

Family Service

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[0 : 0 0] I wonder if you like an adventure. Hands up if you like an adventure. Who likes an adventure?

All the children like adventures, and the grown-ups, they're very boring. They don't like adventures, but they do really. They're just pretending. You can put your hands down. I like adventures. One adventure that I like going on is on a holiday, maybe going far, far away. I wonder if you've ever been on a holiday adventure when mom and dad have said, you've got to go to bed early tonight because we're waking up very early. We're going to get in the car, and we've got a long drive to get to our holiday. You're very excited, and you can't get to sleep because you know that there's going to be a big adventure. You get up, and it's dark, and you get into the car, and off you go. You probably fall asleep in the car, but eventually you get to your holiday. Or maybe some of you have even been on an adventure when you need to go on a plane.

That's very exciting. You have to go far, far away, and you get in a plane, and it goes very fast, and you go somewhere very far, far away on an adventure. Well, I'm going to tell you this morning about a Christmas adventure that we read about in the Bible. In fact, we read about it just a moment ago, but the wise men who went on this big adventure to find baby Jesus. The wise men lived far, far away from where Jesus was born in Bethlehem. We don't really know exactly where they lived, but we think they maybe lived in a place called Babylon, and it was far, far away from Bethlehem. And the wise men, well, they were men who did something very interesting. They studied the stars. I don't know, some people are very clever about knowing all the stars, and the names of the stars, and where the stars are in the sky, and I don't know much about that, but these wise men, they studied the stars, and so at night they would look up into the sky, and they would see all these stars. Well, you know, one night as they looked up into the stars, something was different. It wasn't completely different, but something just didn't seem quite right. They looked up, and what was different was that there was a new star, a star they'd never seen before. And you know, they looked at each other, and one of them said to his friend, he said, do you see that? And he said, yes, I do.

He said, what is it? I don't know. They looked up again, and they closed their eyes, and they opened them again, just in case their eyes were playing tricks on them, but there it was. They rubbed their eyes, and they looked again. There it was. It was still there, and it seemed to be a very special star.

Somehow, difficult to know why, but it just seemed to be a very special star, a star that was announcing some very important news, a star that was announcing that a king was going to be born, the king of the Jews. I wonder how they knew that. How could these wise men in Babylon know that this star was announcing that a king was going to be born, and why would they be interested in a king of the Jews? Well, we don't really know for sure how they knew or how they realized how important that star was, but you know, maybe one of the things that helped them was that in Babylon, hundreds of years before, had lived somebody that you know about, and I'll tell you who he is, Daniel. We all know about Daniel, don't we?

[3 : 59] Daniel in the lion's den, and all the stories about Daniel. Well, Daniel had lived in Babylon. He didn't want to live in Babylon. He was taken as a prisoner to Babylon, and when he was in Babylon, he wrote about God's promise of a king who was going to be born, a king of the Jews who would reign over Israel and over all the world, and he'd written about that in a book that we have in the Bible, and maybe, we don't know, but maybe the wise men in Babylon had read that book, or maybe they'd heard about Daniel's prophecy, or the other Old Testament prophets who had spoken about a king that was going to be born, a king of the Jews. Well, however it was, we don't know for sure, these wise men knew that this star was very special, and that it was announcing that a king was going to be born.

So what to do? Well, they were wise men. Maybe they could have got their maps out of all their stars, and they could have pinpointed this new star. They'd say, right, we've got a new star on our map.

They could have done that. Maybe they could have written about it, what it looked like, and where it seemed to have come from. I don't know what people who know about stars write about stars, but whatever they do, they could have done that. Maybe they could have given it a name.

Sometimes you hear about people finding a new star, or a new planet, or something up in the sky, and they give it a name. Well, maybe they could have done that. But these wise men knew that they needed to do something else. They needed to go and find the king that the star was announcing.

They couldn't just think about it or wonder about it. They needed to go and find this newborn king. Well, that was a big adventure, and that's really where the adventure begins, because they lived so far away. A journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, where they thought they would find the newborn king, well, that would take weeks and weeks and weeks. You see, they couldn't jump into a car. They couldn't get into a train. They certainly couldn't go onto a plane.

[6 : 06] They needed to get camels and donkeys and different animals for the journey, and no doubt they would have needed people to help them, maybe somebody to do the cooking, maybe somebody to help them, give them protection from wild animals or from robbers, so they would have had maybe some soldiers with them, people to help them set up camp on the way. Oh, I imagine there was quite a lot of people, as well as the wise men, on that big adventure. And so they got ready, and everything was ready, and just as they were about to leave, I imagine they were very excited, very excited about what they were going to find in Jerusalem. And off they went on their big adventure. And day after day, they traveled, and maybe sometimes at night they could stay in a village or a town on the way, or maybe they'd have to camp out around a bonfire. And on they went on their big adventure, and time seemed to pass very quickly, because they were so excited, until eventually they reached the River

Jordan. And they knew that they must be very close. Once they crossed the Jordan, well, Jerusalem wasn't far away. So they crossed the Jordan, and they carried on, and then at night they could look in the distance, and they could see the lights of Jerusalem. And they thought, yes, we've arrived, we're nearly there. And so in they went to Jerusalem. And the people in Jerusalem were very curious about these men who had come from Babylon. They looked a little bit different, and they dressed differently, and they spoke differently, and they were wondering, who are these men, and why have they come, and why are they here? And well, the wise men from Babylon, they were quite happy to tell them why they'd come.

And they had a very important question that they wanted to ask the people in Jerusalem. And this is what it says. We can read it in the Bible. This is the question the wise men asked the people that they bumped into as they came into Jerusalem. Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star and have come to worship him. Well, I wonder what answer they got. Well, the people in Jerusalem didn't have a clue. They said, star? We haven't seen a star? A newborn king? We don't know anything about a newborn king. But not only did they not have a clue, some of them were quite frightened.

They said, we don't talk about kings in Jerusalem. We certainly don't talk about new kings in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, there is a king, and he's called King Herod, and he is a very bad man.

[8 : 42] And if he hears that we're talking about new kings, he's going to get very angry, and he might even kill us because he doesn't want any new kings. He's king. And so they were a bit frightened to even talk about a new king. Well, King Herod did find out about the visitors, the wise men who had come from Babylon, and he found out that they were looking for a newborn king. And well, Herod was very angry when he heard that. He was stomping around his palace, and he was hearing the news, and he said, King of the Jews? King of the Jews? I'm the king of the Jews. Grumbling away to himself, very cross, and very angry to hear about these men from Babylon talking about a king of the Jews.

So he thought to himself, I've got to speak to these men. So he sent for the wise men that they would come to the palace, and they could have a chat. Well, the wise men, I imagine they had found somewhere to stay, and they'd had a bath, and they'd had a nice hot meal, and then it was off to the palace. They were very happy to go to the palace because they thought, well, King Herod, he should know about the king of the Jews that's been born. He'll be able to help us. We need to find the baby.

So off they went to the palace. And King Herod, before they'd arrived, he had been wondering, well, how can I work out where this new king might be? So as he was waiting for the wise men to come, he called some very clever people, some very important teachers of the law and religious people who knew all about the Bible and the Old Testament and the prophecies. And he said to them, he said, now, see this king of the Jews that's meant to be born. Where is he to be born? I need to know where he's going to be born. Well, I did say they were very clever people, and they said, oh, that's an easy question, King Herod. We know the answer to that. We know where he's going to be born. He's meant to be born in Bethlehem in Judea. And how did these clever people know that? Well, because a prophet called Micah had written about that 700 years before, and they knew all about it.

They said, oh, yes, King Herod, that's where he's going to be born in Bethlehem. So Herod was thinking, okay, I know where he's going to be born, and I've got the wise men coming. Right, I think I've got a plan.

So the wise men arrived, and King Herod, he was very friendly to them, and he welcomed them, and he all seemed a very nice man. And he said, you're looking for the king of the Jews that's been born. Well, I can tell you where he's meant to be born. He's meant to be born in Bethlehem.

[11 : 16] So why don't we do this? You go to Bethlehem, and you find the baby who's been born. I know you want to worship him. Well, that's fine. You can do that. But then, if you could please come back and tell me, because I want to go and worship him as well. So that's the plan. What do you think? And the wise men thought this was a very good plan. They said, that's fine. We can do that.

