

I had a great Christmas. I especially enjoyed the time I was able to spend with my family. It was kind of unusual because usually when I take time off from the church I don't really take off. My body is not at church but my mind is. This time was different. This time I really got away and relaxed. We had four passes to Sea World in San Antonio that expired December 31, 2007, so we figured if we were going to see Shamu we had better get down there. I didn't know if Sea World would be open or not so I checked online and found out that they were not only open, but the weather forecast was outstanding for the day we planned to go. So we took off last weekend for San Antonio. Alisha and I love to go to Austin so we decided to spend the night in Austin on the way and get up early and drive to Sea World. By the way, if you are ever in Austin go eat at the Brick Oven. It's an Italian restaurant not far from the capitol building.

When we got to Sea World we realized that we were not the only ones who thought it might be a good idea to visit Shamu. I was surprised at the number of people who went to Sea World in December, but the crowd was not near as big as a summer crowd. We had a fun day. We played on the big playground, we rode the rides, we watched Shamu jump out of the water, we pet the dolphins, etc. We did everything you are supposed to do when you go to Sea World and the weather was perfect to boot. Sea World was the destination but the journey was the best part. Perhaps you have been on one of those trips. You are definitely excited about the destination, but once you begin the trip you realize that the trip itself is the destination. I experienced that firsthand when I traveled to Israel eight years ago. I couldn't wait to see what it was like in Jerusalem, but along the way I realized that the trip itself was part of the destination. It was the same way with this trip. I had just as much fun traveling as I did at Sea World (even with all the "Are we there yet?" questions from the back seat).

I think that is what we all come to realize at some point in our lives. We realize that life itself is a journey and that to get the most out of life we must learn to enjoy and appreciate where we are on the journey. If we are never satisfied until we get to the "destination", we ultimately miss out on some of life's greatest blessings. I'm not big into New Year's resolutions. In fact, I rarely make New Year's resolutions. A few years ago I decided to get into shape but it wasn't on January 1st. It was August 1st. By the way, if you are going to start jogging outside, don't do it on August 1st! But this year it just so happens that I do have a New Year's resolution. It's not

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because it's a new year necessarily; it's because I really want to do this. I want to enjoy life more. That might sound kind of simplistic and goofy coming from a pastor, but it's true. I need to stop and smell the roses more often and appreciate the blessings in my life. In short, I'm going to enjoy my journey and be more open to what God is saying to me.

I was talking to some friends of mine earlier this week who attended the funeral of a friend of theirs over the holidays. Their friend was in his early sixties and had recently retired. He and his wife were in the process of looking for a place to retire. Sadly and unexpectedly, he collapsed and died. You know retirement for many people is "The Destination", but as this story illustrates we do not know when our last day on earth is going to be so we might as well look at each day as the destination and enjoy the moment. I cannot tell you how many people I talk to who do not like what they do for a living, yet for years they have continued to do what they not only do not feel called to do, but dislike. Here is some advice for you if you are in that category – quit what you are doing now and go do something different. Life is too short to be unhappy. God has called each of us to a live a life of meaning and fulfillment, and the sooner we see our lives as a journey to be enjoyed and savored, the better.

In our story from Matthew today we have some wise men going on a journey. These wise men were from the east and were most likely astrologers. They followed the stars. They were Gentiles so they really didn't have any background with the Hebrew Scriptures. They wouldn't have known Abraham or Moses if their lives depended on it. So it's surprising that they came to King Herod asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." King Herod then got paranoid about the whole thing and did some checking on the situation. He found out through the chief priests and scribes that yes, indeed, the child was to be born in Bethlehem. So Herod sent the wise men on a journey to find Jesus and report back to him as soon as possible so he could also go and pay him homage.

The wise men did exactly as Herod had instructed. They set out on the journey and followed the star that they had seen at its rising. There have been several different theories on what "star" it was that they followed. One theory is that it was Haley's Comet. Historical records have indicated that Haley's Comet was passing through around 12 B.C. Another explanation is

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that the planets were aligned just right. Whatever the case, the point is that God wanted these men to get to Jesus and God provided a star to guide them. I'm perfectly okay with the explanation that God put a star in the sky to guide them. If God created the rest of the stars, then would it not be possible for God to create a special one to direct them to his Son?

