

Where Should I Go?

[Matthew 2:1-6](#)

Fourth Sunday of Advent

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Earlier this morning we sang, "O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord." Are you ready to do that this evening? Until you are, you will never be able to adore anything, or anyone, else.

One of the wonderful things about being a pastor is that I get to listen to people's dreams. Our dreams are as many as the stars of the skies. But it seems to me that behind them all is a common pursuit of something to adore. We are all searching for something that will fill the empty place in our hearts, something that will allow us finally to find rest and save us from another year of searching. And we just know in our souls that if we found some job, person, or place that we truly adored, then at long last we would be satisfied with life.

When a man and woman fall in love, or when a parent holds a newborn child, or when grandparents throw open their arms to greet a visiting grandchild, they get a glimpse of this adoration. But it is only a glimpse. In time we always discover that even the best human loves can only point us to our longing for God. For example, when a young couple comes to visit me for premarital counseling, I am struck by how much they are in love, and yet how tentative they are with each other, as if they know already in their hearts that this adoration will not last long. Similarly, when a couple brings a new baby home from the hospital, as much as they adore their child, it doesn't take them long to discover that this baby was not conceived by the Holy Spirit. For a while, we can adore a new teacher, a new boss, a new political leader. But eventually we always discover no human being is going to exhaust our insatiable thirst to find someone to adore.

The biblical understanding of adoration is to worship. Thus, to adore anyone or anything other than God, apart from a relationship with God, is soon to be frustrated by the traces of "creatureliness" we encounter. Most of us know that. But God can seem so far away. So for a very long time, we have been searching for someone like God on earth.

We know from non-biblical sources that when Jesus was born there was a great expectancy that a new king would be born who could lead the world to peace. The Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus wrote about the common belief that someone, somewhere would be born who would one day weave the nations into a universal empire. Virgil, the Roman poet, believed this new king would usher in a golden era for humankind. The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that messianic expectations were running high among the Jews when Jesus was born. The philosopher Seneca said people were coming to Athens to make a sacrifice to the memory of Plato in hopes that a new philosopher king would emerge. So Romans, Greeks, Jews, and Persians all record this same great hope that somewhere a new Savior-King was being born, if only he could be found.

Among those searching for this new king to adore were the Magi who came from the East. We don't much about these men. Tradition has said there were three of them and called them wise men and kings. Some of our biblical scholars believe the Magi belonged to a class of philosopher-rulers and were astronomers who watched the shifting stars. Other scholars think they were astrologers who read the stars to predict the future. But Matthew's interest in the Magi seems to be only for the purpose of indicating that Gentiles from another place were searching for a savior. Seeing a new star rising in the sky, they decided to follow it in hopes it would lead them to long-awaited new king. But they got a little lost along the way.

Like the Magi, we have chased a lot of stars in our day. We have spent a great deal of life looking in our jobs, our dreams, and our relationships hoping that the next thing would be something we could adore. But the star we were chasing turned out to be just another rotation around the same pattern of hope-disillusionment-new hope-more disillusionment. After a while, we start to feel a little lost, wondering if we haven't used up too much of life searching. "Where is he? Where is the one we can adore?"

One of the most striking things about the story of the wise men is that there really are no miracles involved. No angels. No one is even talking to God. We just have some wise men lost in their search, asking for directions. This passage should come as a great relief to those of you who cannot relate to the shepherds and their extraordinary experience with the heavenly host. Others of you who have had a mystical experience, know what you have seen and heard. If it brought you to Jesus, it was a good thing. But not everyone heard the angels singing on the night Jesus was born. If you are stuck without any supernatural experiences, with just your restless mind and your searching heart, you too can find your way to the Savior. It just takes a while longer.

Like the wise men, you may get lost along the way. You may lose sight of the star or the light you were following. You may have to ask for help and direction. But you can get there if you really want to find the Savior King. You don't have to manufacture a mystical experience. You just have to want to find your savior, the object of your adoration, and you will. This is what Jesus meant when he called himself, "the way, the truth, and the life." In the words of Simone Weil, "Christ prefers that we seek the truth even more than him. Because if we seek the truth honestly, we will not have gone far before we fall back into his arms." Some of us will get to those arms through a supernatural intervention. Others will wander into the arms as the Holy Spirit guides them through the truth they have.

When King Herod heard about the Magi's search for "the one born king of the Jews," he was understandably upset. So Herod asked the priests and scribes to tell him where this new king was to be born. Here's the amazing part: they tell him, because they knew all along. "According to the prophet Micah," they said, "He is born in Bethlehem." Isn't this fascinating? Some foreigners are searching diligently for the one worthy of adoration. Those who know where he is missed his arrival because they didn't believe he could really be the answer to the search.

For a long time now, through a whole lot of Christmases, like Micah, the church has been clearly announcing the birth of the Savior. This is hardly a secret. But we live in a culture that has become so accustomed to searching, many of us will not go to the manger tonight to worship. Don't get used to the search! Don't make searching the object of your adoration. It will suck your soul dry, as it obsessively forces you to discard one blessing after another in search of something else. Have the courage to stop looking long enough to bow your knees tonight in adoration. That is why we call the Magi the Wise Men. They knew when to stop searching.

There are still many questions that Christmas does not answer. But have you devoted yourself to the answer it does bring? Have you stopped trying to adore others as your Savior? Have you allowed the same Holy Spirit who conceived God's son in Mary to now adopt you into the son's relationship with the Father? Have you found your self-esteem in life by hearing that is you who are adored so much by God that in Christ he came to find you? As we face the coming of a new year, let us resolve not to keep searching for more answers. Rather let us resolve to be faithful to the answer we have. Because once you accept this singular spiritual answer at Christmas that God is with us everything else in life will find its center.

The text tells us that after worshiping Jesus, the wise men went home by a different way. That is what we need. We all need to be able to go home after tonight's miracle, by a different way. No longer will we see home and work and our relationships for what they are not. Now we have found a new way to be at home. Now we can adore all these things as the Christmas gifts of the Savior we adore.

O God Emmanuel, give us the courage this day to join Mary and Joseph, and the wise men of old, in bowing before our savior king in adoration, that the search may end and that we may again enjoy the gift of life. Amen.