But of course, King Herod didn't really want to worship baby Jesus. No, not at all. He was tricking them. He was pretending that he wanted to worship the baby, but really what he wanted to do, do you know what he really wanted to do? And I almost, it seems a terrible thing to say, but I'll just tell you, I know some of you know, he wanted to kill the baby. Imagine that. Imagine wanting to kill a baby. That really is a terrible thing. But that's what King Herod wanted to do, because he was the king, and he didn't want any other kings, not even a baby, who might grow up to be a king. So that's what Herod wanted to do. But the wise men didn't know, and off they went. And when they left the palace, what did they see in the sky? But the star. I don't think they'd been seeing the star on the whole journey. Sometimes we think that they follow the star from Babylon, but the Bible doesn't really say that. They had known by other means that they had to come to Israel and to Jerusalem. But when they came out of the palace, when they looked into the sky, there was the star again, shining brightly in the sky. They were very happy. The Bible says they were overjoyed.

Well, there's a star again. And not only did they see the star, but the star began to move towards Bethlehem, just where they needed to go. And so they were so excited, and then the star stopped. It rested over Bethlehem. Isn't that amazing that a star would help the wise men find Jesus? In fact, it's so amazing that some people say, oh, that's just impossible. Some silly people say, no, that can't be true. That's just a made-up story, a star that moves and that takes you to Bethlehem.

Well, that's just nonsense. That's what some people say. Well, let me just think about this for a moment. Let's think about that together for a moment. I wonder if any of you know a wee song that we sing about the stars, who made the twinkling stars, the twinkling stars, the twinkling stars, who made the twinkling stars, our Father God. So let's just think about this. If God made the stars, which He did, why couldn't God use a star to guide the wise men to Bethlehem? Of course He could. It's not silly at all. It's not impossible at all. God made the stars, and God used a star to guide the wise men to Bethlehem. So if you ever hear people saying, oh, that's just a made-up story, don't you listen to them. It's true. It's an exciting adventure, but it's a true adventure. So anyway, the wise men reached Bethlehem, and they needed to find where baby Jesus was, and they managed to find

Him. And they found Him in a house, not in a stable. See, Jesus had already been born maybe several months before they arrived, maybe even a year or two. We don't know for sure. And so obviously, Mary and Joseph had found a better place, a safer place, a cleaner place, a house, not a big fancy house, but a house where they could look after Jesus. And so the wise men arrived, and there He was.

[14 : 54] There was the baby they were looking for. And what did they do? What did they do when they arrived at the house? Well, there was Jesus, and the Bible tells us that they bowed down and worshipped Jesus.

And that doesn't just mean that they bowed their heads like this. What it means is they went right down on the ground, and they lay down on the ground, worshipping the baby. That's a very strange thing to do.

For grown men, quite important men, to bow down on the ground and worship a wee baby. It's a very strange thing to do. It really is a very strange thing to do. And that's not all they did. They opened up their treasures that they'd brought from Babylon. I don't know if they were on camels or on donkeys, but they opened them up, and they had some presents, very expensive presents for Jesus, gold and incense and myrrh. And they gave them to Jesus. And we want to just think about that for a wee minute. We've already said that it was really quite a strange thing that these men did. So why did they do it? Why did they bow down and worship a baby? Why would they do that? Well, because Jesus wasn't just any baby. He was a very special baby. He was a real baby, but he was a very special baby.

The wise men knew that he was special. They knew he was the king of the Jews. They knew that. We don't know how much more they knew, but they knew that. But of course, the Bible tells us so much more about Jesus. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Son of God. And so, the baby who was born in Bethlehem was God coming to Bethlehem as a baby. And that's amazing. The baby in Bethlehem was the Savior of the world. He was the king of kings, the Lord of lords. And so, it was right that the wise men bowed down and worshiped him, even if they didn't know all of these things. Of course, we do, so we've got even more reason to worship Jesus. And that's something for us to remember. Yes, it's an exciting adventure to hear about the wise men and their long journey to Jerusalem. But the important thing for us is to learn from the wise men and say, well, if they worship Jesus, well, we should worship Jesus as well. And how can we do that? Do we need to go to Bethlehem? No, we don't need to go to Bethlehem. He's not in Bethlehem anymore. Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and we can worship Jesus by trusting in Him as our Savior. We can worship Jesus by obeying Him.

We can worship Jesus by following Him. We can worship Jesus by giving Him, not presents like the wise men did, but by giving Jesus our hearts and our lives. And in that way, we can worship Jesus as well. Well, what an adventure for the wise men from Babylon, traveling all that way to search for and to find Jesus. But you know, there's an even more exciting adventure that we can go on, that you can go on, that we can all go on. And that even bigger adventure is to love and to follow Jesus. That is the biggest and the best adventure of all. So, I hope we all are on that adventure, and we'll carry on on that great adventure of being followers of Jesus. Let's just bow our heads, and let's pray.