

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Magi: Travel Delays”

Rev. Mark Lampley

December 10, 2023

Micah 5:2-4 & Matthew 2:1-8

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

Search diligently for the child. Search. Diligently. For the child.

Our sermons throughout December are from Matthew 1 & 2. They all involve our **searching** for Jesus, the Christ child. They’re various aspects of seeking the Lord, our Shepherd. Our matching daily devotionals on our new app and in print also revolve around this theme.

Searching (and related words) occurs 465 times in the Bible, so it’s safe to say a very common theme in the Old and New Testaments. And, *searching* is something we regularly experience no matter our age or stage. *Searching* can wear us out. It can involve lots of time and effort. It can be filled with a range of emotions: fun, frustration, excitement, or feel like a waste of time.

One of my cousins, Anne, knows how to diligently search. She lives in NC outside of a small town and has a few small animals in the back yard. Once when she was feeding scraps to the chickens, the diamond in her wedding ring fell out, unbeknownst to her. When she noticed it was gone, she and her husband, along with all her children searched high and low for that diamond. They all eagerly hunted for it, and this went on for months. Eventually, she even suspected that her diamond could have been lost outside, so curiously she started looking inside the chickens that they needed to take care of for the table. One day, as she prepared chicken for dinner, she found the tiny diamond for her wedding ring inside its intestines! That’s meticulous searching!

Being human involves *seeking* God. It's not unique to Christianity. We do this because we all know deep inside there's more to life than just ourselves. We're naturally curious about: who God is, and why we are here, and how we're related to our Maker. We, together, seek God, just like the magi/the wisemen did 2000+ years ago. And, similar to the magi, our search for God has twists and turns. We run into hurdles, stumble, get preoccupied, go our own way. These are all delays in our path of discipleship.

Who isn't delayed, in some way or another, these days? We experience delays driving around (or being driven around). We may experience delays: on planes, in buses, in lines at a store, or as we mail something. The magi were delayed, as they followed the star.

Still, despite interruptions, they searched diligently for the child. Herod delayed them by secretly calling for the magi and deviously pumping them for information. Stopping them in their tracks. He interrogated the magi of the exact time when the star had appeared. Herod feared losing his power, influence and position. Because of the child. Then, Herod sent them to Bethlehem, about 5 miles Jerusalem. He interrupts their initial plans, then comes across like he wants to know about the child to be reverently worshipful.

Nobody in the history of Biblical interpretation has read Matthew 2 thinking that Herod has honorable motives to pay the Christ-child homage. Later in chapter 2, we find out Herod engages in genocide because of his insecurities and fears. The Bible remains relevant as we are in the midst of dark valleys. Though we walk through the darkest valley, God is with us.

Fear not with delay/ interruptions/ getting off course, even as we feebly try to seek the Christ child. Like in the classic book Pilgrim's Progress, there will be ominous hurdles. And, we will have selfish ambitious, and easily become worried. We may start out enthusiastic, then our mind wanders off to temporal matters like making a list of things that need to be done. Then, by the grace of God, the merciful Holy Spirit can nudge us/ can remind us of Bible passages like, "seek first the kingdom of God," (Matthew 6:33).

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But, as the prophet **Micah** basically says, though you may not be strong or feel insignificant, out of you will come one who will be ruler. His origins are of old, from ancient times. A woman will give birth and people return home to a place of peace. A shepherd will tend to his people, his flock, and strength and dominion will make living right again. His greatness will reach the ends of the earth and hope and well-being will be found (Mic. 5).

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We have all had our doubts and fears, as we've tried to seek the Christ child. We've become worried about the state of affairs: in the Ukraine, Middle East, China, Knox County, or in our soul. We anxiously fret that maybe God is not in control. We become distracted by the darkness, instead of the light. Our minds wonder off- considering more about what's wrong locally,

regionally and globally. We don't consider that heavenly things will fully reign, but they will. We can feel like a siege is laid against us. We may think our loved ones feel like they're struck on the cheek.

But, as the prophet **Micah** basically says, though you may not be strong or feel insignificant, out of you will come one who will be ruler. His origins are of old, from ancient times. A woman will give birth and people return home to a place of peace. A shepherd will tend to his people, his flock, and strength and dominion will make living right again. His greatness will reach the ends of the earth and hope and well-being will be found (Mic. 5).

The prophet **Isaiah** announces, in ch. 60, "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light... Lift up your eyes and look about you: all assemble and come; your sons come from afar and your daughters are carried on your arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy... Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob... your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. The sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end" (Is. 60).

In our *searching*, God understands we are frail and wayward children. He guides us with prophets, stars, fellow seekers, and much more but especially the beautiful light of the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, that reminds us of all we've learned and can give peace. If you're looking for application from this sermon, remember this, albeit cliché: "wise men still seek Him." Be a wise man. Be a wise woman. Be a wise child or youth. To seek the Christ child, you don't have to be: smart or rich, known or powerful, in shape or energetic, young or in fashion. In fact, God seeks after us because we are God's children. No other credentials are necessary. **The good news is that while we are sinful seekers, God seeks us out.** God seeks those who are: tired, weary, lonely, broken-hearted, those who have hurdles to jump. Fearful! Those who feel: overwhelmed, short-tempered, impatient, distracted, and stressed out. God loves those who have a cross to bear and those who get delayed.

I suppose seeking the Christ child takes a lifetime and our distractions and delays are all "happy little accidents," as Bob Ross puts it, on our journey of faith. But, God is worth seeking because He will be found, if we search diligently for the child. The child, who one day would be nailed to a cross to die for our sins that we might know the light and life. Our Redeemer. Our Savior. Don't let your delays and distractions define you. Be defined by being found, by the holy child who is our: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace!