

Pastor Jeremy Walloch – Home By Another Way (December 24, 2010 + Matthew 2:1-12)

Once upon a time there was a wise man—wise enough to know all the world over, but not wise enough to know there was much he had yet to learn.

Everyone in the small town knew of his eccentric wisdom. He quoted Aristotle and the Dalai Lama, Einstein and Sun Tzu. His bookshelves revealed ancient dramas and modern politics, zen meditation and the latest medical studies. His walls showcased trinkets representing his travels: a necklace from Japan, a wood carving from Israel, a horn from Brazil, an oil painting from France.

When college students returned home from their first semester with confused looks on their faces, they went to him. When a newly-wed couple argued through an issue for the first time, they went to him. When a middle-aged person felt disenfranchised with life, they often went to him.

A full beard, loose linen clothes, rope sandals, a dozen pieces of jewelry—he even looked the part of wisdom incarnate.

Everyone knew he was wise, and almost everyone in town envied him from time to time. Everyone, that is, except he. During the day he felt confident, assured, sophisticated, even (though he'd never say it) superior, but at night, laying alone in the dark, not spouting wisdom but listening to silence, a different feeling regularly sprang up: terror. What if he was wrong? What if all he had read was useless? What if he really didn't know a thing?

One evening, after his nightly yoga workout, and after reading some Plato in Greek, his questions again arose: What if I'm wrong? What if they're right? What if I know it all but still don't know enough?

After stirring in frustration for over an hour, he rose to go out for a midnight stroll through his garden. Frustrated, confused, weary, he dejectedly plodded over the mulch, and then looked up and saw it. Was it a plane on fire? a satellite exploding? Was a star or planet doing something he hadn't read about in his astronomy magazine?

After entertaining and rejecting every possible solution, he finally, cautiously wondered: What if it's a sign? What if it's my answer? What if this is what I have been searching for my whole life long?

Without even going back inside he started walking down the road towards it—surely it couldn't be far—it didn't look too far beyond the old courthouse.

As he walked along in the darkness, his eyes on the light, he suddenly bumped into someone else. “Excuse me,” he said, “I'm sorry, I'm just following the...”

“Me too,” the man responded. He didn't know the other man well, but knew he was an interesting character too. He had a reputation in town for his diet. He bought all his food in the big city from some store where everything was all-natural, all organic, all free-range or shade-grown. There were spells when he would only eat nuts and oil, seasons he would only drink tea with pepper. His body always looked malnourished, yet he always claimed to be healthier than anyone else.

The two men didn't say a word more, but kept walking purposefully, and weren't surprised at all when someone else joined them.

The third man had a reputation of his own. When the newspapers were delivered at the grocery store, he always walked up first, avoiding stepping on any cracks in the sidewalk as he strode. He immediately turned to page 4D to read the day's horoscope for his sign, and everyone else's as well. He often visited roadside fortune-tellers, he decorated his kitchen wall with fortune cookie inserts, his *Farmer's Almanacs* were handy, dog-eared, and worn. When he joined the pair of men walking, there wasn't even a word as they continued their procession.

Upon arriving at the courthouse, they found no one there except a lone police officer, with nothing else to do that night but make sure teenagers weren't skateboarding on the steps and leaving those nasty black marks on the new white cement.

Even though the building was ornate, and the man had some power, one glance assured the men that this guy obviously wasn't the one for whom they were looking.

“We saw a star, we're looking for...Him.”

“Just me here tonight, fellas,” the officer responded, “but if you find someone interesting, let me know. Lord knows we could use a little excitement 'round here.”

So they continued their trance-like walk, now heading out into the country, out toward Hicksville.

After they were far beyond the city limits, after the street lights faded leaving only the one light, eventually they noticed the star halting above a building, though “building” is an overly-generous term. It looked like a worn cardboard box discarded on the edge of a field. Once it was

probably a modest farmhouse, but that must have been a hundred years earlier. Now it was maybe used for storage, maybe used for nothing at all.

But there was a dim light emanating from within, so they walked over and just opened the door.

And there they were, illuminated by a flashlight propped up in a corner: a foreign couple looking exhausted, exacerbated, ashamed, yet ecstatic. They sat on the floor leaning against a wall, huddled side-by-side staring down at a little bundle of old stained dishtowels with a few stray weeds stuck on them.

As the door opened, they looked up, not as surprised as you or I would be, but with a sense of peace that came from somewhere in the room.

“We’re here to see Him,” the first wise man began.

“We have gifts,” the second continued, and the three quickly searched their bodies and coat pockets and bashfully handed over an ornate watch, some fancy chopsticks, and a gold talisman.

“He’s the one we’ve been looking for,” the third concluded.

At that moment, the baby turned his head their way, and looked at them with an expression as miraculous and wise as that found on every newborn.

Yet when they looked deep into his eyes, they didn’t see the light reflected from the flashlight’s beam on the wall, but they saw the very star they had followed.

If you had asked them earlier in the day how they would respond to such an experience, the first would have said he would recite a poem by Rumi, the second would have prepared his finest 12-course meal, the third would have bought a lottery ticket. But instead, all three suddenly found themselves taking a knee, three old wise men worshipping a newborn baby boy they all knew was already wiser than they would ever be.

Time passed—maybe a minute, maybe a lifetime—then the three wisemen together bid their farewells. When they stepped out onto the decrepit old porch, they looked up and now saw only darkness.

The first man, instead of writing a philosophical tract on the event, went home and pulled off the shelf an unworn Bible. The second man, instead of fixing his fancy tea, took all the money he had available and gave it to an organization that fed hungry children. The third man, instead of going to see his fortuneteller, made his first appearance in the old town church.

That is to say that each of them, stars still burning in their eyes, went home by another way.