They followed the star until it stopped over the place where Jesus was located in Bethlehem. Verse ten states: "When they saw the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." The literal reading of this verse would read: "They rejoiced with a really, really big joy." Now that is joy! Not just joy, but really, really big joy. My question is "What were they so joyful about?" Remember, they were Gentiles who were not waiting on a Messiah. They were just wise men, astrologers from the east, who had an interest in the stars. Why the great joy?

This is the Christian season of Epiphany. Epiphany in Greek means "appearance" or "manifestation". It is the time in which we reflect on what it means for us that God came to us in the form of Jesus Christ. The point is that God came to us and not vice versa. The wise men were overjoyed not because of anything they did but because of what God did. It was God who led them on the search for Christ. God started the whole thing. So their joy was not something that came from within themselves, but something that came from outside through God. By the time they reached Jesus they were just giddy with excitement. I think part of the reason for their great joy was the search itself.

I've already told that garage sales are not my cup of tea. I do not like having garage sales and I do not like going to garage sales. However, I have talked with many people who love to go to garage sales. The ones that go to garage sales year after year go because of the search. We have some good friends in Dawson who know a lot about antiques and what items are worth. They go to garage sales and look for that diamond in the rough. One time they were at a garage sale in Fairfield and found an old rolling pin. They bought the rolling pin for \$1 but they knew it might be worth more. When they got home they looked it up in the antique book and found it was worth \$800. I don't know about you but I would be overjoyed with that! That's my kind of garage sale!

Some things in life we search for and we know what we are going to find when we find it. There are no surprises. I love my wife. She is the

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sweetest person in the world to put up with me. She is an absolute saint. But she has this knack for misplacing her keys. Anyone else here have that problem? I always put my car keys by my wallet on the counter so I know I will never lose them. Alisha, on the hand, puts her car keys in all sorts of places – her purse, on the counter, on the front porch, in the keyhole itself, etc. It is a game with us – where did Alisha put her keys today? Once she lost her keys and asked me if I knew where they were. I asked her, “Where did you put them last?” She then looked at me and said, “If I knew the answer to that question I wouldn’t have asked you in the first place!” When Alisha loses her keys we look for them and then we find them. There are no surprises. We know exactly what we are looking for. We may have no idea where to start looking, but we know we are looking for keys.

The ironic thing about the search that the wise men were on is that they really didn’t even know what they were looking for. They knew they were looking for the child who was to be the king of the Jews, but they had no idea what was really waiting for them. It wasn’t like they were searching for a set of car keys. What they were searching for was mysterious and unknown, and that kind of search can be exhilarating and scary at the same time.

Legend has it that there were three of these wise men, but we don’t know that for sure. We know they came bearing three different gifts, but that doesn’t necessarily indicate there were three wise men. There could have been two or seven for all we know, but we do know they experienced joy when they found Jesus. When they entered the house they saw Jesus with his mother Mary and they knelt down to pay him homage. Then they opened their treasure chests and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We know what gold is – gold is gold, but what about frankincense and myrrh? Frankincense was a fragrant resin and myrrh was a resin used for anointing purposes for kings. So the wise were bringing gifts to anoint the new King. It’s interesting to note that Jesus was not only anointed with this myrrh as his life began on earth but also as his life ended on earth. After Jesus had been crucified and taken down from the cross a man by the name of Joseph of Arimathea took his body and prepared it for burial. Part of the process of preparing a body involved the use of myrrh, the same kind of resin used to anoint Jesus by the wise men.

Little did they know that the same child that they anointed with myrrh would one day be anointed again, but not in the way that they or anyone else

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could anticipate. For this child would grow to turn the world upside down, and ultimately die on a cross. The wise didn't know it at the time but they had just entered the greatest story in the history of the world. You and I are not much different. We think we know what we are searching for when we enter a relationship with Christ, but we do we really? Do we really know what we are searching for? Do we really understand the cost of following this child? Do we really understand the blessings of following this child?

In some ways I don't think we know what we are searching for in Christ any more than the wise men did, but that's okay. It's okay because maybe that's how God intended it all along. Maybe the point of a life of faith in Christ is not so much the destination but the journey. Maybe we could take a lesson or two from the wise men and understand that we don't have to know and understand everything to show up and worship the King. And remember this as you go along in your journey of faith – if you don't know exactly what you are searching for when it comes to faith, don't worry, He'll find you soon enough – just like he found the wise men.