

*The Quest*  
Pastor Judy Bangsund  
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Matthew 2:1-12  
Isaiah 63:7-9  
Hebrews 2:10-18

Happy New Year! I hope your day is filled with family, friends, food, fun and maybe even a little football. But more importantly, I hope your year is filled with a quest for God. A quest that defines who you are and what you do. A quest that defines your life.

When I hear the word *quest*, I think of Don Quixote, the "Man of La Mancha" and his song, "The Impossible Dream." Maybe your mind goes there as well. It's become a classic. I remember seeing the play as a teenager. I was on a study tour and so I got to see it in London at the Picadilly Theater. What a great experience! The acting, the sets, the music were fabulous. And of course, that particular song -- so inspiring to a young girl. I'll never forget it.

That song kind of fits our reading today about the Wise Men. Remember? Here's part of the song:

"This is my quest, to follow that star;  
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far ..."

Remember that? (Now it's probably running through your head, right?) But seriously, much earlier than Don Quixote, there were other men on a quest. Wise Men were seekers. They sought a king and they found God. Their quest is our quest. It's life-long. And it's life-giving.

Matthew tells us very little, actually, about the wise men. Chapter 2:1-2:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, 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 when it rose and have come to worship him."

And then in verse 11:

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.

Matthew does not say anything about kings – although they gave kingly gifts. Nor does he tell us how many men – only that they gave three gifts (so, three men?). Nor do we know how they traveled -- by camel? It doesn't say. Only that they came from the east, following a star.

So what can we learn from these wise men? Well, at least four lessons for today. First, when God is up to something, do something. Second, when God is up to something, seek his guidance through Scripture. Third, believe in him; act on your faith. And fourth, keep on seeking him all your life! This is a life-giving quest. Let's take a look.

First, when you discover that God is up to something, do something. How did the Wise Men, presumably astronomers, link the new star with the birth of a king – specifically, the king of the Jews? We don't know. Clearly, they were scholars. And a hallmark of scholarship is curiosity. They didn't just sit on their hands and say, "Well, that's nice," and then go on with their business. They didn't say, "Well, that's nice for the Jews, but it's not for us," for they were not Jews. They didn't know the inner politics of Judea; they didn't know that Herod was a paranoid

and brutal king. They came from other countries. And the point is, once they received this knowledge, they got up to do something about it. They did their homework. They laid plans. They bought gifts to honor the new king. And they took off on a journey of unknown length and unknown difficulties, and began their quest.

Perhaps you've had an experience in your life when something caught your interest, or when something wasn't right, and you found you needed to chase it down until you got answers. In this congregation we have had that experience. Several years ago, when we began to realize that people weren't flooding to the church anymore and attendance began to go down, it caught our attention. We had to do something. Because it wasn't just St Timothy's; it was happening all over the country to congregations like ours. So we did our homework. And when we realized there was a discipleship movement afoot, where God seemed to be working and where congregations were growing and making an impact, we found a way to get on board. Today we are part of that movement. My friends, when God is up to something, do something! Check it out. Put your boots on. Don't sit on the sidelines.

So the Wise Men teach us, first of all, that when God is up to something, do something. Secondly, when God is up to something, seek his guidance through Scripture. The Wise Men believed that this star would lead them to the King of the Jews. Logically, their search took them to Herod's palace. Herod was surprised and threatened by the news that a new King of the Jews had been born, but that's another story. The important piece for us here is that this visit led the sages to the Jewish Scriptures, where they found that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Further, they found this new king would not be your typical ruler, who (like Herod) would rule with brutal force. No. This ruler would be the kind that would *shepherd* his people. *Care* for them as a shepherd cares for his flock. The kind of king God had always intended to rule his people – indeed, the world.

Now the wise men had not only a divinely-inspired star to guide them, they also had divinely-inspired Scripture to lead them. Believing, they headed for Bethlehem. They followed the star until it stopped, and there they found more than they sought.

Seeking the king of the Jews, they found the King of the nations – for Jesus was born for all peoples. Seeking a king, they found God. And they not only honored him as a king, bringing kingly gifts; they bowed down and worshiped him – for they recognized this King *was* God.

