this test was...

- a) Super, b) Great, c) Fantastic, d) All of the above

[TITLE SLIDE] So, how did you do? I've given this test before, and it never fails that someone complains, "But that's not what they told us at the outdoor drama!" True. Our traditions do not always reflect the Bible accurately. I freely confess, I chose the hymn, "We Three Kings," which is probably the most biblically inaccurate carol in our hymnal, but I love it, anyway.

I have some catholic friends over in Germany who do a better job of sticking to the script. They make their magi travel through the whole house before they get to be in the nativity. Seriously. My buddy Marc puts the camels and magi out during Advent, and they go from room to room, "searching" for Jesus, and they finally make it there in January on the day of Epiphany. I've never asked him why he doesn't make them travel for two years...

However, the point of the quiz was not to tell us that we need to change our nativity set. The point is to wonder: Who were these magi, and what were they searching for? Is this just a story to explain why we exchange gifts on Christmas? Or does their search also tell us something about what we are searching for?

Let's look at the scripture and see. Matthew 2 tells us that these magi came from the east, but it doesn't say what country. Most people assume it was Arabia or Persia, both of which are east of Israel. We don't really know. The point is, these magi were not Jewish. The original readers of this gospel would have realized that these people were pagans.

[SLIDE: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN] So, if they weren't Jewish, why were they looking for the "King of the Jews"? The answer very well could lie in the

book of Daniel, the Old Testament "lion's den" guy. Remember him? 600 years before Christ was born, Daniel and his friends were taken from royal Jewish families and made to be slaves in Babylon, which just happens to be in Persia. And guess what Daniel's job was? He was a wise man. A seer. Someone who could interpret dreams and signs. An astrologer. It is very possible that because of Daniel's influence 600 years earlier, these men came out of the east looking for the Christ child. Now, that's a legacy!

[SLIDE: SATURN AND JUPITER] Some scholars think what the wise men saw was the "Star of Bethlehem," a special great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which coincidentally happened again on the winter solstice last month. While the 21st was cloudy in Houghton, I saw some of the amazing pictures online, including this one, and was able to see the planets in the evening sky a few days before the actual solstice. I have to admit, a thrill ran down my spine when I considered that, 2000 years ago, this might have been the same sign that brought the wise men.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM] Whatever it was that these magi saw, they recognized a heavenly billboard that read, "There is a new king in town!" and so they went to Jerusalem to find him. Why would they go to Jerusalem? Well, if you want to see the President, you go to Washington DC. If you want to meet the Queen of England, you go to London. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and therefore the most likely place to find a new king. So the wise men went to Jerusalem first.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN AND HEROD] They found a king, all right, but not the one they were looking for. They met Herod, a poser king, someone who really was just a puppet of the Roman government. Herod wasn't even Jewish himself! But Herod was a powerful and murderous old man. The scripture says he was "disturbed" by the presence of these magi; some translations says "frightened." This really indicates Herod's state of mind. He was terrified of the hint of competition.

However, it was the wise men, not Herod, not the scribes or priests that went looking for the new king. Isn't that ironic? The Jewish leaders interpreted the scripture, and then stayed home. Herod the current king freaked out and wanted to kill Jesus, but he stayed inside his palace. In the end, it was the pagan magi who sought out the Christ child.

[TITLE SLIDE] These wise men were not Jews. They were from the “wrong” country, the “wrong” religion, the “wrong background”, for heaven’s sake, they even went to the wrong city! However, these men desperately searched for Jesus. The scripture says that they knew Jesus had been born a king. Not born a “prince”. Not “eventually, one day, when the time is right, he’ll be a king”, either by succession or by some military coup. Jesus was divinely ordained to be king from the moment he came to earth. The wise men knew that, and they sought him.

[WISE MEN’S GIFTS] After they left Herod, the wise men did eventually find Jesus at home with his mother Mary. Don’t ask me where Joseph was; the scripture doesn’t say. Maybe he was out buying diapers and bottles. (That’s probably where I would have been.) The magi entered the home and worshiped Jesus on the spot. And they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts are odd presents for a toddler. A Washington Times article a while back quipped, “if the three wise men had been women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth.” Sadly, Mary did not receive any such help.

The wise men, at the end of their desperate search, gave their precious gifts to the Christ child. Gold – because Jesus was a king. Frankincense – an offering normally burned in the temple – because Jesus was God. Myrrh – an embalming oil or spice, used at a burial, because Jesus was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

[SLIDE: TWO CROWNS] The magi were looking for someone special, more than just an earthly king. They were looking for the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the one true Lord of Lords. That is why they spent two years searching. That is why they were so desperate to find Jesus.

I want to ask you this morning, how desperate are you to find Jesus? What are you willing to give him? These wise men went great lengths at their own risk to find Jesus and give him costly gifts. They were looking for the one to worship, to give their lives to, and they were not holding anything back: not their money,

not their time, not their traditions or background or culture or even their nationality.

There are some who think Jesus is not the king for all; they think he is just a king for some. They think, "If you fit the right mold, if you have the right training and background, it's OK for you to worship Jesus. But if you don't, well that's just too bad." The story of the magi flies in the face of that. These men wanted answers; they wanted to know Jesus. And they found him.

