

BaptistWay Bible Series for December 21: Coming to find Jesus

December 8, 2008

Christmas time is defined by our expectations. As those few weeks at the end of the year approach, our minds are filled with anticipation of times to come: family reunions, dinners, gifts, traditions, etc. A great holiday season can become a terrible one simply by missing a few key expectations, but then the opposite is also true.

As I look forward to the holiday season, my own mind is filled with expectations of flying home and seeing my family for the first time this year. Certainly expectations can make or break any experience.

Now as we turn again to our passage, we see that the stage is set for the birth of our Savior, the Messiah, God with us, the Lord Jesus Christ. After the extensive genealogy in the first chapter, Matthew tells us something we do not expect: "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'" (v. 1-2).

These magi, popularly known as the Wise Men, most likely were professional priests who made a living watching the stars and discerning "signs" from their movements. They came from the eastern lands, perhaps Arabia, Babylon or Persia (we have no way of knowing for certain) to worship the "king of the Jews" (v. 2).

Who knows what these men, who were very important in their own land, expected as they approached Jerusalem. We certainly have no way of knowing, but we do have a reasonable idea of what King Herod expected

upon hearing news of Christ's birth. We see that he was seriously disturbed by this news, and called together "the people's chief priests and teachers of the law" (v. 4) to find out where this Christ was to be born.

Herod, a man placed on the throne of Judea by devious political maneuvering, became instantly suspicious of the Christ, expecting a challenge to his political power. The text suggests "all Jerusalem" (v. 3) felt the same emotion as the suspicious Herod, but the writer is more likely referring to the religious and political establishment that ruled with Herod, and not the entire city of Jerusalem.

Again, expectations are driving the thoughts and actions of these people. We have seen that expectations are powerful, but what do they have to do with these magi and the rest of the story?

Herod further nurtures his suspicion by eventually enlisting the aid of the unwitting magi in finding the Christ, so that he can do with him as he wants.

With a warning by God in the form of a dream, the magi depart for Bethlehem with the guidance of their aforementioned star and find the Christ, the object of their expectations, in a house with his mother. Much time had passed since they first saw the star when they were still in the east, as much as two years. Yet these intrepid magi had finally found him, so they bowed low and worshipped him before departing for their homeland.

This depiction requires a measure of imagination in order to determine what the magi expected as they approached Bethlehem, when they were coming to find Jesus. Perhaps they were merely anticipating what the Lord desired to reveal to them, whatever it might be. After all, they had left their homeland and travelled far and wide to seek out a baby they had never met solely on the signal given by a star in the sky. What tremendous faith is

found in such an unexpected place.

It is interesting that the king, the priests and the teachers of the law all were given news of the arrival of the Christ. Yet only the magi sought him out to give their worship, seeing as their decisions were motivated by their expectations. As for Herod and his aides, their self-centered expectations blinded them to the fact that their Savior had been born. Those same expectations also biased and blinded them through the remainder of Christ's life.

As you and I hustle and bustle throughout the rest of the holiday season, perhaps we should re-examine our habits and realign our faulty expectations.

If we only expect our holidays to be a repeat of last year, that might be all we receive. Of course, those same expectations might also blind us to what God is preparing to do this year, just as Herod was ignorant to the workings of God in his own day. We always are seeking something during the holidays, even if that something is the expectations of last year.

As we've seen with the magi, God has been known to guide travelers, men and women looking for answers, unexpectedly toward those who can help. As we bustle about this year, and every year, perhaps we need to be on the lookout for the unexpected, for those who are lost and looking for an answer. After all, Christmas time is all about finding that one thing that has been missing all along.

The magi found what they were seeking, and this year God may be leading you to help an unexpected friend find what they are seeking too.

Questions to explore

- *How has God spoken to you through unexpected ways?*

- What are some of your expectations for this Christmas season?
- How can some of those expectations blind you to where God is guiding you this year?
- What must you do ensure that you are available to assist those in search of Christ?