

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 2:1 “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' " 7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Wise Men Seek Life!

Last Christmas season and in the early sermons on the Gospel of Luke we considered the rich theology compacted in the proclamations of the Angel Gabriel: How the baby Jesus coming as the Light of men has changed the world:

- Sins are forgiven
- The Church is established
- New Heavens & Earth have come!

Last Lord's Day we looked at Simeon's life as a great example of how we as God's children should have hope, contentment and be a people of great vision... All flowing from these early pronouncements from Gabriel:

A people whose hope is in the finished work of Jesus; a people content with where He has placed us in His Body the Church; and a people knowing that His Kingdom will fill the whole earth!

Now we will turn our attention to Matthew's account of the coming of the wise men from the east which we will study both this week and next. The coming of these Wise Men in the second chapter of the New Testament foreshadows the coming of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God

- What Simeon saw in his prayer...
- What the Prophets of old proclaimed
- What was the promise to Abraham
- What was implied in the promised victory of the seed of the woman!
- Now these wise men come as the "first-fruits" of the fullness of the Gentiles that God will bring into His Kingdom
- These wise men come providing another great example, like Simeon, from which we can learn important lessons for the 21st Century!

Those who have been reading through the Book of Proverbs as our January readings have certainly been reminded of how strongly the contrasts of life and death, wisdom and folly, or light and darkness run through what Solomon is teaching his son... And us!

This year, I want to focus on the contrast of life and death in this account from Matthew chapter two.

- **This week the wise men come choosing life and next week we will compare them with fools, like King Herod who love death**

This opportunity is timely as our nation remembers the infamous Roe v. Wade decision on January 22nd which legalized abortion-on-demand in the United States: This passage gives us the opportunity to learn that opposing abortion is only a part of the larger battle raging between life and death, wisdom & folly: Between the light of the Gospel & the darkness of human foolishness.

- **This week we will see the wise men choosing life and the blessings that come with this wise choice.**
- **Next week we will see Herod choosing death and the horrendous results that follow**

This type of contrast can be seen in the full length of the Scriptures:

- **There is contrast in the early chapters of Genesis where the battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is established.**
- **We have contrast graphically shown when Moses prepares the people to enter the Promised Land pronouncing blessings and curses that are given in Deuteronomy chapter 28...**
- **You will often see contrasts drawn in the Books of Wisdom, especially the Proverbs**
- **Contrasts are seen throughout the teachings of Jesus as he tells of wheat & chaff, or sheep & goats**
- **We can think of the contrast of the righteous with the unrighteous throughout the New Testament Epistles and finally in the Book of Revelation we come to the great white throne judgment where those in the Book of Life are giving eternal life and those who are not sent off to eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire.**

Now we come to the contrast in Matthew chapter two where wise men choose life and fools choose death:

Prayerfully, what we will see over the next two weeks is that being Biblically ProLife is much more than just being against abortion

- **As with ALL things, even when confronting a sin like abortion, we must remember the BIG picture, making sure we are focused on God's priorities and not just our OWN priorities!**

We want to be the wise ones seeking life and not the fools that love death, so with that in mind I want to focus on a few simple lessons from our text this morning:

- **First we should see that God gave the wise men guidance & they were willing to follow it faithfully:**

We often spend a WHOLE lot of time and discussion trying to figure what the sign was and the timing of their coming rather than marveling at this simple lesson of obedience that is placed right in front of us!

- **God gave them guidance and they followed it! – *a simple lesson***
- **So we should ask, if God gave us guidance would we follow it?**

Yes, of course is our quick response: Especially if it were a spectacular sign in heaven that we could follow. AS we touched on last week, we need to be real honest here:

- **We would certainly be ready and willing to give all IF God gave us specific instructions on how to save the world...**
- **But if He asked us to wash the dishes, we would want to discuss whether it is our turn or show how those dishes are someone else's responsibility**

Too simplistic you say?

- **Well, let us consider Paul's instruction to young Timothy about God's guidance...**

I Timothy 3:14 “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for EVERY good work.”

- **So kids, verse 17 is another verse that is so clear that most adults have to rationalize it away or ignore it: [repeat verse 17]**

So, God gives us guidance in the Bible so we are equipped for which good works? Yes, our English Bibles seem pretty clear saying “every good work” ...and if we study the original language of the Bible, Greek, we find that it means EVERY good work!

- **Asking this question another way: What part of our lives does the Bible not speak too?**
- **The world tells us that this Book is an ancient book for an agrarian people with little to teach us today**
- **Sadly, many in our churches tend to agree with that statement more than they should, leaving science, technology and much of life outside the reach of the Bible, often forgetting to even read the first two-thirds of God’s revelation!**

For example, some would argue that these ancient writers obviously knew nothing of the Internet or text messaging on our phones... Right?

Why electricity had not even been discovered yet!

- **So, does the Bible give us any guidance as to who we should speak to or how we should say things in our various new types of messages?**

How about this verse in Proverbs 25: “4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.”