My friends, you and I have been given a great gift – God's own Word. So seek God through his Word, through Scripture. You will find that all great quests begin here. And the greatest quest of all is for God himself. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," says Proverbs. "And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Isaiah tells us, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." In 1 Chronicles we are told, "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face continually." And in Jeremiah we hear God's promise: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jesus says the same: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well." Do you hear it? The quest for God should take priority in your life. The quest for God should bring urgency to your life. Don't wait until it's too late. Don't wait until the end of your life. Start now. Seek God in prayer. Seek him through Scripture. Seek him with others in Grow Groups. Seek him

through ministry and service. There are lots of opportunities. And his promise is this: when you seek him, you will certainly find him.

Third, having received guidance from God, believe him. Act on your faith. Think of the gold miners of 1849 – the original 49ers. It only took a few gold nuggets and some newspaper stories to fire up their faith. (Now there are all kinds of faith. In this case, it was faith placed, not in God, but in gold.) The Gold Rush was on, and more than 300,000 seekers came to find their fortunes. They believed the stories. And their faith made them persistent. There was no good route to California at that time. They braved dangers, disease and sometimes death along the way. And once they got their pickaxes and shovels, they would dig and dig – just one more foot! Just a turn to the right or to the left, and surely they would find the mother lode. Without faith, misguided as it was, their quest would have been doomed.

The Wise Men also believed -- in the star, in Scripture. And like those original forty-niners, they acted on their faith, and were persistent in their actions. They kept going (possibly for as long as two years, and who knows how far). They kept going until they reached their goal, finding the infant Jesus, now living in a house with Mary and Joseph. And finding him, they bowed down and worshiped him. They were overjoyed. Their faith had been rewarded.

My friends, this quest is worth whatever sacrifice it takes to make it. Think of the sacrifices the Wise men made – time – they had no idea how long it would take to find this king. Comfort – traveling in those days was neither a simple nor a pleasant experience. Cost – their gifts were expensive. But the end result was this *overflowing* joy. They were not just happy; they were not merely thrilled; they were overjoyed when they found the Child. Imagine your joy when you finally meet Jesus face to face. Will it be worth any paltry sacrifice you may have had to make in this brief life? Oh yeah. There will be no regrets.

I don't know if you've ever heard the story of William Borden, heir to the Borden Dairy Estate. In 1904 William graduated from high school, already a millionaire. His parents gave him a trip around the world. Traveling through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe gave Borden a deep concern for the world's hurting people. Writing home, he said, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field." When he made this decision, he wrote in the back of his Bible two words: *No Reserves*. Turning down offers of high-paying job after graduation from Yale University, he entered two more words in his Bible: *No Retreats*. He then studied to become a pastor at Princeton Seminary. Completing his studies, Borden finally sailed for China to work with Muslims, stopping first in Egypt for further preparation. While there he was stricken with cerebral meningitis and died within a month. A waste, you say? Not in God's eyes. In his Bible underneath the words *No Reserves* and *No Retreats*, he had written the words *No Regrets*.

You see, this quest is life-long and life-giving (our fourth and final point). Unlike the Gold Rush or many other quests, it is not merely the end result that counts. Your quest for God is different; it is life-giving. You see, the fact is, God is seeking you. The whole time you are seeking him, he is pursuing you, making you his own. That's why Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." As long as you buy into the illusion that you are in control of your life, you are lost. But the moment you release that control, giving your life to God, you are found. Now you *have* a life, which you didn't have

before. Now you are *given* life, because Jesus came to save it, to redeem it, and to give it back to you.

Remember Don Quixote and his classic song? It has inspired more than one generation. I believe that many stories, legends, poems and songs inspire us because God plants in them seeds of something bigger. Something that points back to him. Don Quixote was a fictional character, but inspiring because he pursued his quest for the right – in the face of so much that is wrong in this world. He sang,

To fight for the right, without question or pause;

To be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause!

It's inspiring – not just because of what he did, or because of what we do; it's not just about of *our* quest. It's inspiring because this was precisely Jesus' quest. He *marched against hell for a heavenly cause* – setting to rights all that is wrong in this world, opening the door to forgiveness and to life everlasting. Opening the door to a life where death will no longer have the last word.

Jesus has made his quest our quest. He invites you to join him in his mission. What could be greater than that? Won't you join with him in 2017 – and beyond? It's the quest of a lifetime. It's the only quest that gives life. Amen.