

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They 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.’” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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.”

⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Proof. We are always looking for proof.

That is what the Ohio State fans want tomorrow – proof. We already know that the Buckeyes are the greatest team in the land. But what we want tomorrow night is proof to convince all the rest of the nation that Ohio is best.

Proof.

That is what the early primaries are about. Proof that a candidate can attract voters. A couple of victories and people start climbing on board. It is not that the candidate changes what he or she is saying but we in the crowd start to shift and momentum builds and someone is proven to be the candidate.

Proof.

A star suddenly appearing – wise, wise men from the east coming to worship – proof that this child is really God come down to earth?

This story is almost like when a celebrity or a rock star or a star athlete says he or she believes in Jesus. For these magi come with gold and frankincense and myrrh, expensive gifts and they bow down to worship the baby Jesus. Through the centuries at times they have been called kings even though the Bible never tells us that they were. We have become accustomed to calling them wisemen though it is likely they were astrologers – more like fortune tellers than like people of great learning. Though it is never said in the whole story we know that it is God who brings them to Jesus.

There is also another part of this story – the one who had been named King of the Jews by the Romans – Herod the Great. The wisemen came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.”

Another King of the Jews? Matthew tells us Herod was frightened and all Jerusalem with him. What an odd thing – a baby is born and everyone is afraid. But maybe they had good reason to be afraid – maybe they knew that what they were up to was not pleasing to God. Maybe they were serving only themselves and their own interests as those with power are always tempted to do. Herod wanted to know where this child was – he told the wisemen that he wanted to worship this child but we know that he wanted to kill the baby Jesus. Herod secretly sent for the wisemen and learned from the wisemen exactly when the star had appeared. That is another odd thing – that Herod secretly sent for them. But secrecy is also a sign that someone is up to something whether the secrecy is in a family or in a church or in government. Herod sent the wisemen on their way to Bethlehem with the instructions that they should return and tell him where the child was.

The star led them to Bethlehem, they entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother – they gave their gifts and knelt down and worshiped Jesus. And being warned in a dream they returned home by another way.

And we never hear of them again. Imagine if we could find a scroll written magi from the east telling of these events. It would make faith so much easier. Or imagine that we could find some proof of a star that others observed in the sky at that time moving over Bethlehem but we have no such proof. So we look for proof in other ways.

Miracles. Healing. Answered prayer. Like the star something outside of what is normally expected.

Or the testimony of important people, famous people, smart people. Sometimes people quote Einstein as if his opinions about God matter more because he was brilliant in science.

Or big crowds. If lots and lots of people believe it must be true. But very often lots and lots of people are misled. Crowds really mean nothing.

Proof?

There is none. The story of the wisemen and the star are not proof but an invitation to faith. The ones who came from the east remind us that everyone is welcome in Jesus presence – everyone. Herod and his hatred remind us that the way of faith in Jesus will not be easy in this world. The fact that the wiseman worship and then go away never to be heard of again reminds us that Jesus is calling us to more than words of love and acts of worship. All through this gospel it will be clear that hearing Jesus word and building our lives on the foundation of Jesus word is to build on a foundation of rock.

You see, what God is calling us to is not to join a big crowd nor to search for a miracle to prop up faith. God is calling you to faith in Jesus – faith that affects your thoughts and your words and your deeds. Faith that is not like clothing you put on and take off but is like your own skin – part of you. Stars and wisemen do not save us but Jesus does and he wants you to bet your whole life on him. For when the Herods and the wisemen and the stars have all passed away Jesus will still be Emmanuel, God with us. Faith in him will be your proof in this life – being with him through all eternity your proof in the life to come. Amen. .