

40-02-03-The Wise Men and the Fool
 Advent, Epiphany, revelation, faith
 Mat 2:1-12

Our faith response to Christ identifies us as either wise or foolish.

INTRODUCTION: (Reading Mat 2:1-12 will explain my sermon **title:**

(NIV) After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’” Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

– The Bible is full of illustrations contrasting the wise with the foolish. But here is one major one: the Magi’s wisdom of **strong faith** with little to go on and King Herod’s foolishness of **wrong faith** with much to go on. Both were **faith responses** to the *news of the Messiah*. **HOM.idea**. What made the Magi wise and Herod a fool? First, let’s look at how...

I. The Wise Men Earnestly Pursued Clues that Were Obscure

A. These men lived far-away with an obscure knowledge of God...

1. These strangers to God’s Word, with expertise in forbidden arts, left their pagan realms to seek a baby Heaven had announced.
2. We all live far away from God’s glory! But how God dealt with the Magi shows how He deals with all who seek Him.

B. Their faith was in mere clues. (God often speaks in obscure ways, often using dreams to stir faith [The Miracle Dreams by Susie M. Best

That night when in Judean skies	And dreamed that he had sight //
The mystic star dispensed her light,	That night when shepherds heard the song
A blind man moved amid his sleep,	Of hosts angelic choring near,

A deaf man stirred in slumber's spell
 And dreamed that he could hear. //
 That night when in the cattle stall
 Slept child and mother cheek by jowl,
 A cripple turned his twisted limbs
 And dreamed that she was pure. //
 And dreamed that he was whole. //
 That night when o'er the new-born babe
 The sanctified who came to save,
 The tender Mary rose to lean,
 A man moved in the sleep of death
 A loathsome leper smiled in sleep,
 And dreamed there was no grave.]

1. Balaam, a *Gentile seer*, prophesied in **Num 24:17a** (NKJV), "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel..." (This *ancient vague prophecy* of a "Star" and a coming King might have been learned by these Magi. It wouldn't be much to go on, but it launched their bold quest.)
2. They were *so convinced*, they even brought birthday gifts for this baby's King's arrival [**Nativity scenes** focus on what they brought Jesus, yet these Magi received a greater gift: the *privilege of kneeling before God Incarnate*, which probably changed the course of their lives, as T. S. Eliot tried capturing in his poem "**The Journey of the Magi**" (some excerpts):

'A cold coming we had of it, / Just the
 worst time of the year / For a journey, and
 such a long journey: / The ways deep and
 the weather sharp, /.../ Then the camel men
 cursing and grumbling / And running away,
 and wanting their liquor and women, / And
 the night-fires going out, and the lack of
 shelters,... / And the villages dirty and
 charging high prices: / A hard time we had
 of it. /.../With the voices singing in our ears,
 saying / That this was all folly. //
 Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
 valley, /... / And arrived at evening, not a
 moment too soon / Finding the place.... //

All this was a long time ago, I
 remember, / And I would do it again,
 but set down / This set down / This:
 were we led all that way for / Birth or
 Death? There was a Birth, certainly, /
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had
 seen birth and death, / But had thought
 they were different; this Birth was /
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death,
 our death. / We returned to our places,
 these Kingdoms, / But no longer at ease
 here, in the old dispensation, / With an
 alien people clutching their gods. / I
 should be glad of another death.]

- C. But even wise men make mistakes: they turned from "*the star*" to where they reasoned a king was most likely to be born: *Jerusalem*.
 1. That *little detour* cost a town of infants and toddlers their lives.
 2. We make mistakes, too, when we turn from God's leading to *our common sense*—"voices singing in our ears, saying that this *is* all folly."
- D. But when they did find Jesus, they "*bowed down and worshiped him*."
 1. These ancient philosophical scholars made a *wise faith response*

- by placing their trust in an obscure bit of divine revelation.
2. Much clearer evidence leads us to *worship this King*, yet many still ask, "*Who knows who this Jewish carpenter really was?*"

TRANS: This Bible says He is *God's Son*, born of the virgin Mary. We have more and better information than the Magi, yet *their bold example forever confirms the truth* that **our response to Christ identifies us as either wise or foolish**. These wise men pursued obscure clues, but...

II. A Foolish King Stubbornly Resisted the Obvious Truth

- A. Herod had greater access to truth (with a group of well-trained Jewish scholars who had aligned themselves with him politically.)
- B. Herod *trusted* their Bible knowledge about "*where the Christ was to be born*" [**They knew** OT prophecy about the Messiah! They knew *the exact town where He was to be born*, yet they weren't looking for Him as the Magi were!]
- C. News of the Messiah worried Herod, when it should have made him join the Magi in finding and welcoming the new-born King.
- D. Herod **believed** the OT prophecies, but without a fear of God. His *response* to slaughter Bethlehem's children to get rid of the threat of Christ's reign. (Most people who try destroying the Jesus of the Bible have a motive like Herod's: if God has truly shown up in Christ, it spoils everything. It means having to surrender to Christ and giving up their own way of thinking and living....)

CONCLUSION:

—**All responses to Christ are either wise or foolish**. Some might call us *foolish dreamers* for believing that God became human, fulfilling obscure OT prophecies. But God-given dreams are never "*too good to be true*." In fact, His divine love makes salvation from sin and death by Christ's Cross and Resurrection "too good not to be true!" (The quest of the Magi became a divine dream that materialized.)

—They kept listening to and wisely heeded their dreams. In **v.12**, they dreamed a warning and "*returned...by another route*," yes, another *route* than the foolish one taken by Herod. The example of their faith-response to Christ is ours to follow, so that we can, by our example of faith, lead other dream-hungry people to the miracle of Advent.