

LOOKING FOR JESUS

The Christmas Story According to St. Matthew 2

(Ordinary Order of Service till the sermon...)

“I lift my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?”
(Psalm 121:1).

This is the cry of the Psalmist, looking for help. Many peoples of the Old Testament era had their sanctuary on the top of a hill: Or on top of a building, or just a big tree, where they used to come and worship their deity. It seems that in the imagination of the people their gods were always on a high place. - Many Christian churches are also built on the highest point of some cities and villages.

Other place where people used to look for help was in the sky: the sun, the moon and the stars were worshiped by many peoples. This belief is still alive nowadays, when people search to know what will happen in their lives in horoscopes, which is based on the movement of the stars and of the planets. – And it is really amazing to watch the stars, especially if you have the opportunity to be in a place without electricity, where the stars shine brightly with splendor. It is something that amazes you!

The ancients were intrigued by the constellations, by the movement of some stars, and by the phases of the moon. Astrology was a well-respected science, and those who could interpret the movement of the asters were respected.

Astronomy (not astrology) plays an important role in the science nowadays as it allows man to go to the moon and to search for new discoveries in this vast universe.

The Christmas story tells us about some astrologers, also called Magi or Wise Men. Watching the sky, they realized that a special star was shining and moving. What does this mean?

They were not Jews, but they were Gentiles coming from the East, maybe from Persia (now Iran and Iraqi), or from southern Arabia.

Jewish people were spread all around the known world of that time, and they used to share their hope in the coming of a special King that would deliver them from their enemies and would restore the throne of David. Did the wise men hear about this hope from the Jews?

Balaam, a Gentile prophet from Moab, had prophesied in the time of Moses: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel... a ruler will come out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17,19). Should this prophesy be preserved among some Gentiles?

In any case, the Wise Men knew something about the Bible’s prophecies and when they noticed the special star moving, they knew that it was a sign of God and they decided to follow it.

Hymn: LSB 412 (vv. 1-3) – The People that in Darkness sat

Where are you looking for help?

Witchdoctors are very common in Africa – maybe not in our culture (I don’t know).

Do you read or listen to horoscopes and other sources to learn about your future?

Self-help literature fills the shelves of bookstores and has a special place at the display, promising help for every kind of symptoms.

Does your hope rest in your position or in the money you have on your saving account?

Where are you looking for help?

Hymn/Choir: MP 740 (v. 1) We Three Kings of Orient are

(The three kings enter following a star. Herod and some soldiers are in the stage)

Reader: *“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.”*

Following the star, the Wise Men were first led to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. It was probably daylight when they arrived and they couldn't see the star anymore during the day. Where did they search for the new born King? Obviously in the palace of the King Herod, a powerful king!

Reader: *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when in the east and have come to worship him.”* – was the question they raised.

Many trust in powerful people and look for help in government palaces and in political solutions. We know from the history and by experience how many times people were deceived by politicians. They play a special role in the world, but they cannot help us to get the true peace. Even they don't have peace! Listen to what happened when the Wise Men raised their question: *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when in the east and have come to worship him.”*

Reader: *“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”*

Herod became disturbed and even angry. No child had been born in his palace recently. Why are these strange men looking for “the new born King of the Jews”?

The story tells us that King Herod was so jealous of his position as king that he even killed three of his own sons because he suspected that they wanted to depose him and to take his throne. Knowing this, you can imagine what Herod began to plan in his mind.

Hymn: LSB 399 (v. 1,2) (Tune 580) – The star proclaims the King is here

Herod was very clever. He didn’t react with violence immediately. But – it’s amazing to realize it – he searched for the answer in the right place: In the Bible. Our Gospel tells us:

(Some teachers of the Law enter with the scrolls. The Wise Men go to the vestry.)

Reader: *When Herod had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah 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 shepherd my people Israel.”*

King Herod linked the question of the Wise Men with the hope of Israel people: The Messiah, the Son of David, who would come to restore the Kingdom of Israel! And he was right in his conclusions. He got the right answer from the leaders of the church.

Let's take a little brake in our Christmas story: If Herod, a violent and ungodly man, knew where to search for the truth, why so many people are looking for help and for answers in another place but in the Bible? Many even despised the Bible as something from the past that doesn't have any value anymore. Think about this: The Bible is still the resource God gives us to look for help, to look for the truth, to look for Jesus!

Hymn: LSB 361 (v.1) – O Little Town of Bethlehem

The Bible record continues:

(The Wise Men entre before Herod again)

Reader: 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 search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.

(The Wise men go through the sacristy to the entrance of the church. Herod and the soldiers go out as well)

King Herod was lying. He didn't want to worship the Baby King, but he wanted to kill Him! A new Baby King could only be born from Herod's house, and nowhere else.

The Wise Men didn't suspect the bad intention of the king, but they believed in the Prophecy quoted by the scholars of the Scripture.

Hymn: LSB 363 (vv. 1-3) – Silent Night

(To switch off the lights. Only a light on the Nativity Scene. The Kings entre following the star again during

the reading. Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus are in the stage).

Reader: *“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose 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, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”*

Hymn/Choir: MP 740 (v. 5) We Three Kings of Orient are

The Wise Men followed the Scripture and the special star God had placed on the sky and they found the New Born King, the Messiah, the Son of God, our Savior.

What was their reaction? They didn't complain about the small village of Bethlehem. They didn't complain that the New Born King was not in a palace, but in an ordinary house. They didn't question the circumstances. They just believed in the Bible and they were sure that they had found their Savior. And they bowed down and worshipped Him, giving Him precious gifts.

Hymn: LSB 397 (vv. 1-3) – As with gladness men of old - Offerings

We are looking for Jesus at this Christmas again. Sometimes it is so difficult to find Him amidst all the rush, the celebrations, the loads of lights – everyone thinking about the preparations for Christmas – and many forget the reason why we are celebrating Christmas. Some even want to take the name “Christ-mas” out of this celebration, and call it just “Happy Holidays” or “Happy Season”.

Without Christ, there is no Christmas. Jesus is where He always has been: In the Bible, where the Wise Men found Him by the right advice of the scholars of the Scripture. Let us come and worship Him, let us give Him also our gifts: Our lives, our talents, our offerings. Praise be to the New Born King!

Hymn: LSB 379 – (vv. 1-4) - O come let us adore Him.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, October 2016

Christmas Play St Thomas 22016 – LOOKING FOR JESUS

CHARACTERS:

Herod: _____

2 soldiers: _____

3 Kings: _____

1 carrying the star: _____

2 Teachers of the Law: _____

Joseph: _____

Mary: _____

Readers: _____