[SLIDE: DIVERSITY] Do you know that Jesus is King for All? The search for Jesus is not limited to the people with the right credentials. All people can worship Jesus! You simply have to have a heart that is ready to receive him. You have to be desperate enough to search diligently, maybe for years, to find him.

What about you? Are you searching for Jesus? Do you need to give him your figurative gold, frankincense, or myrrh? Do you need to submit to him as King, worship him as God, and confess your belief that he died to save you? Jesus is the King for All, and he can be your king, too.

[TITLE SLIDE] Maybe you have sought him and still are seeking him. That's great. Who else is following in your footsteps? Think about it, we have a lot to thank Daniel for in this story. His faith likely led these magi to travel in search of Christ. Daniel helped us know we would find our King, our God, our Redeemer in a small house in Bethlehem 600 years later. And it leaves me wondering, what am I willing to do to find the King of Kings and lead someone else to him? Christmas was eleven days ago, but it's never too late to find Jesus. And I pray that you will, and that you will lead others to him, as well. Happy New Year!

Prayer of Confession (by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com)

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! (In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!) Glory to God! AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Benediction

Go into God's world, bearing the light of hope and peace. Bring the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ to all the people. Go in peace. AMEN.

MEMORY VERSE:

John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you see Jesus as a "King for All" or just a "King for Some"?
2. Which of the three gifts – gold (ruler), incense (deity), myrrh (sacrifice) – do you identify with? What would you give to Jesus?
3. How far would you go to see the King of Kings?
4. How does your life help lead others to Jesus?

"A King for All"
(Epiphany)

Matthew 2:1-12

[TITLE SLIDE] Happy New Year! Christmas and New Year's really seemed to fly by this year. By the way, next Saturday is our last task of the holiday season: we have to take all these beautiful decorations down and store them. It seems like a shame to have to put them away. Still, I am grateful for all of those who helped during our busy holiday season, especially those who served a meal for Little Brothers on Christmas Day. These are the meaningful ways we act, all throughout the year, as we remind ourselves, "Whose birthday it really is." We give Jesus the best present ever when we serve as the body of Christ.

Would you turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, "I'm glad you here to worship with me"? It's true. We're all in this together.

I invite you to pray with me. Awesome and mighty God, thank you for your love, shown to us once again in the gift of Christmas and a brand new year. May your words be a light to our path as we again open the scripture and hear your voice speaking to us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Christmas may have been nine days ago, but since today is Epiphany, we have one more Christmas story to cover. These figures appear in our nativity set, and we commonly call them the three wise men. I know you all were listening carefully to our scripture this morning, so I'm going to surprise you with a pop quiz. Here we go.

Question 1: Who saw "the star in the east"?

- a) Shepherds, b) Mary and Joseph, c) Three kings, d) Both a and c
 - e) None of the above, f) Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my!
- ...because...

Question 2: What does "wise men" (magi) refer to?

- a) Men of the educated class, b) Eastern kings, c) Astrologers,
- d) Sages, e) Men smart enough to follow the star

Question 3: How many wise men came to see Jesus? (*At least two*)

Question 4: The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to...

- a) Inform Herod about Jesus, b) Find out where Jesus was,
- c) Ask about the star that they saw, d) Fill up with gas, e) Buy presents for Jesus

Question 5: The wise men found Jesus in a...

- a) Manger, b) Stable, c) House, d) Holiday Inn Express, e) Good mood

Question 6: What is frankincense?

- a) A precious metal, b) A precious fabric, c) A precious perfume,
- d) An Eastern monster story, e) None of the above

Question 7: What is myrrh?

- a) An easily-shaped metal, b) A spice used for burying people, c) A drink
- d) After-shave lotion, e) None of the above

Question 8: I think that this test was...

- a) Super, b) Great, c) Fantastic, d) All of the above

[TITLE SLIDE] So, how did you do? I've given this test before, and it never fails that someone complains, "But that's not what they told us at the outdoor drama!" True. Our traditions do not always reflect the Bible accurately. I freely confess, I chose the hymn, "We Three Kings," which is probably the most biblically inaccurate carol in our hymnal, but I love it, anyway.

I have some catholic friends over in Germany who do a better job of sticking to the script. They make their magi travel through the whole house before they get to be in the nativity. Seriously. My buddy Marc puts the camels and magi out during Advent, and they go from room to room, "searching" for Jesus, and they finally make it there in January on the day of Epiphany. I've never asked him why he doesn't make them travel for two years...

However, the point of the quiz was not to tell us that we need to change our nativity set. The point is to wonder: Who were these magi, and what were they searching for? Is this just a story to explain why we exchange gifts on Christmas? Or does their search also tell us something about what we are searching for?

Let's look at the scripture and see. Matthew 2 tells us that these magi came from the east, but it doesn't say what country. Most people assume it was Arabia or Persia, both of which are east of Israel. We don't really know. The point is, these magi were not Jewish. The original readers of this gospel would have realized that these people were pagans.

[SLIDE: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN] So, if they weren't Jewish, why were they looking for the "King of the Jews"? The answer very well could lie in the

book of Daniel, the Old Testament "lion's den" guy. Remember him? 600 years before Christ was born, Daniel and his friends were taken from royal Jewish families and made to be slaves in Babylon, which just happens to be in Persia. And guess what Daniel's job was? He was a wise man. A seer. Someone who could interpret dreams and signs. An astrologer. It is very possible that because of Daniel's influence 600 years earlier, these men came out of the east looking for the Christ child. Now, that's a legacy!

