

THE EXAMPLE OF THE WISE MEN

On Epiphany, January 6th, the twelfth day of Christmas, we remember another Christmas story - the story of the three Wise Men described in Matthew 2:1-12. The Wise Men were passionate people. It seems odd that the gospel would hold up these pagans from a foreign country, as persons for us to emulate. Their religion had nothing to do with Christianity. Yet, today we see them as examples of faith. Why? The fundamental human passion is the search for something to believe in. This is important for us to know and think about. What are the passions of my life? Where am I searching for meaning and truth? The Wise Men set out looking for a newborn King. They were not looking for any ordinary newborn king, but the newborn King of the Jews, who was going to change the world. What they found was not a king surrounded by regal splendor. Rather, they found ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. But it was precisely in this situation that they came to adore the Lord. They could have looked at the little house, the carpenter's wife and the little child and said: "This can't be it." They could have turned around and headed back to the east. But they didn't. They went in to worship and adore because their passion for truth would have it no other way.

The Wise Men were humble people. It takes grace-filled humility to prostrate yourself before anyone, especially a baby (vs 11). But it also takes humility to be joyful and the Wise Men were just that - overcome with joy (vs 10). Joy is an element that is too often lacking in the lives of many Christians. By looking at our faces, one would think that Jesus was still in the tomb. Maybe that is because we aren't humble enough before the Lord. When I expect someone to do something for me, my joy is not very great when it happens. But when I don't expect it, then my joy is much greater. Unjoyful Christians usually are that way because they have assumed an elevated position in their own eyes. Rather than being down to earth and humble before the Lord, we can fall into the subtle trap of feeling that God almost owes us something. We end up praying with hands ready to grasp, rather than hands open to receive.

The Wise Men were also faith filled and faithful people. They saw in Jesus who he truly was; the son of God. They believed what they saw. They were faithful because they did what they were told in the dream. They didn't go back to Herod. Rather, they went back to their homeland by another

route (vs 12). They were willing to act when God spoke to them. We too need to act on the word of God when He speaks. God gives us the grace to act or speak His word when He wants and needs. Yet we can sit back and fail to cooperate with that grace. "I don't think God wants me to do this now. Maybe tomorrow I will do it," we say. But God wants us to act when He calls. He wants to use us as His instruments in various situations. If we would be faithful, then we must be willing to respond to God's grace when he gives it.

Matthew's story of the three Wise Men has quite a message for us. Much more than being a story about giving gifts, it asks us to see who we are as followers of Christ. The Wise Men are a model of passionate longing for someone to believe in, of being humble and joyful before the Lord, and of being faithful to the grace of God.

The Rev. Bert Eaton is Rector of St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church , located at 503 W. Broad St. in Swansboro.