



## CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

WEEK 3: *Peace in the Midst of Excess*

FREDDY VILLARREAL

December 17 & 18, 2016

Christmas Presence! This sermon series discusses God's presence as His greatest present to us. We focus on family dysfunction, busyness, and the commercialization of Christmas. Each weekend we will focus on a significant Biblical character in the birth story. We hope you receive encouragement to let the presence of God fill your lives and be the driving factor in how they experience the Christmas season this year.

### PEACE IN THE MIDST OF EXCESS

**Matthew 2.1-12 (HCSB)** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem, **2** saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." **3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah: because out of you will come a leader who will shepherd My people Israel." **7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find Him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship Him." **9** After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

The wise men, or Magi, were wealthy, elite leaders, as well as scholarly. They were not necessarily kings, but would have been part of the ruling class in a caste system. These men, while we don't know exactly how many, were captivated by a star they saw in the sky and were drawn to follow it; they ended up following it for about two years expecting to see a sign. It is important to understand that these men most likely did not travel by themselves, but rather in a caravan consisting of armed guards, advisors, servants, camels, etc. The cost for this journey would have been immense. In **verse 2** above we learn that these wise men knew they were looking for the King of the Jews, and they had a purpose to come and worship Him. They were driven and passionate, and they sensitive to the signs God was delivering to them.

### DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

What about these wise men intrigues you? After listening to the message, or reading the passage above, do you see the wise men in a different way that you did before? Discuss.

## LESSON 1: CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT WORSHIP

**Matthew 2.11 (HCSB) 11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The first of three lessons we can learn from the wise men is that Christmas, or the remembrance of the birth of Jesus, is about worship. We are all experts of worshipping something; there are things we get excited about, passionate about, and vocal about that tug at the core of who we are. You know the feeling... emotion wells up inside of you and it needs to find a way out. Maybe it was when the Cubs one the World Series and your reaction to that. Maybe it was your favorite band, and the emotion that was a reaction to that live music. Maybe it is the endless dollars spent on a classic car or a home. Maybe it is the countless hours you spent studying politics, or business journals that brought a feeling of fulfillment. If you look closely, these things we may be worshipping may not always be the right things. Read **Matthew 6.21**. What we are willing to sacrifice the most for is where our heart is. When you look to the wise men, you see they were drawn on a two-year journey and gifted Joseph, Mary, and Jesus and frankincense, gold, and myrrh. They were dedicated to a journey and brought gifts that showed sacrifice.

### DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

What are some things that you get excited about visually, vocally, and emotionally? How does it compare to how you worship God? How do you define your worship to God? Is it something you want to change? How? Explain.

What comes first on your calendar; what things do you always make sure there is time for? Compare that to the wise men. How might your priorities be different? What needs to change? Explain.

Think about how you worship this holiday season? How can you put some *reason* back in the season? How can you be more reflective and worshipful towards God through the end of the year? Make a list and put it on your calendar. Share how you will make this a part of your day going forward.

## LESSON 2: EXPERIENCE, NOT INFORMATION, LEADS TO TRANSFORMATION

**Matthew 2.3-6 (HCSB) 3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah: because out of you will come a leader who will shepherd My people Israel."

In this passage the wise men show us that experience is transformative, not information. Read **John 1.14**. The answer was right before Herod and the chief priests, yet it was the wise men from the east that

announced the birth of Messiah. These wise men committed to the experience, not relying on the information they possessed, that allowed them to become transformed. We need to step into action to demonstrate our faith. Read **James 2.17**. Our faith is not demonstrated by our knowledge or the information we have; God's works defy the concept of human logic time and again. Stepping out into action is what defines our faith and our trust in God. The wise men stepped out in action and in the course of this transformation came in the form of our God in flesh as a baby boy.

**DISCUSS/JOURNAL:**

Hard question... is your life decisions and faith decisions based on what information you have, or is it based on the true acts of faith – stepping out blindly with expectation? Why? Explain. Do you have any examples of experience leading to transformation in our life? If so, what are they? Discuss.

### LESSON 3: GOD'S SPIRIT CAN LEAD US

**Daniel 2.48 (HCSB) 48** Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many generous gifts. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon.

The wise men knew the history of Babylon and the works of God during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. They knew that God was a God of action. Daniel was put in charge of the wise men of the east and Daniel was teaching them. For generations these teachings were handed down. The wise men seeking Jesus, knew what they were seeking. When you read **Matthew 2.9-10**, you can see this star more as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit leading the wise men to the exact place they needed to be. Read **Exodus 13.21**. While God may not manifest a pillar of fire or cloud, or even a shining star to guide, God will guide us in different ways, if we are willing to take action and step out.

**DISCUSS/JOURNAL:**

What do you make time for in your life? Is God something you designate time for? If you do, has He led you in certain ways? Explain. Define the circumstances.

Do you have expectations of God? What are they? How will your designating time for God and stepping out into faith with expectancy of action expose God to you this Holiday season? Do you want to see Him lead you in a near supernatural fashion? Are you willing to take time to watch and listen for Him? What obstacles would keep you from this? Discuss.

### PROVIDE US WITH FEEDBACK

We are excited about the potential these studies have to help each of us process the weekend message at a deeper level, and to see God change our lives in significant ways. In order to make these guides as helpful as possible, we would love to hear which elements are most helpful, which are least helpful, as well as any other comments, questions or suggestions. Feel free to send your feedback directly to Jon Holmberg at [jonrholmberg@gmail.com](mailto:jonrholmberg@gmail.com).

Has God been prompting you to lean out over your skies a bit? Have you had a desire to write, but not sure how to start to scratch that kind of itch? This may be your chance. We are currently looking to expand our team of writers. If you have experience, or no experience, writing studies or devotionals... it's not a big deal – Let God guide your fingers. If you would like to investigate this a bit more please contact me at [jonrholmberg@gmail.com](mailto:jonrholmberg@gmail.com).

## REFERENCES