[SLIDE: SATURN AND JUPITER] Some scholars think what the wise men saw was the "Star of Bethlehem," a special great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which coincidentally happened again on the winter solstice last month. While the 21st was cloudy in Houghton, I saw some of the amazing pictures online, including this one, and was able to see the planets in the evening sky a few days before the actual solstice. I have to admit, a thrill ran down my spine when I considered that, 2000 years ago, this might have been the same sign that brought the wise men.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM] Whatever it was that these magi saw, they recognized a heavenly billboard that read, "There is a new king in town!" and so they went to Jerusalem to find him. Why would they go to Jerusalem? Well, if you want to see the President, you go to Washington DC. If you want to meet the Queen of England, you go to London. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and therefore the most likely place to find a new king. So the wise men went to Jerusalem first.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN AND HEROD] They found a king, all right, but not the one they were looking for. They met Herod, a poser king, someone who really was just a puppet of the Roman government. Herod wasn't even Jewish himself! But Herod was a powerful and murderous old man. The scripture says he was "disturbed" by the presence of these magi; some translations says "frightened." This really indicates Herod's state of mind. He was terrified of the hint of competition.

However, it was the wise men, not Herod, not the scribes or priests that went looking for the new king. Isn't that ironic? The Jewish leaders interpreted the scripture, and then stayed home. Herod the current king freaked out and wanted to kill Jesus, but he stayed inside his palace. In the end, it was the pagan magi who sought out the Christ child.

[TITLE SLIDE] These wise men were not Jews. They were from the “wrong” country, the “wrong” religion, the “wrong background”, for heaven’s sake, they even went to the wrong city! However, these men desperately searched for Jesus. The scripture says that they knew Jesus had been born a king. Not born a “prince”. Not “eventually, one day, when the time is right, he’ll be a king”, either by succession or by some military coup. Jesus was divinely ordained to be king from the moment he came to earth. The wise men knew that, and they sought him.

[WISE MEN’S GIFTS] After they left Herod, the wise men did eventually find Jesus at home with his mother Mary. Don’t ask me where Joseph was; the scripture doesn’t say. Maybe he was out buying diapers and bottles. (That’s probably where I would have been.) The magi entered the home and worshiped Jesus on the spot. And they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts are odd presents for a toddler. A Washington Times article a while back quipped, “if the three wise men had been women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth.” Sadly, Mary did not receive any such help.

The wise men, at the end of their desperate search, gave their precious gifts to the Christ child. Gold – because Jesus was a king. Frankincense – an offering normally burned in the temple – because Jesus was God. Myrrh – an embalming oil or spice, used at a burial, because Jesus was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

[SLIDE: TWO CROWNS] The magi were looking for someone special, more than just an earthly king. They were looking for the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the one true Lord of Lords. That is why they spent two years searching. That is why they were so desperate to find Jesus.

I want to ask you this morning, how desperate are you to find Jesus? What are you willing to give him? These wise men went great lengths at their own risk to find Jesus and give him costly gifts. They were looking for the one to worship, to give their lives to, and they were not holding anything back: not their money,

not their time, not their traditions or background or culture or even their nationality.

There are some who think Jesus is not the king for all; they think he is just a king for some. They think, "If you fit the right mold, if you have the right training and background, it's OK for you to worship Jesus. But if you don't, well that's just too bad." The story of the magi flies in the face of that. These men wanted answers; they wanted to know Jesus. And they found him.

[SLIDE: DIVERSITY] Do you know that Jesus is King for All? The search for Jesus is not limited to the people with the right credentials. All people can worship Jesus! You simply have to have a heart that is ready to receive him. You have to be desperate enough to search diligently, maybe for years, to find him.

What about you? Are you searching for Jesus? Do you need to give him your figurative gold, frankincense, or myrrh? Do you need to submit to him as King, worship him as God, and confess your belief that he died to save you? Jesus is the King for All, and he can be your king, too.

[TITLE SLIDE] Maybe you have sought him and still are seeking him. That's great. Who else is following in your footsteps? Think about it, we have a lot to thank Daniel for in this story. His faith likely led these magi to travel in search of Christ. Daniel helped us know we would find our King, our God, our Redeemer in a small house in Bethlehem 600 years later. And it leaves me wondering, what am I willing to do to find the King of Kings and lead someone else to him? Christmas was eleven days ago, but it's never too late to find Jesus. And I pray that you will, and that you will lead others to him, as well. Happy New Year!

Prayer of Confession (by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com)

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! (In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!) Glory to God! AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Benediction

Go into God's world, bearing the light of hope and peace. Bring the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ to all the people. Go in peace. AMEN.

MEMORY VERSE:

John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you see Jesus as a "King for All" or just a "King for Some"?
2. Which of the three gifts – gold (ruler), incense (deity), myrrh (sacrifice) – do you identify with? What would you give to Jesus?
3. How far would you go to see the King of Kings?
4. How does your life help lead others to Jesus?

“A King for All”
(Epiphany)

Matthew 2:1-12

[TITLE SLIDE] Happy New Year! Christmas and New Year’s really seemed to fly by this year. By the way, next Saturday is our last task of the holiday season: we have to take all these beautiful decorations down and store them. It seems like a shame to have to put them away. Still, I am grateful for all of those who helped during our busy holiday season, especially those who served a meal for Little Brothers on Christmas Day. These are the meaningful ways we act, all throughout the year, as we remind ourselves, “Whose birthday it really is.” We give Jesus the best present ever when we serve as the body of Christ.

Would you turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, “I’m glad you here to worship with me”? It’s true. We’re all in this together.

I invite you to pray with me. Awesome and mighty God, thank you for your love, shown to us once again in the gift of Christmas and a brand new year. May your words be a light to our path as we again open the scripture and hear your voice speaking to us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Christmas may have been nine days ago, but since today is Epiphany, we have one more Christmas story to cover. These figures appear in our nativity set, and we commonly call them the three wise men. I know you all were listening carefully to our scripture this morning, so I’m going to surprise you with a pop quiz. Here we go.

Question 1: Who saw “the star in the east”?

- a) Shepherds, b) Mary and Joseph, c) Three kings, d) Both a and c
 - e) None of the above, f) Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my!
- ...because...

Question 2: What does “wise men” (magi) refer to?

- a) Men of the educated class, b) Eastern kings, c) Astrologers,
- d) Sages, e) Men smart enough to follow the star

Question 3: How many wise men came to see Jesus? (*At least two*)

Question 4: The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to...

- a) Inform Herod about Jesus, b) Find out where Jesus was,
- c) Ask about the star that they saw, d) Fill up with gas, e) Buy presents for Jesus

Question 5: The wise men found Jesus in a...

- a) Manger, b) Stable, c) House, d) Holiday Inn Express, e) Good mood

Question 6: What is frankincense?

- a) A precious metal, b) A precious fabric, c) A precious perfume,
- d) An Eastern monster story, e) None of the above

Question 7: What is myrrh?

- a) An easily-shaped metal, b) A spice used for burying people, c) A drink
- d) After-shave lotion, e) None of the above

Question 8: I think that this test was...

- a) Super, b) Great, c) Fantastic, d) All of the above

[TITLE SLIDE] So, how did you do? I've given this test before, and it never fails that someone complains, "But that's not what they told us at the outdoor drama!" True. Our traditions do not always reflect the Bible accurately. I freely confess, I chose the hymn, "We Three Kings," which is probably the most biblically inaccurate carol in our hymnal, but I love it, anyway.

I have some catholic friends over in Germany who do a better job of sticking to the script. They make their magi travel through the whole house before they get to be in the nativity. Seriously. My buddy Marc puts the camels and magi out during Advent, and they go from room to room, "searching" for Jesus, and they finally make it there in January on the day of Epiphany. I've never asked him why he doesn't make them travel for two years...

However, the point of the quiz was not to tell us that we need to change our nativity set. The point is to wonder: Who were these magi, and what were they searching for? Is this just a story to explain why we exchange gifts on Christmas? Or does their search also tell us something about what we are searching for?

Let's look at the scripture and see. Matthew 2 tells us that these magi came from the east, but it doesn't say what country. Most people assume it was Arabia or Persia, both of which are east of Israel. We don't really know. The point is, these magi were not Jewish. The original readers of this gospel would have realized that these people were pagans.

[SLIDE: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN] So, if they weren't Jewish, why were they looking for the "King of the Jews"? The answer very well could lie in the

book of Daniel, the Old Testament "lion's den" guy. Remember him? 600 years before Christ was born, Daniel and his friends were taken from royal Jewish families and made to be slaves in Babylon, which just happens to be in Persia. And guess what Daniel's job was? He was a wise man. A seer. Someone who could interpret dreams and signs. An astrologer. It is very possible that because of Daniel's influence 600 years earlier, these men came out of the east looking for the Christ child. Now, that's a legacy!

[SLIDE: SATURN AND JUPITER] Some scholars think what the wise men saw was the "Star of Bethlehem," a special great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which coincidentally happened again on the winter solstice last month. While the 21st was cloudy in Houghton, I saw some of the amazing pictures online, including this one, and was able to see the planets in the evening sky a few days before the actual solstice. I have to admit, a thrill ran down my spine when I considered that, 2000 years ago, this might have been the same sign that brought the wise men.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM] Whatever it was that these magi saw, they recognized a heavenly billboard that read, "There is a new king in town!" and so they went to Jerusalem to find him. Why would they go to Jerusalem? Well, if you want to see the President, you go to Washington DC. If you want to meet the Queen of England, you go to London. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and therefore the most likely place to find a new king. So the wise men went to Jerusalem first.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN AND HEROD] They found a king, all right, but not the one they were looking for. They met Herod, a poser king, someone who really was just a puppet of the Roman government. Herod wasn't even Jewish himself! But Herod was a powerful and murderous old man. The scripture says he was "disturbed" by the presence of these magi; some translations says "frightened." This really indicates Herod's state of mind. He was terrified of the hint of competition.

However, it was the wise men, not Herod, not the scribes or priests that went looking for the new king. Isn't that ironic? The Jewish leaders interpreted the scripture, and then stayed home. Herod the current king freaked out and wanted to kill Jesus, but he stayed inside his palace. In the end, it was the pagan magi who sought out the Christ child.

[TITLE SLIDE] These wise men were not Jews. They were from the "wrong" country, the "wrong" religion, the "wrong background", for heaven's sake, they even went to the wrong city! However, these men desperately searched for Jesus. The scripture says that they knew Jesus had been born a king. Not born a "prince". Not "eventually, one day, when the time is right, he'll be a king", either by succession or by some military coup. Jesus was divinely ordained to be king from the moment he came to earth. The wise men knew that, and they sought him.

[WISE MEN'S GIFTS] After they left Herod, the wise men did eventually find Jesus at home with his mother Mary. Don't ask me where Joseph was; the scripture doesn't say. Maybe he was out buying diapers and bottles. (That's probably where I would have been.) The magi entered the home and worshiped Jesus on the spot. And they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts are odd presents for a toddler. A Washington Times article a while back quipped, "if the three wise men had been women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth." Sadly, Mary did not receive any such help.

The wise men, at the end of their desperate search, gave their precious gifts to the Christ child. Gold – because Jesus was a king. Frankincense – an offering normally burned in the temple – because Jesus was God. Myrrh – an embalming oil or spice, used at a burial, because Jesus was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

[SLIDE: TWO CROWNS] The magi were looking for someone special, more than just an earthly king. They were looking for the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the one true Lord of Lords. That is why they spent two years searching. That is why they were so desperate to find Jesus.

I want to ask you this morning, how desperate are you to find Jesus? What are you willing to give him? These wise men went great lengths at their own risk to find Jesus and give him costly gifts. They were looking for the one to worship, to give their lives to, and they were not holding anything back: not their money,

not their time, not their traditions or background or culture or even their nationality.

There are some who think Jesus is not the king for all; they think he is just a king for some. They think, "If you fit the right mold, if you have the right training and background, it's OK for you to worship Jesus. But if you don't, well that's just too bad." The story of the magi flies in the face of that. These men wanted answers; they wanted to know Jesus. And they found him.

[SLIDE: DIVERSITY] Do you know that Jesus is King for All? The search for Jesus is not limited to the people with the right credentials. All people can worship Jesus! You simply have to have a heart that is ready to receive him. You have to be desperate enough to search diligently, maybe for years, to find him.

What about you? Are you searching for Jesus? Do you need to give him your figurative gold, frankincense, or myrrh? Do you need to submit to him as King, worship him as God, and confess your belief that he died to save you? Jesus is the King for All, and he can be your king, too.

[TITLE SLIDE] Maybe you have sought him and still are seeking him. That's great. Who else is following in your footsteps? Think about it, we have a lot to thank Daniel for in this story. His faith likely led these magi to travel in search of Christ. Daniel helped us know we would find our King, our God, our Redeemer in a small house in Bethlehem 600 years later. And it leaves me wondering, what am I willing to do to find the King of Kings and lead someone else to him? Christmas was eleven days ago, but it's never too late to find Jesus. And I pray that you will, and that you will lead others to him, as well. Happy New Year!

Prayer of Confession (by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com)

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! (In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!) Glory to God! AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Benediction

Go into God's world, bearing the light of hope and peace. Bring the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ to all the people. Go in peace. AMEN.

MEMORY VERSE:

John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you see Jesus as a "King for All" or just a "King for Some"?
2. Which of the three gifts – gold (ruler), incense (deity), myrrh (sacrifice) – do you identify with? What would you give to Jesus?
3. How far would you go to see the King of Kings?
4. How does your life help lead others to Jesus?

"A King for All"
(Epiphany)

Matthew 2:1-12

[TITLE SLIDE] Happy New Year! Christmas and New Year's really seemed to fly by this year. By the way, next Saturday is our last task of the holiday season: we have to take all these beautiful decorations down and store them. It seems like a shame to have to put them away. Still, I am grateful for all of those who helped during our busy holiday season, especially those who served a meal for Little Brothers on Christmas Day. These are the meaningful ways we act, all throughout the year, as we remind ourselves, "Whose birthday it really is." We give Jesus the best present ever when we serve as the body of Christ.

Would you turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, "I'm glad you here to worship with me"? It's true. We're all in this together.

I invite you to pray with me. Awesome and mighty God, thank you for your love, shown to us once again in the gift of Christmas and a brand new year. May your words be a light to our path as we again open the scripture and hear your voice speaking to us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Christmas may have been nine days ago, but since today is Epiphany, we have one more Christmas story to cover. These figures appear in our nativity set, and we commonly call them the three wise men. I know you all were listening carefully to our scripture this morning, so I'm going to surprise you with a pop quiz. Here we go.

Question 1: Who saw "the star in the east"?

- a) Shepherds, b) Mary and Joseph, c) Three kings, d) Both a and c
 - e) None of the above, f) Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my!
- ...because...

Question 2: What does "wise men" (magi) refer to?

- a) Men of the educated class, b) Eastern kings, c) Astrologers,
- d) Sages, e) Men smart enough to follow the star

Question 3: How many wise men came to see Jesus? (*At least two*)

Question 4: The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to...

- a) Inform Herod about Jesus, b) Find out where Jesus was,
- c) Ask about the star that they saw, d) Fill up with gas, e) Buy presents for Jesus

Question 5: The wise men found Jesus in a...

- a) Manger, b) Stable, c) House, d) Holiday Inn Express, e) Good mood

Question 6: What is frankincense?

- a) A precious metal, b) A precious fabric, c) A precious perfume,
- d) An Eastern monster story, e) None of the above

Question 7: What is myrrh?

