

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Magi: Stargazers”

Dr. Jay Howell

Matthew 2:1-2

December 3, 2023

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But alongside all this talk of Christ coming, of our waiting for Christ, and of Christ being revealed, what does it mean to *seek* Christ in this season? I think the Magi might have something to say about that. Let’s go to God’s Word together, Matthew 2:1-2. ***In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.”*** The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Holy God, we thank you this day for how you have made yourself known to us: in creation, by your Spirit, in Scripture, and most of all through your Son Jesus Christ, the Word. We pray for your presence to be among us this day, that you would open our eyes to hear your Word, and that you would give us hearts eager to seek him. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

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Friends, Christmas may or may not be familiar territory for you. For many, this season can be a welcome return to a time of cheer, for others, it can be a time of some trepidation due to all the things that inevitably have to get done, but it's nevertheless familiar. Sometimes it can be so familiar that a season that should be about the powerful self-revelation of God, of anticipating God's arrival in the flesh in Christ Jesus, is instead more about checking the boxes. Go to this concert there. Go to that Christmas party there. Hear these songs in this setting, light the candles, and hope for a good night's sleep. Nothing wrong with those. They can just end up sounding like the usual channels, so to speak. They can get so familiar that we can miss the amazing claim that God has come to dwell among us. The powerful hope within the story of these Magi shows us that the good news of Christ is not just for the usual channels, but will break out in unexpected ways, and still does.

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and you'll never look at a nativity set the same, everyone may be wondering, "Okay, if the Magi really don't have that much to do with Jesus' birth, then why on earth are we talking about them in the lead up to Christmas?" For the same reason the birth of a child in some backwater town got this group of learned, "wise" people to travel thousands of miles in order to find him: Because they saw a star in the sky.

The way Matthew tells the story makes an amazing thing seem somewhat trivial. The scene doesn't start in far off wherever, with these Magi peering into a telescope and look up astonished at what they find. They're already in Jerusalem before we find out why they've set out that far. They ask King Herod where the child who was born King of the Jews. And how do they know this? Because, they say, they have seen "his star at its rising." Plenty of theories as to what that could have meant. Maybe during that period of time there was a peculiar alignment of stars or planets making it seem like there was one larger, brighter star. Maybe what we would label a supernova appeared. Or maybe a comet. Begs also the question that whatever the astronomy was, how would they have interpreted it to signify the birth of the King of the Jews? Matthew doesn't give us these details. All we know is that these Magi traveled a great distance to seek out this new king.

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The notion of revelation, when it comes to God, is a big topic. How does God reveal himself? Not to dive in too deep, but your typical theologian is going to recognize Christ himself as this central, pure revelation of God, God in the flesh, the Incarnation, but then testifying to that revelation are other particular ones, singular among them being Scripture, the inspired Word of God testifying to, bearing witness to the good news of Christ. But then it can get a bit expansive.

As the Psalm told us, the very heavens testify to the glory of God, so to some degree, creation itself reveals God's glory, but not so fully as to say that that tree outside is God himself, or even that creation in its totality is God. But at least at this point in time, the heavens were saying something specific, in a different way.

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SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Magi: Stargazers”

Dr. Jay Howell

Matthew 2:1-2

December 3, 2023

Today as we begin the season of Advent, we start a new series looking at what I suppose might ultimately be an untraditional focus for a season like Advent, even if it feels pretty familiar: the Magi, also known as the “wise men.”

We’ll talk a lot about them in just a moment, but in general our hope is that we consider what this group of people, these Magi might show us about what it means to seek Christ during a season like Christmas. This is a season in which we speak so much about how we wait for Christ, how we hope for Christ, and rightfully so. This is also a season in which we speak of how Christ is revealed, how God is revealed in Christ, the Incarnation, this central miracle of the Christian faith, through which we see the eternal God of the cosmos, of eternity, fully in the flesh.

But alongside all this talk of Christ coming, of our waiting for Christ, and of Christ being revealed, what does it mean to *seek* Christ in this season? I think the Magi might have something to say about that. Let’s go to God’s Word together, Matthew 2:1-2. ***In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.”*** The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Holy God, we thank you this day for how you have made yourself known to us: in creation, by your Spirit, in Scripture, and most of all through your Son Jesus Christ, the Word. We pray for your presence to be among us this day, that you would open our eyes to hear your Word, and that you would give us hearts eager to seek him. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

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