



SEARCHING
FOR GOD

Topic:	Responding to God
Main Point:	God reveals Jesus to us in different ways
Intended Response:	We have a choice to either worship Jesus or reject Him
Key Verse:	Matthew 2:1-18

Introduction

We all respond differently to the things of God. In the Bible, some people loved Jesus and accepted Him freely, others were angry, some were confused, others were amazed!

And we all have a choice to make in-between what God reveals to us and how we respond to it, to worship Jesus or reject Him. This sermon looks at the responses of a few people in the Christmas story, and highlights what we can learn from them.

A. Searching the sky (the Magi)

- The Magi were skilled in astronomy, astrology, and other religious arts.
- God reveals Himself by a star and guides them to Jesus.
- They brought gifts and worshipped Jesus.

Point One: We are all given an opportunity to worship Jesus.

B. Searching the suburbs (King Herod)

- Herod was an evil and very corrupt ruler.
- Herod was paranoid at the idea of anyone taking his power.
- He searched for Jesus to eliminate Him.

Point Two: We all have a choice to either worship Jesus or reject Him.

C. Searching the Scriptures (Chief priests and religion scholars)

- The chief priests and religion scholars searched the Bible to learn about Jesus
(Insert story of how you searched for answers in God's Word)

Point Three: A great way to search for God is the Bible is to read the Bible.

Teaching Illustrations and props:

To tease out the theme of searching for things, you could set up a few telescopes on stage, or hang binoculars around the pulpit. You may want to source some nice images of the Milky Way to display in the background. **More resources for this sermon, including PowerPoint slides are available at www.SArmy.org.au**

Introduction:

Welcome everyone.

It's just a few more days until Christmas. Of course the main part of Christmas is celebrating the birth of Jesus, coming together as family, and sharing a meal with friends.

But if you ask the kids, the main part of Christmas is opening presents! Can you remember a time when you were younger and you were handed a present and you were so excited to open it?

Insert story: I can remember the excitement I felt as a child on Christmas Eve when I lay in bed wondering what I would get when I opened my presents. My stand out Christmas was Christmas 1986 – it was the year of the Transformers Movie, and my parents bought me all the latest Autobot toys. I couldn't hide the joy on my face when I unwrapped Optimus Prime for the first time.

Or can you remember a time when you received a present and it wasn't really what you expected or wanted?

Insert story: A few Christmas' back, my daughter was eagerly expecting a small mermaid toy she had her eye on for quite some time. I remember Christmas morning when I handed her the last present and she thought 'this is it!' ... but it wasn't it – we had gotten her something else instead, and she was devastated.

Kids are funny with presents. They can go from being super excited to being really disappointed in a second. As our daughters have gotten older they can now appreciate the finer things of Christmas: setting up the tree, turning on the lights for the first time, watching Christmas carols on TV, having family over and enjoying a meal together.

If they're handed a gift, their much more controlled with their responses. We've taught them to read the card first, unwrap the gift slowly, and say thank you – no matter what they receive.

As I was reading through the gospel of Matthew this week, I was struck by the different responses people had to the gift of God's Son. Some people loved Jesus and accepted Him freely, others were angry, some were confused, others were amazed!

Henri Nouwen wrote, "Every moment of each day [we] have the chance to choose between cynicism and joy...people who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it..."

Transition	<p>We all have different responses to the things of God. And we all have a choice to make in-between what God reveals to us, and how we respond to it.</p> <p>Last week, we spent time thinking through how Joseph responded to what God revealed to Him. We looked the at different challenges of change he had to cope with.</p> <p>This week, I'd like to spend time looking at a few other people in the Bible, and see what it is we can learn from their responses.</p> <p>We're going to begin with the Magi; we start in Matthew 2:1-12</p>
Matthew 2:1-12 (RSV)	<p>Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him...</p> <p>(7) ...Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was.</p> <p>When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.</p>
Searching the Sky (the Magi)	<p>We don't know a lot about the Magi, but they are often referred to as the three wise men or thee kings in nativity plays.</p> <p>What we do know about them, is that they were skilled in astronomy, astrology, and other Middle-eastern religious arts. They were spiritual people and would have searched the night sky as a way to interpret what was going on around the world, and what was to come.</p> <p>What was incredible for them was that one night a new star shone in the night sky. And this star was not like any other star they had seen before – this star moved, and it moved in such a way, that they were compelled to follow it.</p> <p>We read how it guided them all the way from where they lived right to the place Jesus was in Bethlehem. So God revealed to them a star in the sky to get their attention and lead them to Jesus.</p>

	<p>I love that ! God enters into the world of others and speaks their language to bring them to Jesus.</p> <p>And how did they respond?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, we know they were open to following the star. This journey would have most likely taken them months. It was a long, hot, dangerous journey. No cars back then. No Motor Inns to stay in with a cool shower. No running taps to get water when they were thirsty. No iPods to listen to music on the way. But they stayed their course, following the star the whole way, and completed the journey set out before them. • Second, when they came to Jerusalem, they already knew they were looking for the new King of Israel. When they packed their bags, they packed gifts and treasures. They had an attitude of honour. • Third, when they met Jesus, they worshipped Him. They didn't just come, say a few well wishes, give a gift and leave – the Bible says, “they bowed down and worshipped him”. • And finally, they were open to God. Their story ends with God speaking again but this time in a dream – not only did this protect Jesus, but it also would have protected them from Herod's rage – if he found they worshipped another King, he probably would have killed them. <p>Again, it's amazing to see how God increases the closeness of His voice to them after their obedience. They followed the star of God diligently straight to Jesus. Now, instead of speaking externally to them in the sky, God speaks directly to them through their dreams.</p> <p>There are so many points we can draw from this alone. I think the main one for me is that they ended up worshipping Jesus. We can know about Jesus. We can be led to Him. We can come to church and present tithes and offering, give of our time, talents and treasure – but at the end of the day – it's all about worshipping God.</p>
Point 1.	We are all given an opportunity to worship Jesus.
Transition	The next person's response we'll look at is Herod's...
Searching the suburbs (King Herod)	<p>When king Herod found out that the Magi were searching for a new king, he called them into his palace in secret. Herod didn't want anyone else to find this new king. Herod was an evil ruler and very corrupt. He did everything in his power to find this new king Jesus and eliminate him.</p> <p>Herod was paranoid at the idea of anyone taking his power. The Bible tells a terrible story of Herod sending out search parties all out over Bethlehem, to search for Jesus and kill any boy that matched his description (Matt 2:16).</p>

	<p>It's because of Herod's evil nature that Mary and Joseph had to flee with Jesus. This made Jesus a refugee when He was born. His parents needed to flee their home country in order to live.</p> <p>I think there is a very serious and challenging message in this for us all to consider. If Jesus was a refugee, and we are to treat others as we treat Him, what can we do to respond to the modern day refugee crisis?</p> <p>When the Magi revealed to Herod that the new king was born, Herod didn't respond in the same way they did. Instead, he rejected Jesus and tried to kill Him.</p> <p>I don't know why anyone would not want Jesus in their lives, but God gives every one a choice: to worship the king or reject Him.</p>
Point 2.	We all have a choice to either worship Jesus or reject Him.
Transition	The last type of response to consider comes from the chief priests and teachers of the Law...
Searching the Scriptures (Chief priests and religion scholars)	<p>Matthew 2:4-6</p> <p>Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly: It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land, no longer bringing up the rear. From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."</p> <p>This last group did something I think we all should do - search the Scriptures, or in others words – read the Bible.</p> <p>The prophet Micah's words are found in the Old Testament. I can imagine them all huddled together in a small, dimly lit room, opening the scrolls of the Old Testament, and pouring over the words – diligently searching for what God said.</p> <p>The Bible not only contains the message of Christmas, but also contains the answers to so many of life's questions.</p> <p><i>Insert story: tell a story of how you found God's guidance, answers to need, through reading, listening to, or discussing the Bible.</i></p>
Point 3.	A great way to search for God is the Bible is to read the Bible.
Transition	What has God revealed to you this Christmas?

Call to Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe you've felt prompted to get involved in serving a meal Christmas day, • Maybe God has placed the refugee crisis on your heart and wants you to get involved in finding solutions, • Perhaps you feel like buying a present for our community Christmas tree, • Or feel inspired to give a generous offering into our Christmas Appeal and help bring hope where it's needed most, • Perhaps you've felt inspired to read the Bible more in 2018? <p>God reveals different things to us all in different ways.</p> <p>The question is – how will we respond to what God reveals to us?</p> <p>What will you do about the thing God has placed on your heart?</p>
Conclusion	<p>If there's anything we can do to help you respond to the leading of God this Christmas time, please feel free to speak to me or one of our church members.</p> <p>If you know of anyone in need this Christmas time, there are many ways we can assist as a corps.</p> <p>If you are here today, and do need some help – please, come and speak to either myself or one of our leaders after the service.</p> <p>Next Sunday is our Carol service. It will be a lot of fun, so please invite your friends and family along.</p> <p>We also have our Christmas Day service. It will be a shorter meeting but it would be great to share Christmas morning together.</p> <p>Let's pray...</p>
Prayer	<p>Father, thank you for sending Jesus to us, and the precious gift of life He offers to all who believe in Him.</p> <p>We ask that you would be with us in our responses this week. Help us be open to your leading and guidance. Help us serve others in meaningful and practical ways this Christmas time.</p> <p>And help us spend time with you so we receive the strength we need to help others in need – Amen.</p>

Matt 2:1-17

1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory— this was during Herod's kingship— (Magi) a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

3-4 When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

5-6 They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly: It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land, no longer bringing up the rear. From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

7-8 Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the (Magi) scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship."

9-10 Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

11-12 They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh. In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

13 After the (Magi) scholars were gone, God's angel showed up again in Joseph's dream and commanded, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child, and wants to kill him."

14-15 Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod's death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea had preached: "I called my son out of Egypt."

16-18 Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he'd gotten from the (Magi) scholars.)