- a) An easily-shaped metal, b) A spice used for burying people, c) A drink
- d) After-shave lotion, e) None of the above

Question 8: I think that this test was...

- a) Super, b) Great, c) Fantastic, d) All of the above

[TITLE SLIDE] So, how did you do? I've given this test before, and it never fails that someone complains, "But that's not what they told us at the outdoor drama!" True. Our traditions do not always reflect the Bible accurately. I freely confess, I chose the hymn, "We Three Kings," which is probably the most biblically inaccurate carol in our hymnal, but I love it, anyway.

I have some catholic friends over in Germany who do a better job of sticking to the script. They make their magi travel through the whole house before they get to be in the nativity. Seriously. My buddy Marc puts the camels and magi out during Advent, and they go from room to room, "searching" for Jesus, and they finally make it there in January on the day of Epiphany. I've never asked him why he doesn't make them travel for two years...

However, the point of the quiz was not to tell us that we need to change our nativity set. The point is to wonder: Who were these magi, and what were they searching for? Is this just a story to explain why we exchange gifts on Christmas? Or does their search also tell us something about what we are searching for?

Let's look at the scripture and see. Matthew 2 tells us that these magi came from the east, but it doesn't say what country. Most people assume it was Arabia or Persia, both of which are east of Israel. We don't really know. The point is, these magi were not Jewish. The original readers of this gospel would have realized that these people were pagans.

[SLIDE: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN] So, if they weren't Jewish, why were they looking for the "King of the Jews"? The answer very well could lie in the

book of Daniel, the Old Testament "lion's den" guy. Remember him? 600 years before Christ was born, Daniel and his friends were taken from royal Jewish families and made to be slaves in Babylon, which just happens to be in Persia. And guess what Daniel's job was? He was a wise man. A seer. Someone who could interpret dreams and signs. An astrologer. It is very possible that because of Daniel's influence 600 years earlier, these men came out of the east looking for the Christ child. Now, that's a legacy!

[SLIDE: SATURN AND JUPITER] Some scholars think what the wise men saw was the "Star of Bethlehem," a special great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which coincidentally happened again on the winter solstice last month. While the 21st was cloudy in Houghton, I saw some of the amazing pictures online, including this one, and was able to see the planets in the evening sky a few days before the actual solstice. I have to admit, a thrill ran down my spine when I considered that, 2000 years ago, this might have been the same sign that brought the wise men.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM] Whatever it was that these magi saw, they recognized a heavenly billboard that read, "There is a new king in town!" and so they went to Jerusalem to find him. Why would they go to Jerusalem? Well, if you want to see the President, you go to Washington DC. If you want to meet the Queen of England, you go to London. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and therefore the most likely place to find a new king. So the wise men went to Jerusalem first.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN AND HEROD] They found a king, all right, but not the one they were looking for. They met Herod, a poser king, someone who really was just a puppet of the Roman government. Herod wasn't even Jewish himself! But Herod was a powerful and murderous old man. The scripture says he was "disturbed" by the presence of these magi; some translations says "frightened." This really indicates Herod's state of mind. He was terrified of the hint of competition.

However, it was the wise men, not Herod, not the scribes or priests that went looking for the new king. Isn't that ironic? The Jewish leaders interpreted the scripture, and then stayed home. Herod the current king freaked out and wanted to kill Jesus, but he stayed inside his palace. In the end, it was the pagan magi who sought out the Christ child.

[TITLE SLIDE] These wise men were not Jews. They were from the “wrong” country, the “wrong” religion, the “wrong background”, for heaven’s sake, they even went to the wrong city! However, these men desperately searched for Jesus. The scripture says that they knew Jesus had been born a king. Not born a “prince”. Not “eventually, one day, when the time is right, he’ll be a king”, either by succession or by some military coup. Jesus was divinely ordained to be king from the moment he came to earth. The wise men knew that, and they sought him.

[WISE MEN’S GIFTS] After they left Herod, the wise men did eventually find Jesus at home with his mother Mary. Don’t ask me where Joseph was; the scripture doesn’t say. Maybe he was out buying diapers and bottles. (That’s probably where I would have been.) The magi entered the home and worshiped Jesus on the spot. And they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts are odd presents for a toddler. A Washington Times article a while back quipped, “if the three wise men had been women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth.” Sadly, Mary did not receive any such help.

The wise men, at the end of their desperate search, gave their precious gifts to the Christ child. Gold – because Jesus was a king. Frankincense – an offering normally burned in the temple – because Jesus was God. Myrrh – an embalming oil or spice, used at a burial, because Jesus was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

[SLIDE: TWO CROWNS] The magi were looking for someone special, more than just an earthly king. They were looking for the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the one true Lord of Lords. That is why they spent two years searching. That is why they were so desperate to find Jesus.

I want to ask you this morning, how desperate are you to find Jesus? What are you willing to give him? These wise men went great lengths at their own risk to find Jesus and give him costly gifts. They were looking for the one to worship, to give their lives to, and they were not holding anything back: not their money,

not their time, not their traditions or background or culture or even their nationality.

There are some who think Jesus is not the king for all; they think he is just a king for some. They think, "If you fit the right mold, if you have the right training and background, it's OK for you to worship Jesus. But if you don't, well that's just too bad." The story of the magi flies in the face of that. These men wanted answers; they wanted to know Jesus. And they found him.

[SLIDE: DIVERSITY] Do you know that Jesus is King for All? The search for Jesus is not limited to the people with the right credentials. All people can worship Jesus! You simply have to have a heart that is ready to receive him. You have to be desperate enough to search diligently, maybe for years, to find him.

What about you? Are you searching for Jesus? Do you need to give him your figurative gold, frankincense, or myrrh? Do you need to submit to him as King, worship him as God, and confess your belief that he died to save you? Jesus is the King for All, and he can be your king, too.

[TITLE SLIDE] Maybe you have sought him and still are seeking him. That's great. Who else is following in your footsteps? Think about it, we have a lot to thank Daniel for in this story. His faith likely led these magi to travel in search of Christ. Daniel helped us know we would find our King, our God, our Redeemer in a small house in Bethlehem 600 years later. And it leaves me wondering, what am I willing to do to find the King of Kings and lead someone else to him? Christmas was eleven days ago, but it's never too late to find Jesus. And I pray that you will, and that you will lead others to him, as well. Happy New Year!

Prayer of Confession (by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com)

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! (In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!) Glory to God! AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Benediction

Go into God's world, bearing the light of hope and peace. Bring the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ to all the people. Go in peace. AMEN.

MEMORY VERSE:

John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you see Jesus as a "King for All" or just a "King for Some"?
2. Which of the three gifts – gold (ruler), incense (deity), myrrh (sacrifice) – do you identify with? What would you give to Jesus?
3. How far would you go to see the King of Kings?
4. How does your life help lead others to Jesus?

“A King for All”
(Epiphany)

Matthew 2:1-12

[TITLE SLIDE] Happy New Year! Christmas and New Year’s really seemed to fly by this year. By the way, next Saturday is our last task of the holiday season: we have to take all these beautiful decorations down and store them. It seems like a shame to have to put them away. Still, I am grateful for all of those who helped during our busy holiday season, especially those who served a meal for Little Brothers on Christmas Day. These are the meaningful ways we act, all throughout the year, as we remind ourselves, “Whose birthday it really is.” We give Jesus the best present ever when we serve as the body of Christ.

Would you turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, “I’m glad you here to worship with me”? It’s true. We’re all in this together.

I invite you to pray with me. Awesome and mighty God, thank you for your love, shown to us once again in the gift of Christmas and a brand new year. May your words be a light to our path as we again open the scripture and hear your voice speaking to us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Christmas may have been nine days ago, but since today is Epiphany, we have one more Christmas story to cover. These figures appear in our nativity set, and we commonly call them the three wise men. I know you all were listening carefully to our scripture this morning, so I’m going to surprise you with a pop quiz. Here we go.

Question 1: Who saw “the star in the east”?

- a) Shepherds, b) Mary and Joseph, c) Three kings, d) Both a and c
 - e) None of the above, f) Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my!
- ...because...

Question 2: What does “wise men” (magi) refer to?

- a) Men of the educated class, b) Eastern kings, c) Astrologers,
- d) Sages, e) Men smart enough to follow the star

Question 3: How many wise men came to see Jesus? (*At least two*)

Question 4: The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to...

- a) Inform Herod about Jesus, b) Find out where Jesus was,
- c) Ask about the star that they saw, d) Fill up with gas, e) Buy presents for Jesus

Question 5: The wise men found Jesus in a...

- a) Manger, b) Stable, c) House, d) Holiday Inn Express, e) Good mood

Question 6: What is frankincense?

- a) A precious metal, b) A precious fabric, c) A precious perfume,
- d) An Eastern monster story, e) None of the above

Question 7: What is myrrh?

- a) An easily-shaped metal, b) A spice used for burying people, c) A drink
- d) After-shave lotion, e) None of the above

Question 8: I think that this test was...

- a) Super, b) Great, c) Fantastic, d) All of the above

[TITLE SLIDE] So, how did you do? I've given this test before, and it never fails that someone complains, "But that's not what they told us at the outdoor drama!" True. Our traditions do not always reflect the Bible accurately. I freely confess, I chose the hymn, "We Three Kings," which is probably the most biblically inaccurate carol in our hymnal, but I love it, anyway.

I have some catholic friends over in Germany who do a better job of sticking to the script. They make their magi travel through the whole house before they get to be in the nativity. Seriously. My buddy Marc puts the camels and magi out during Advent, and they go from room to room, "searching" for Jesus, and they finally make it there in January on the day of Epiphany. I've never asked him why he doesn't make them travel for two years...

However, the point of the quiz was not to tell us that we need to change our nativity set. The point is to wonder: Who were these magi, and what were they searching for? Is this just a story to explain why we exchange gifts on Christmas? Or does their search also tell us something about what we are searching for?

Let's look at the scripture and see. Matthew 2 tells us that these magi came from the east, but it doesn't say what country. Most people assume it was Arabia or Persia, both of which are east of Israel. We don't really know. The point is, these magi were not Jewish. The original readers of this gospel would have realized that these people were pagans.

