

**“THE FOURTH WISE MAN”  
Matthew 2:1-12  
December 24, 2017  
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

**In the ancient world, wise men were mostly astrologers.  
Their primary function was to dole out advice –  
mostly advice that was based upon the influence of stars.**

**Instead of being like the astrologers of today,  
with their advice columns in the newspapers,  
these folks used all their worldly knowledge  
to offer advice to kings, royalty and the rich.  
They were considered “wise”  
because of the effort they put forth to gain knowledge.**

**One such wise man is said to have discovered an ancient scroll  
during his quest for increased knowledge.  
The scroll contained a prophecy of a great king or leader  
who would be born when a certain star appeared.  
That place would be Bethlehem in Judea.**

**So, the one who found the scroll  
invited his closest colleagues to examine the scroll.  
During the examination, two of the wise men  
decided the scroll was authentic  
and they began planning a trip to Israel.**

**The fourth one, Zethar, was a skeptic.**

**In a sense, he pretty much represents some of us.**

**In truth, most of us have been skeptical of the Christmas story  
– and perhaps still are.**

**And for pretty much the same reasons  
that caused Zethar to be a skeptic.**

**He believed the scroll to be authentic  
but he simply could not bring himself to believe  
that a great leader would be born in Israel.**

**Surely not miserable, Roman-occupied, oppressed Israel!  
What kind of world leader could possible come from there?!  
The bright star was simply a coincidence –  
to act upon the information would be foolish.**

**Zethar, after examining the scroll and discussing with his colleagues  
decided not to make the trip.**

**Despite Zethar's warning,  
his three friends loaded up gifts appropriate for a leader  
And headed out for Israel.**

**Sometime later,  
news reached Zethar that the wise men had returned.  
He met with them and received their report.  
And the news they brought was unsettling, distracting.**

**Apparently, the 3 wise men had presented themselves before Herod  
and had received permission to seek this leader in Bethlehem.  
In return, Herod asked they come back and report.**

**What the wise men found was a rough-handed carpenter,**

**a peasant girl and a newborn son.**

**Not in a palace, not even a house –**

**- But in a stable meant for animals.**

**There were also shepherds there who shared the wildest tale  
about angels and music and heavenly announcements.**

**When Zethar heard this, he simply would not believe  
that the wise men had found the ruler of the world!**

**In *those* circumstances?**

**Preposterous.**

**However, the wise men had held to their convictions –  
in the face of evidence to the contrary.**

**They were certain the events they witnessed  
were beyond their experience and understanding.**

**This was something celestial, perhaps divine.**

**They were so overcome they left their gifts.**

**Before they returned to report to Herod,  
the wise men had a dream  
in that dream they were warned  
not to report back to Herod.**

**So, they bypassed Herod  
and returned using back roads and little used routes.**

**Zethar remained skeptical – a king born in a *stable*?  
He criticized the wise men and said they should know better.  
A *king* groveling in a *stable*?**

**Before we judge Zethar too harshly,  
We need to remember that we may have also been skeptical.**

**At some point in our lives,  
someone told us the good news of the Gospel  
and we just didn't believe it.  
Virgin birth? Scientifically impossible!  
Resurrection? Probably a misdiagnosis.  
Heaven? Do you have any proof it exists?**

**Or perhaps we needed something from God  
and God failed to deliver what we wanted  
so we gave us our faith and trust in God.**

**It happens.  
It is very, very sad.  
But, it happens.**

**The wise men would not budge;  
what they had seen was enough to convince them  
of what they could not explain:  
How God would speak through a baby  
instead of thunder and lightning.**

**Well, the story doesn't end there.**

**What Zethar had heard began to chip away at his skepticism.  
His friends were truly wise and would not be duped so easily.  
He began to realize his friends has seen *something*.**

**The more he thought about both the story  
and the effect it had on his colleagues**

**the more he questioned his own skepticism.**

**Like the way dripping water  
will eventually erode the hardest rock,  
the testimony of his colleagues  
over time, did its work on Zethar.**

**Over the next few years, his urge to investigate this story grew  
until one day, he left for Israel without a word to anyone.  
He had decided to see this for himself.  
He loaded up gold and spices as set out.**

