

Theme: Nothing but the Truth: Truths of Christmas

Title: Truth for the Nations – Matthew 2:18-25

Aim: Rejoice in the truth that Jesus came to save the nations.

Intro: Back in 2004, Andi gave me a GPS for Father's Day. It may have been that very day that Beth & Blythe & I traveled to Boston to connect w/my brother & sis-in-law, who had come up from VA for a meeting for his work. We decided we should go to Bunker Hill, not far from their hotel & conference center. What a great opportunity to use my new GPS! We plugged in the info & it gave us directions & we set off in my car. Mind you, tho – we were in Boston. Streets come up quickly & if you miss one, the GPS has to recalculate. But in Boston, by the time it recalculated, you missed the next turn. We could actually see Bunker Hill in the distance, but we couldn't get there. It was interesting (& somewhat amusing) that after a while the GPS starting directing us home, as if to say, "You hick! You don't belong in the city. Go home!" We did turn around & went back to their hotel, then walked to the Cheesecake Factory for dinner, so it was a win for us. Well, the Magi didn't need a GPS because they had a star (or aligned planets perhaps) lighting the way before them, guiding them to where the Christ child was, in Bethlehem. Theme: Nothing but the Truth; sub-theme: Truths of Christmas. The truth we'll consider today is a truth for the nations. Last week we read how the angel announced to the shepherds that "good news of great joy that [was] for all the people" – the news that Christ the Savior was born in Bethlehem. But those shepherds probably considered that all the people meant all the Jews, God's chosen people. We know it was/is good news of great joy for ALL the people of the world & the worship of the Magi was an important indication of that. Text: Matthew 2:1-12 [READ]. I) **Who are these Wise Men (Magi)?** Some, like David Gudzik, think that these were descendants of Jews exiled from Judah or Israel centuries before. Many Jews were indeed taken captive to Babylon in 586 BC & were exiled there for 70 years, as God decreed. Most of them returned, but some decided to remain in Babylon (which at that time was under Persian rule). It is feasible then that there would be

descendants of those who stayed still in that Babylonian region at the time of Christ's birth. They would have known the prophecies in regard to the Messiah. Others think it most likely that these were natives of that region – easterners - who had heard of one Hebrew named Daniel who had spoken of a Son of Man who was to come. Daniel, too, was a “wise man.” What does that mean? Wise men were philosophers, counselors to royalty & other leaders. They studied the stars (astronomers). So, they weren't kings, as the hymn suggests. They may have had some royal heritage, but they were more likely scientists who studied the heavens & contemplated the meaning of what they saw & advised kings or other rulers, like Daniel did. And we don't know how many there were. We think 3 because of the number of gifts but most likely there was quite an entourage, causing quite a stir in Jerusalem. These magi had noticed something in their study – a new star (some think it might have been a rare alignment of Jupiter & Saturn or Jupiter & Mars). They took it to be a sign of a king being born. Biblical commentator William Barclay quoted the Roman historian Seutonius, who wrote that at the time Jesus was born, “There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world.” Tacitus, another Roman historian of the general period, wrote: “There was a firm persuasion...that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire universal empire.” It's fathomable that these magi knew of that belief & were thus persuaded themselves. So they left their homes/families & traveled in the direction indicated by the star. It would be natural for them, traveling from another country in search of a king, to make a stop in the capitol city of the country they traveled to. And it would make sense to them that the current administration would know about a king being born. So they traveled – perhaps several weeks or even months – to Jerusalem. These wise men were seekers. The promise of God is that those who seek Him w/all their hearts will find Him. And I'm sure you've heard the saying, “Wise men still seek Him.” II) **King Herod & the Jewish religious leaders**. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the

magi asked what a natural question: “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” “We saw his star & have come to worship him.” Herod heard of it & became troubled, “& all Jerusalem w/him.” Herod the Great, as he was known, reigned as king of Judea under the overlordship of the Romans. He reigned for 37 years until his death in 4 BC. D.A. Carson wrote of Herod: “He was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates,” even some of his family. Again, Barclay wrote that “Augustus, the Roman Emperor, had said, bitterly, that it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.” Herod called for the chief priests & scribes to determine “where the Christ was to be born.” The thing is, they knew the Scriptures & knew where the Messiah would be born, but they weren’t interested in seeing Him themselves. As King Herod felt threatened by the announcement of a new “King of the Jews,” so these religious leaders may have felt threatened by the possibility of the Messiah really coming. They would have said they wanted Him to come, but what if they lost their positions? They told Herod what the Scriptures said, but they either didn’t really believe it or they were threatened. Either way they didn’t go w/the Wise Men to see & worship Jesus. We’re also told that “all Jerusalem was troubled w/Herod & the religious leaders. Perhaps they were troubled because they didn’t know who this entourage was – perhaps they had come to spy out the land. Or, whenever Herod was troubled, the people & their way of living was troubled as well. They probably wished nothing would upset their lives, even the Messiah they said they longed for. There are some today who oppose Christ as Lord & King or who would rather ignore Him. And there are those who have heard the truth, but don’t

want to be disturbed. Herod was an opposer to Christ, the religious leaders were ignorers of the truth, the people didn't want to be disturbed. On the other hand, III) **The Wise Men were bent on worshipping this new King**. Herod told them to go find the child & then bring him word, lying that he wanted to worship Him also. We know instead that his plan was to kill the child, because he ordered that all the male children in Bethlehem & the surrounding region, of 2 years & under be killed – slaughtered. But God would protect His Son, the Messiah, our Savior. Nothing would thwart His perfect plan of redemption. The magi went on their way toward Bethlehem & as they went they again saw the star & “rejoiced exceedingly.” By this time (up to 2 years after His birth) Joseph had moved Mary & Jesus into a house, where the magi found them (they were not at the manger). The magi marveled at what/who they saw. They knew this child was the king for whom they had been searching. “They fell down & worshipped” Him. Then they presented Him w/gifts they had brought – gave them to Jesus, not His mom or earthly dad. Surely it was these gifts – gold, frankincense & myrrh – that financed Joseph & Mary & Jesus’ flight to Egypt. God provided everything Joseph needed to care for his young family & protect this precious treasure. Matthew records that the magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so, “they depart to their own country by another way.” I think they not only traveled a different way, but became different men, wiser than before. I think these wise men were included in the Christmas story to express what we know is true: all who come to Jesus in faith are saved & become true children of Abraham & more importantly children of God. The seekers became worshippers. Jesus is Savior of Jew & Gentile alike, of men & women, of anyone of any nation or tongue who embrace Him by faith. He is indeed the Light of the world – the whole world. He is the Bread of Life for all who will take Him in. He is the Good Shepherd not only to the Jews, but He has others not of that fold – Gentiles were brought into the fold by the one Door, Jesus; & they were grafted into the Vine to be able to draw life from Him. When Jesus comes, there will

be gathered to Him “a great multitude that no one [can] number, from every nation, from all tribes & peoples & languages,” those washed in the blood of the Lamb, the redeemed of God. Will you be in that number? Are you a seeker – seek w/your whole heart, & you will find your Savior, because He will make Himself known to you. You won’t need a GPS. Here (Bible/Gospel) is your GPS. Are you an opposer of Christ? You can’t win unless you surrender. Are you an ignorer of Christ? You ignore Him to your eternal peril. Do you not want to be disturbed/bothered? Only as you include Him in your life can you be made whole. Are you a worshipper of Christ? Yes, that what you want to become. You are fulfilled as you embrace Him by faith & worship Him as Lord. We were made to worship. Wise men (& women) do indeed still seek Him. That’s the truth & nothing but the truth.