[SLIDE: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN] So, if they weren't Jewish, why were they looking for the "King of the Jews"? The answer very well could lie in the

book of Daniel, the Old Testament "lion's den" guy. Remember him? 600 years before Christ was born, Daniel and his friends were taken from royal Jewish families and made to be slaves in Babylon, which just happens to be in Persia. And guess what Daniel's job was? He was a wise man. A seer. Someone who could interpret dreams and signs. An astrologer. It is very possible that because of Daniel's influence 600 years earlier, these men came out of the east looking for the Christ child. Now, that's a legacy!

[SLIDE: SATURN AND JUPITER] Some scholars think what the wise men saw was the "Star of Bethlehem," a special great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which coincidentally happened again on the winter solstice last month. While the 21st was cloudy in Houghton, I saw some of the amazing pictures online, including this one, and was able to see the planets in the evening sky a few days before the actual solstice. I have to admit, a thrill ran down my spine when I considered that, 2000 years ago, this might have been the same sign that brought the wise men.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM] Whatever it was that these magi saw, they recognized a heavenly billboard that read, "There is a new king in town!" and so they went to Jerusalem to find him. Why would they go to Jerusalem? Well, if you want to see the President, you go to Washington DC. If you want to meet the Queen of England, you go to London. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and therefore the most likely place to find a new king. So the wise men went to Jerusalem first.

[SLIDE: WISE MEN AND HEROD] They found a king, all right, but not the one they were looking for. They met Herod, a poser king, someone who really was just a puppet of the Roman government. Herod wasn't even Jewish himself! But Herod was a powerful and murderous old man. The scripture says he was "disturbed" by the presence of these magi; some translations says "frightened." This really indicates Herod's state of mind. He was terrified of the hint of competition.

However, it was the wise men, not Herod, not the scribes or priests that went looking for the new king. Isn't that ironic? The Jewish leaders interpreted the scripture, and then stayed home. Herod the current king freaked out and wanted to kill Jesus, but he stayed inside his palace. In the end, it was the pagan magi who sought out the Christ child.

[TITLE SLIDE] These wise men were not Jews. They were from the "wrong" country, the "wrong" religion, the "wrong background", for heaven's sake, they even went to the wrong city! However, these men desperately searched for Jesus. The scripture says that they knew Jesus had been born a king. Not born a "prince". Not "eventually, one day, when the time is right, he'll be a king", either by succession or by some military coup. Jesus was divinely ordained to be king from the moment he came to earth. The wise men knew that, and they sought him.

[WISE MEN'S GIFTS] After they left Herod, the wise men did eventually find Jesus at home with his mother Mary. Don't ask me where Joseph was; the scripture doesn't say. Maybe he was out buying diapers and bottles. (That's probably where I would have been.) The magi entered the home and worshiped Jesus on the spot. And they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts are odd presents for a toddler. A Washington Times article a while back quipped, "if the three wise men had been women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth." Sadly, Mary did not receive any such help.

The wise men, at the end of their desperate search, gave their precious gifts to the Christ child. Gold – because Jesus was a king. Frankincense – an offering normally burned in the temple – because Jesus was God. Myrrh – an embalming oil or spice, used at a burial, because Jesus was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

[SLIDE: TWO CROWNS] The magi were looking for someone special, more than just an earthly king. They were looking for the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Prince of Peace, the one true Lord of Lords. That is why they spent two years searching. That is why they were so desperate to find Jesus.

I want to ask you this morning, how desperate are you to find Jesus? What are you willing to give him? These wise men went great lengths at their own risk to find Jesus and give him costly gifts. They were looking for the one to worship, to give their lives to, and they were not holding anything back: not their money,

not their time, not their traditions or background or culture or even their nationality.

There are some who think Jesus is not the king for all; they think he is just a king for some. They think, "If you fit the right mold, if you have the right training and background, it's OK for you to worship Jesus. But if you don't, well that's just too bad." The story of the magi flies in the face of that. These men wanted answers; they wanted to know Jesus. And they found him.

[SLIDE: DIVERSITY] Do you know that Jesus is King for All? The search for Jesus is not limited to the people with the right credentials. All people can worship Jesus! You simply have to have a heart that is ready to receive him. You have to be desperate enough to search diligently, maybe for years, to find him.

What about you? Are you searching for Jesus? Do you need to give him your figurative gold, frankincense, or myrrh? Do you need to submit to him as King, worship him as God, and confess your belief that he died to save you? Jesus is the King for All, and he can be your king, too.

[TITLE SLIDE] Maybe you have sought him and still are seeking him. That's great. Who else is following in your footsteps? Think about it, we have a lot to thank Daniel for in this story. His faith likely led these magi to travel in search of Christ. Daniel helped us know we would find our King, our God, our Redeemer in a small house in Bethlehem 600 years later. And it leaves me wondering, what am I willing to do to find the King of Kings and lead someone else to him? Christmas was eleven days ago, but it's never too late to find Jesus. And I pray that you will, and that you will lead others to him, as well. Happy New Year!

Prayer of Confession (by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com)

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! (In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!) Glory to God! AMEN.

Prayers of the People

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Benediction

Go into God's world, bearing the light of hope and peace. Bring the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ to all the people. Go in peace. AMEN.

MEMORY VERSE:

John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you see Jesus as a "King for All" or just a "King for Some"?
2. Which of the three gifts – gold (ruler), incense (deity), myrrh (sacrifice) – do you identify with? What would you give to Jesus?
3. How far would you go to see the King of Kings?
4. How does your life help lead others to Jesus?