

**Sermon** January 7, 2024  
[Matthew 2:1-12]

*Finding God: From Cosmos to Christ*  
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Grace to you, and peace, from God, the creator of the cosmos, and from Christ, God made small for us. Amen.

There are many mysteries in this world, one of which is: How did Ethan arrive at the number “7,121” when it comes to the stars, given the fact that both his uncle and father are in some way involved in the industry of space?!? I’m anxious to hear what the answer is after the service!

The title of this morning’s message is *Finding God: From Cosmos to Christ*.

What confirms to you the presence of God in the world?

Where do you find God?

I suspect for some people of faith, what confirms the presence of God in the world is the performance and existence of miracles.

For them, miracles serve as proof for God, whether we’re talking about the last public miracle by God in the Old Testament, which occurs when the prophet Elijah calls down the fire from the heavens to consume the altar of Ba’al; or about the variety of miracles in the New Testament, the total number of which is 37 wonders, signs or deeds of power, the most common of which, you can probably guess, is the miracle of healing.

Now, I don’t know about you, but for me, while I see the deeper significance of the miracle stories – that is, these miracles were told, in a way, to emphasize how God’s kingdom was emerging amongst and because of Jesus, a kingdom that would lead to the restoration and renewal not only of human beings, but the entire universe – that’s the deeper significance – nevertheless, I don’t see miracles as proof for God’s existence or as confirmations of His presence.

After all, as Martin Luther wrote, “The miracles performed,” which is to say, reported in Luther’s day at various shrines and holy places, (Some of you may recall reading *The Canterbury Tales* in high school. That’s a great example of a story where people go on a pilgrimage to a holy site or shrine. And the belief was, at these various shrines, that miracles occurred) So Luther writes, “The miracles performed there prove nothing.”

“They prove nothing. For the Evil One can show also wonders, as Christ has taught us in Matthew 24:24.” It’s easy, in other words, to get distracted by what I call “the fireworks of the New Testament;” the miracles.

But there is another way to talk about miracles. One that doesn’t contradict science.

The theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher of the early 19th century captures it perfectly. “To me,” he writes, “all is miracle.”

In the popular sense, the inexplicable and strange alone are miraculous. So, Jesus calms a storm; that’s obviously strange and unusual. That’s what are counted as miraculous.

“But in my view,” he says, “these things are not miraculous; the more religious you are, the more miracle you would see everywhere.”

We hear the same thing from Albert Einstein. He writes, “There are two ways to live. You can live as if nothing is a miracle. Or you can live as if *everything* is a miracle.”

We see the same attitude in Scripture.

“When I look at your heavens,” the author of Psalm 8 writes, “the world of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, (That is to say the 7,121 stars that you have established – or 20...) what are human beings, that you are mindful of them; mortals, that you care for them?”

Obviously, the Psalmist had no idea of spiraling galaxies, or a universe teeming and glittering with 200 billion trillion stars, yet he, and perhaps some of us, were grasped by the wonder of it all. The mystery of it all. The sheer breadth of it all, and the infinite depth of it all.

I assume this is the spirit behind what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1: “Ever since the creation of the world, God’s eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made.”

I assume, as well, that this is the spirit behind the search of the wise men in our Gospel reading for today.

Now we all know the story; we just heard it. Three wise men from the East, probably astrologers, are inspired to follow a star to that will lead them to the Savior, or the king of the Jews, which was prophesied to come from Bethlehem.

When they arrive at the scene, they discover of course, not only the child, but also Mary. (There is no reference here to Joseph, which I think adds a little controversy to the story.)

The question I have, that I think is often unasked, is this: What motivated their search?

The Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Barron has an answer. In a special editorial that he wrote for *The Wall Street Journal* last week, he writes, “The Magi [the three wise men] stand for all those down through the ages and across... cultures, who have hungered and thirsted for meaning; for the ultimate good; for the living God. The mysterious star led them to the most surprising place: a cave outside the unremarkable town of Bethlehem, where a child lay in the animals’ manger.”

(Now, that’s interesting. We have reports from the second century that Jesus was, in fact, born in a cave. So Bishop Barron is picking up on that.) “[Here they] found the God who had stooped down to lift us up. The God who wants nothing other than to make us fully alive.”

When you hear people, for example, talk about “God’s will” or “God’s purpose,” it’s not simply “everything that comes to pass.” God’s will for each of us, at least according to Jesus in the Gospel of John, is “abundant life.”

A second-century theologian, Irenaeus, says that “the glory of God is the human being fully alive” or again, as Barron says here, “a God who wants nothing other than to make us fully alive.”

And what did these three wise men experience?

Well, they heard the gurgling, cooing sounds of a baby as the answer to the question of meaning.

They discover what centuries later the Lutheran philosopher Soren Kierkegaard would call “the absolute paradox of the Christian faith,” namely that the eternal had become temporal; that the heavenly had become historical.

Led by a star, which is the perfect symbol for cosmic wonder, (again, just imagine it: 200 billion trillion stars!) led by one of them, which is a perfect symbol again for cosmic wonder, the Magi stumbled upon the *small* wonder of God available to us in and through Jesus Christ. The transition here from the God of the Cosmos, which theologians referred to as “general revelation,” and which people had come to ignore, according to the Apostle Paul, to “God With Us,” which is special, our “particular revelation,” had taken place.

Now as our second reading for today says, human beings could have access to God in boldness and confidence, through the apprehension of Love in the Christ Child. The apprehension of Love.

Jesus, in other words, makes the Cosmic God personal for each of us.

Jesus makes the cosmic God, the God of all things, the God of all stars and universes, personal for each of us--and this changes everything.

This changes everything.

For years, people told me they don't believe in God because there is no evidence. Perhaps you've heard friends or family members say the same.

I watched recently an interview with Ricky Gervais, a comedian who in every other respect is not qualified even to begin to answer this question, say dismissively, “There's no evidence for God, I don't believe.”

Now, in spite of that attitude, I certainly understand the point. I've struggled with it for many years. Indeed, since a young adult, I have longed to experience God, just once, in a direct, verifiable, and unmistakable way. As if God, for a moment, could take a knife and cut through the fabric of reality, just for a moment, so that I could peek in, say it's all good, and let God sew it back up.

But what would that look like, this reference to a direct, an unmistakable, verification of God? And what standard for proof would be enough? After all, I can attribute any direct experience of God to medication; or to hallucination! Who's to say my experience is trustworthy?

What the Gospel reading for today suggests, however, is not that we find God, but that *God finds us*—and on God's terms, not our terms. The story we heard of the Magi is one way of how people experience God. The first, as I've said, is by looking up at the

heavens, observing a star here, and following it. This affirms that nature, in its totality, has a revelatory capacity; that we can find God through the contemplation of Mystery we encounter in, with, and under all things.

It's what led Friedrich Schleiermacher to say, "To me, all is miracle."

It's what led Albert Einstein to say, "There are two ways to live; you can live as if nothing is a miracle, or you can live as if everything is a miracle."

It's what led the Psalmist to say, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings, that you are mindful of them; mortals, that you care about them?"

And it's what leads *me* to say that science and religion are ultimately two roads to the same destination, the encounter of "capital-M" Mystery that lies at the heart of everything.

Mic drop.

But, there's more. God comes to us in *another* way, according to our Gospel reading for today. There's the star that leads our Magi, from the Cosmos to Christ. And what is this Christ, but the experience, through his person, not of "capital M" Mystery, but of "capital-L" Love--gurgling and cooing there in a manger.

1 John captures it perfectly. The author writes, "God's love was revealed among us in this way. God sent His Son into the world, so that we might live through Him."

There's that reference again, to abundant life.

But there's more, even. When we love according to our Christian faith, we *make* God exist, as Maurice Clavell, a French philosopher once put it. We *incarnate* the love that we see in the Christ Child into our everyday lives.

1 John puts it like this:

"No one has ever seen God. Yet if we love one another--if we love one another--God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us."

There's the proof, from a Christian perspective, for the existence of God. It's not evidence, scientifically. It's not miracles. It's Love.

Whenever we incarnate that love, again, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.

This is the second way of finding, or experiencing God: not through the stars in heaven, but through each other.

Through each other.

Today, you've heard of two ways to find God: The "big" way, which is the wonder of the Cosmos in its totality, the sheer existence of being. And the other way: God big made small; the appearance of Love in history, which should inspire us to do the same.

May each of us, therefore, incarnate God by loving and caring for others, and may each of us find God in the care and love others show us.

In Jesus' name. Amen.