Beulah Baptist Church  
Reverend Doctor Jerry D. Black, Pastor  

Sunday School Lesson  
December 31, 2023  
Teacher – Sister Kevyn “KC” Carter

Lesson — The Faith of the Wise Men  
Text: Matthew 2:1-12  
Devotional Reading – Isaish 49:1-6  
Topic: “Taking Risks and Reaping Rewards”

I. Aim for Change/Lesson Objectives  
By the end of this lesson, we will…  
1. Evaluate the implications of the wise men in journeying afar to seek the King of the Jews,  
2. Marvel at those who dare to move beyond boundaries and find Christ, and  
3. Name one avenue in which their congregation could reach beyond its comfort zone in following Christ.

Key Verse  
“(Saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.)”  
{Matthew 2:2/King James Version}  
“(Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.)”  
{Matthew 2:2/New Living Translation}

Unifying Lesson Principle  
We may choose to pursue things that take us out of our comfort zones. What makes these pursuits worth the risk? The wise men in Matthew’s gospel took the risk of following a star that led them to Christ.

II. People & Places (Two Prominent Characters)  
The Magi (Wise Men)? The Magi were “trained” astronomers and astrologers who functioned as highly influential court advisors and they also officiated religious matters in the Persian Empire. The advent of a new star would give an indication for them, the birth or rise to power of a new leader in the country over which the star shone. The Magi’s were considered “pagan priest-scholars”, who confidently acted on what little they saw of God and God’s working. They were Persian priest from Greek magos – related to magic.

King Herod (Herod the Great)? Jesus was born toward the end of King Herod’s reign, when this politically savvy and ambitious ruler was devolving into a deeply paranoid man that was responsible for the deaths of most of his own family. This positioned the Magi questioning the birth of a legitimate claim to the throne of Herod being particularly threatening. The New Testament portrays King Herod as a tyrant and murderer, into whose kingdom Jesus of Nazareth was actually born. King Herod was the second son of Antipater II, who named him the governor of Galilee at age twenty-five in AD 47 (Anno Domini – in the year of our Lord/shows that a year is after the year in which Jesus Christ is thought to have been born: 12th century AD).

III. The Historical – Geographical/Cultural Settings
Who is the Legitimate King of Israel – King Herod or newborn Jesus “King of the Jews”?*

Matthew wanted the readers to think about this question: Who is the legitimate king of Israel? The narratives invite a comparison of the kingship of Jesus with that of the illegitimate puppet (Herod) (puppet reference: actions controlled by a powerful personal and/or government, even though they may appear to be independent).

(Matthew 5:17) …Jesus came not to abolish the law or the Prophets; but to fulfill the law; (John 10:10) …but came that they might have “life, and that they might have it more abundantly”. *Jesus is noted to be a sharp contrast from King Herod.

The wise men (Magi’s) followed the Star and paid homage to the “newborn king.”

These men (including what may have been more than the three men – only because its noted three (3) gifts), when they saw the Star, they rejoiced. This “Star” cast in the heavens, was their guide to the birthplace of Jesus. Why was this important? They were able to find Joseph, Mary & Jesus. The scripture states that they paid homage to the newborn Jesus, worshipped him and opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. These treasures were greater than the world’s possessions. (Matthew 2:9-11)

**Gold:** Symbol of kingship on Earth;

**Frankincense:** Symbol of Deity;

**Myrrh:** Symbol of death (used in embalming – signified one who was mortal – also known to relieve pain and destroy bacteria in the body).

IV. **Topical Outline**

A. Taking a Chance on Obedience to God

Scripture states that the Magi (wise men) came from the East in search of the one who had been born king, it was God, not humans, who controlled the unfolding of this birth story. **Matthew 2:12:** states for the record that the Magi were warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country “another way”).

1. God was at work in each scene to direct the various characters;
2. God was the guide for the wise men in their travels;
3. God secured Jesus’ life from Herod;
4. God made it possible for Joseph, Mary and Jesus to travel back from Egypt after Herod’s death;
5. God allowed these wise men to partner with Him in the grand scheme of the redemption of humankind – Yes, obedience is better than sacrifice!

B. Biblical Background

Matthew in Chapter 1 – introduces Jesus through “genealogy”; Chapter 2 – introduces Him through “geography”. The Magi’s question of WHERE?, “where” was repeated by Herod (threatened by this new King – was afraid, as were the priests/scribed) but, he introduces the geographical theme by naming specific locations; i.e., Bethlehem of Judea, the East, Jerusalem, the land of Judah. These instances connect Jesus to the geographical references that connect Jesus to the history of Israel. Both chapters recognize Jesus’ identity as the Messiah.

V. **Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. The Child Who Was Born a King

**Matthew 2:1-2** – Jesus’ birthplace is noted in Matthew 2:1 and 2:6.

1. This sets the birth of the Son of David in the hometown of David. A bit of History: In Bethlehem, David had been a shepherd; chosen and anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-3);
2. The birthplace is significant given the emphasis on the “Royal Line” of David which begins in Bethlehem;
3. Great-Grandson of Ruth and Boaz of Bethlehem;
4. Jesus was the “Good Shepherd” that Israel had been waiting for;
5. Homage is paid to the young king by the wise men – which was noted as more respect that He received than from his own people.

B. An Illegitimate King - Fearful of the Savior
Matthew 2:3-8 – King Herod was troubled and all of Jerusalem with him. Why?
1. Herod and Jerusalem (the Jewish people) heard the news of the wise men’s inquiry (Matthew 2:3);
2. This also included priests and scholars, especially in Jerusalem. They would soon openly reject Him - Jesus;
3. Herod calls for the “chief” priests and scribes – asked them where the Savior was to be born (Matthew 2:4) – based on Old Testament;
4. They answered/told him – saying “that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Matthew 2:5);
5. These priests & scribes noted that the scripture was coming to pass (Matthew 2:6); however, Herod would not be able to stop this One who was born King of the Jews!

C. Wise Men Guided by a Shining Star w/Opposition
1. Now Herod wants details – namely, What Time the Star Appeared (Matthew 2:7);
2. Scrupulous/Obsessive in Pursuit to destroy/kill the newly born and established Kings of Kings;
3. The Magi were told by Herod, to go and search “diligently” for this child and bring back information as his whereabouts (Matthew 2:8);
4. Some seem to think (Herod/priests/scribes) that the Magi’s were “perhaps” fooled – they agreed to return with information, but didn’t;
5. The wise men left – saw the Star – followed the Star for thousands of miles – then it (the Star) stopped over the place where Jesus was;
6. No “ordinary” star. It’s noted that not only do the winds and the waves obey God’s will and so do and did this Unusual Star;
7. Verse - Matthew 2:10, states they rejoiced with exceeding great joy when the Star stopped!!
8. These “wise men” found the one they had been searching for; (Matthew 2:11) states they saw a young child with Mary, fell down and worshipped Him – then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts – Gold/Frankincense and Myrrh.

D. A Dream and a Different Direction
1. Dreams – can give us guidance – encouragement – clear direction – warning - confirmation (Matthew 2:12)
2. Herod – characteristic (cunning/deceitful/murderer/paranoid) – reconciled he needed to have Jesus killed to sustain his Kingship – didn’t happen as he planned;
3. God has a divine plan/intervention – this was a major theme in Matthew’s gospel;
4. The Magi/Wise Men did not return to Herod – scripture tells us “they went home another way/direction” (Matthew 2:12).

Concluding Reflection
Men and Women of Faith – study to show yourself approved (2 Timothy 2:15)
KJV: Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
NLT: Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive His approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

Your Take-Away(s)
God Bless You and Keep You
Happy New Year!
A New Beginning with God!