Or we have Paul’s instruction to the Colossians: “4:5 Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

We have talked about being practical in this New Year and this might be a great place to start:

- **How about posting that verse on each of our computer monitors and checking each message we compose against this Biblical standard BEFORE we hit the “send” button?**

Or how about putting it next to the telephone so we can be reminded about what OUR side of any conversation should be like?

- **In this morning’s account we are NOT told the details about the star these wise men were given to follow**

- **But we are told that they obeyed its guidance, reminding us that we should heed ALL the guidance given to us in God's Word**
- **They were rewarded not only with further directions, but also with the blessing of being able to worship the newborn King!**
- **Remember the lesson that Moses gives God's people on those mountains in Deuteronomy 28**

[This can be your "homework" and you should take special note because there are 14 verses describing the blessings of obedience and 54 verses to describe the curses of disobedience!]

- **Blessings for obedience, curses for doing our own thing!**

These wise men stand in stark contrast with the religious and political leaders there at Jerusalem: They had the very Words of God as keepers of His Scriptures: AND they knew them, being able to tell the wise men exactly where the Messiah would be born: In Bethlehem! The Messiah lay only about five miles from Jerusalem, yet NO ONE from the temple or the palace was willing to make that short journey

- **And there lies another of those practical life lessons: How often is the solution to our problems just a short distance away and yet we are not willing to make the journey?**
- **Often because like these religious leaders and King Herod we are so absorbed in what WE are doing, that we don't have time to listen to God.**

We must be sure that we are NOT so wrapped up on OUR priorities that we don't have time for God's priorities!

- **WE will more fully study the question of Kingdom priorities when we come to chapter nine in our study of Luke's Gospel:**
- **But let me jump there quickly this morning for a reminder from our Lord about priorities:**

"59 Then [Jesus] said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." 61 And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

- **Does this mean that Jesus does not like funerals or care about our families?**

Of course not...

- **It simply means that when Jesus speaks, WE should listen even if it might conflict with what we think are 'good' things that we want to get done!**
- **Helping Love Them Both this week as a good example!**

We also clearly see the importance of priorities in Matthew's gospel when Jesus tells the parable of the great wedding feast that is prepared, but the invited guests were just too busy with what THEY wanted to do:

Matthew 22:1 "[Jesus said] "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4 Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." ' 5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6 And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. 7 But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' 10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests."

- **Here again we clearly see the pattern of blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience!**
- **We want to be like the obedient wise men who sought after life and found it with the Baby Jesus!**
- **We do NOT want to follow the example of those who ignored God's guidance:
Who not only missed God's blessings, but as we will see next week, end up in the midst of death and sorrow.**

Finally this account of the Wise men clearly shows that God protects and cares for His Son as He does for us:

- **When He was just 40 days old, Jesus was taken to the Temple: Herod and the religious leaders were SO self-absorbed that they missed Him!**
- **Now the Wise men travel just a few miles from Jerusalem to find Jesus and NO ONE from the palace or Temple tag along!**
- **God warns the Wise men in a dream that they must return by another route.**
- **And finally, God warns Joseph to take the baby and flee to Egypt, knowing what destruction was coming to that region at the hands of Herod.**

The Messiah, even though He was a helpless baby in a poor family is kept safe: God's plan of salvation cannot be thwarted!

That is clearly seen here in Matthew chapter two and Jesus applies it to ALL of us who are united to Christ:

- **In John chapter ten we see a very similar situation and what follows are some of the most comforting words we can find in all of the Scriptures:**

We find Jesus again at the Temple: John 10: 23 "And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you."

- **Neither the words or works of Jesus are acknowledged by these hard-hearted religious leaders...**
- **Just as they ignored the Baby Jesus and the coming of the Wise Men**
- **Here is yet another reminder that our salvation is wholly dependent on God's Grace!**

Jesus then contrasts them with those who DO hear and obey the words of Jesus:

"27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

- **And then we see that just as God protected His infant Son when He was most vulnerable, Jesus protects us as His sheep:**

“28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

Jesus and the Father united in this great purpose, which is being accomplished by the Comforter who was sent to us:

- **Jesus will save His people from their sins, we are united as His body and His Kingdom will advance and we can KNOW that we are secure in the hands of our faithful covenant God!**

The title of this week’s sermon is simply “Wise Men Seek Life” and it stands in stark contrast with next week where we learn that “Fools Love Death.” When we understand this contrast then and only then will we enjoy the blessings of life that God offers His people and will we know how and why we must stand against the results of this love-affair with death such as the sin of abortion in our land.

I hope we are all spending time this month studying once again the Wisdom of Solomon in the Book of Proverbs: If you are following our daily readings, you will have seen this life and death contrast and the call to obedience clearly in chapter eight:

Proverbs 8:32 "Now therefore, listen to me, my children, For blessed are those who keep my ways. 33 Hear instruction and be wise, And do not disdain it. 34 Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors. 35 For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the Lord; 36 But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death."

- **God offers rich blessings for obedience and dreadful curses for disobedience.**
- **As we are commissioned and sent forth this week...
Let us choose wisely!**

Communion meditation:

Proverbs 9:1-6: " 1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city, 4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 "Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding."