**Where is He? Matthew 2:1-12. January 2 2022.**

To be unable to find someone who is special to us, causes us distress, and motivates an active search. Throughout this year, as happens most years, we have heard of various people that have gone missing. Incredibly this year we have seen some amazing rescues; the little boy AJ Elfalak who roamed away from a NSW rural property, Cleo Smith in Western Australia and just in the last few days teenage siblings Eli and Hannah Jones in bushland in NSW.

The Magi in today’s story were ardently, passionately searching for a promised King. They took their search to the highest authority, to Herod himself. They may indeed have expected that this new born King was indeed known to Herod. They probably had little idea about who they were actually looking for but they looked eagerly.

Climatic moments in movies are often accompanied by a search. A search for a person, or a significant object, the result of the quest often changes the direction of the whole story. Our stories, our journeys encompass many twists and turns. A New Year reminds us of new possibilities and changing circumstances. We can rest in the knowledge that God is always with us. As the prophet Jeremiah said, **“**When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,”[[1]](#footnote-1)

These Magi have also been referred to as Wise Men and even Kings, though there is no mention in Scripture of them being Kings. Magi (*Magos)* was the term originally used for the Persian priestly caste. They had an important role in advising the King. The term was also applied more broadly to “learned men and priests who specialised in astrology and the interpretation of dreams, and in some cases magical arts.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

There was scepticism, reticence and even disapproval of Magi in Jewish and Christian circles, but Matthew makes no comment to justify their presence at the birth of Jesus. Whatever their social position the Magi felt confident of gaining an audience with the reigning king and to of seeking to pay homage to an emerging king.[[3]](#footnote-3) The birth of Jesus highlights the rule of God in this world. Jesus comes to give all insight into who God really is, what God honours and what God expects of those who follow God. These insights, nurture a wisdom, that surpasses intellectual prowess and enables application of the teachings of Jesus, in our own context. We all need this wisdom to navigate the world as followers of Jesus.

The idea of special stars heralding the birth of significant individuals was common in the ancient near east.[[4]](#footnote-4) The star features prominently in this brief account. It seems to highlight that light was coming into this world. As Zechariah prophesied after the birth of John the Baptist, “the dawn from on high will.. give light to those who sit in darkness”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Light and revelation are often used as complementary terms. Even now we will often speak of some new understanding which we have gained as a “light bulb moment”. This star signifies the dawn of a new era, a new revelation of God, which begins in Bethlehem.

There have been various attempts to scientifically identify what astrological phenomenon this “star” may be; however the crux of Matthew’s story is that this is a supernatural phenomenon, this is God at work, through the natural order or in some other way. God is doing something spectacular!

However the circumstances of the little family are far from spectacular. (Certainly not what these wise men were expecting when they set out, I suspect. Prostrating themselves before a baby in a palace would be seen as most fitting, however this was an ordinary possibly meagre house, which magnifies the significance of their worship. God is doing something new, an upheaval is underway.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The temple has been the focus of their worship as followers of God, yet now God is experienced by visitors from the East in an ordinary house!

The story of these wise men enables us to see that God is present in the ordinary and the extraordinary, that God meets us as we search for God, that God will give us insight enabling us to navigate life guided by God’s wisdom.

As we enter a New Year, as our journeying may remain somewhat restricted, as our world grapples with a pandemic, still God journeys with us, meets us in ordinary and extraordinary places, God understands our yearnings even when we find them difficult to articulate and God is ready to meet us, and give us wisdom in the choices that we make.

A few weeks ago I heard the story of one of the Christmas hymns which I grew up singing. It is the hymn “Wisemen seeking Jesus travelled from afar”. It was written by the Rev James East a Methodist Minister in England who died in 1937.

“James East was a man fascinated by the Holy Land and it was his life-long dream to travel there. Having little money, he saved all he could throughout his life and after retiring he finally had enough money to make the trip. He went to the travel agents to make the arrangements, but on his return received a message from a friend. His friend was ill and needed an operation or he would die. The friend didn’t have the money for the surgery (this was in the days before the NHS). James East cancelled his travel plans to Israel and gave the money to his friend.

Out of that experience, James East wrote this hymn to remind us that God is everywhere and not just in the Holy Land. Where we are; where we meet God becomes our Holy Land. So, on this day we celebrate God’s revelation of himself in Jesus to all the world where we might be, or where we may travel as the magi did, here are the words to “Wise Men Seeking Jesus”.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Wise Men Seeking Jesus (Hymns & Psalms 128)**

Wise men seeking Jesus

travelled from afar,Guided on their journey

by a beauteous star.

But if we desire Him,

He is close at hand,For our native country

is our holy land.

Prayerful souls may find Him

by our quiet lakes,Meet Him on our hillsides

when the morning breaks

In our fertile cornfields

while the sheaves are bound,In our busy markets

Jesus may be found.

He is more than near us

if we love Him well,For He seeks forever

in our hearts to dwell. (James Thomas East (1860-1937) Public Domain.)

1. Jeremiah 29:13 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2007) 66 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luke 1:78-79 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rev Will Grady blog at <https://ramblingsfromredrose.wordpress.com/2011/01/06/wise-men-seeking-jesus-a-hymn-for-epiphany/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)