**Like his colleagues before him,  
Zethar headed for Herod's court.**

**There he met one of Herod's astrologers  
who confirmed the visit from Zethar's three friends.**

**Whatever they had to say to Herod  
scared Herod so badly that did some terrible things.  
Unspeakable things.**

**The three wise men never returned,  
but it was rumored they had seen and experienced *something*.**

**Armed with additional information,  
Zethar then headed to Bethlehem  
and took up residence in the Bethlehem Inn  
where he quickly became friends with the innkeeper.**

**As often happens with new friends,  
they began swapping stories over a little wine.**

**One night, Simon the innkeeper told Zethar a strange story  
about a birth that had happened just behind the inn.  
Simon said: “Nothing has perplexed me more!”**

**Zethar’s breathing quickened, and he asked:  
“What exciting event could possibly happen in this village?  
It is small, out of the way, insignificant.”**

**Like the little town I grew up in  
where all the young teens complained:  
“Nothing *ever* happens here!”**

**Simon then described a scene filled with brilliant light,  
celestial beings, angels singing,  
shepherds gathering  
and three wise men who came bearing gifts.**

**As great as that was,  
there was something extraordinary about the child.**

**They family wasn’t here long,  
soon after the birth of the child,  
they packed up and fled to Egypt by a little used route.**

**Zethar asked for directions,  
gathered his supplies and headed out after the child.  
But, Zethar could not find the child.  
So, he returned to Jerusalem.  
There he studied Hebrew  
and Jewish custom and history.**

**Years passed.**

**Jerusalem was buzzing with gossip about a new prophet.**

**A healer, a teacher quite outside the orthodox teachings.**

**A lot of what this Jesus taught**

**ran counter to the exhortations of the Scribes and Pharisees.**

**“Love your enemies.”**

**“Sabbath was made for us; not us for the Sabbath.”**

**He claimed he had the authority to forgive**

**without the rituals of the Temple.**

**Some even said he could raise the dead.**

**Zethar began to question where this young preacher was trained.**

**What was his background, where did his wisdom come from?**

**When Zethar heard that Jesus was from Nazareth,**

**he headed to Nazareth and found his way to Mary’s house.**

**Upon relating his quest to Mary,**

**she produced a leather box with a royal symbol on it.**

**Inside was gold from the Numbidian kingdom –**

**the gold one of his friends had brought.**

**Zethar had found the evidence he was searching for –**

**but he had not yet found the child who was now a man.**

**Unfortunately, by this time,**

**the sands in the hourglass of Zethar’s life**

were running low.

He had been searching for more than thirty years.

With what little money he had left,

Zethar began making preparations for his last days.

He purchased a new, unused tomb in a garden –

and waited for his last day to come.

As Passover drew near that year,

all of Jerusalem was again buzzing about this Jesus.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem.

Before Zethar could meet this man,

Jesus was arrested, tried, and sentenced to be crucified.

Leaning on the arm of one of his servants,

Zethar followed the crowd out of the city

to the hill of Calvary – where criminals were crucified.

It was there that Zethar finally came to realize

that 33 years ago, his friends had been right –

this was the Messiah.

When Zethar returned to the city

he found one of his close friends, Joseph of Aramathea,

weeping over the death of Jesus.

They had been close, Jesus and Joseph.

Joseph had been a follower of Jesus

and had shared a lot of Jesus' teaching with Zethar.



**Zethar offered his tomb to Joseph to bury Jesus.**

**Shortly after the resurrection,**

**Zethar came to a full and complete knowledge  
this Jesus was the one he had been searching for.**

**This is the one from whom the star had shone.**

**This is the one he had been searching for.**

**He had missed the babe – but had found the man –  
by the grace of God.**

**And with that discovery,**

**came the peace Zethar had been searching for.**

**His search had come to a conclusion.**

**He had found the babe – the Messiah.**

**Shortly after, Zethar passed away,**

**With this prayer upon his lips:**

**“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace,**

**For I have seen, and I know, and I believe.”**

**The body of Zethar was laid to rest in his now-empty tomb.**

**Zethar’s servant said as he was laid to rest, he heard:**

**“Enter thou into the joy of the Lord.”**

**PRAYER:**

**As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, bring us closer to understanding  
the great love You have for us. Sweep aside our skepticism and fill  
us with the peace and joy that come through a saving belief in Jesus.  
And we lift this prayer in His precious name. Amen**