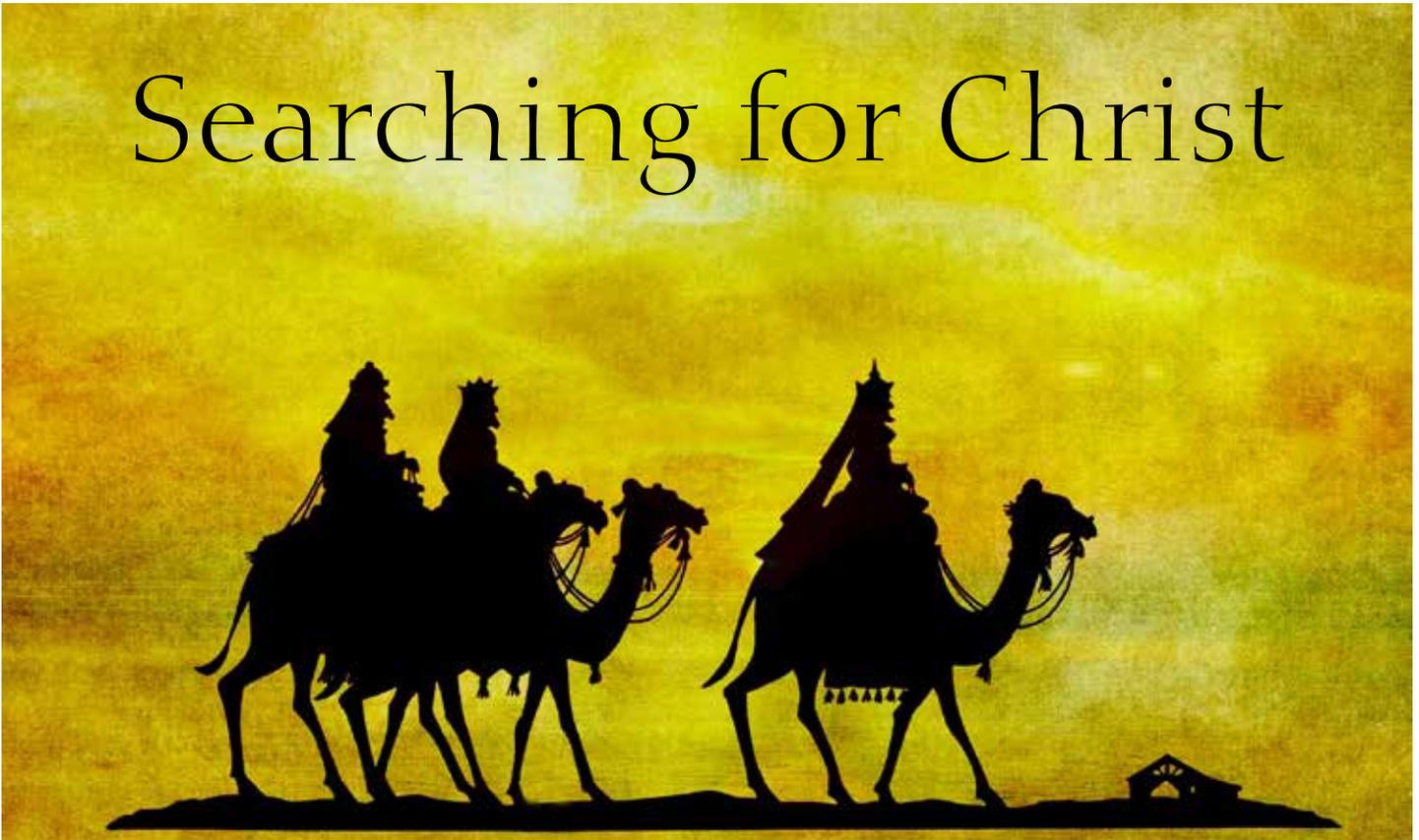


# Searching for Christ



**A** PREVALENT THEME THROUGHOUT the Gospels, and especially in the Infancy Narratives, is that of searching for the Christ. A variety of people for a variety of reasons, at some point or another, find themselves seeking out the Christ Child. In each of these there is a lesson for us to ponder.

The first ones to go out in search of the newborn Christ, we are told, are some shepherds from Bethlehem: *“And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.”* (Lk 2:8-9) To their surprise, the angel beckons to them to go into town, where they will find the long-awaited Christ, “wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” (Lk 2:12)

As would occur time and again in the life of Jesus, *where* the Christ is found is as great a surprise as His appearance among men. The shepherds come upon Him in a cave, essentially a stable, placed in the manger where animals feed. There is a significance in this for a shepherd: the Christ Child is in the midst of familiar surroundings. Perhaps the shepherds might have expected to find Him in a palace or a mansion or, at least, in a house. Instead,

they find Him in a *cave*, in a *manger*, where herd animals dwell.

The lesson for us is that Christ can be found in our most familiar surroundings. “Christ walks among the pots and pans,” said St. Teresa of Avila. Likewise, we can seek Him out in our most menial and familiar tasks throughout the day. He is not far. Indeed, we need not look for Him in exotic settings. He is very near to us.

The next group we meet who are seeking out the infant Jesus are Magi travelling from the East, following a prophecy and a star: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.’”* (Matt 2:1-2)

The star they followed vanished over Jerusalem, leading them to believe that the Christ was born where they might expect to find Him: in a palace. Small wonder, then, that they discover that, not only is He not there, but that the signs of His coming have gone unnoticed among the great ones in Israel! They are re-directed by the chief priests and scribes towards Bethlehem and the star reappears to bring them to the Christ Child’s hum-

ble (and, no doubt, borrowed) dwellings.

Here is a lesson for us not to seek out Christ among the rich and powerful, but among the poor and humble. Granted, there are some who are both fervent Christians and possess money and influence, but they are a minority and fall into a different category from those who place their trust in their own power and wealth. The latter, Scripture tells us, are “but an illusion; On a balance they rise; together they are lighter than air.” (Ps 62:10 NAB) Our trust should always be in the Lord, not in men, no matter how promising they may appear.

The third party we encounter in search of the Christ Child is Herod and his soldiers. When the Magi arrive at his palace looking for the “newborn king of the Jews,” we are told that he was “troubled” and all of Jerusalem with him. He summons the Wise Men and tells them, *“Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.”* (Matt 2:8) His deceit and murderous plans are well known to God and, in the end, the Christ slips through his fingers.

Here we find a double lesson: First, that Christ is not to be found by those who prefer sin; who find in Him a threat to their self-seeking lifestyle. In fact, there are many who, like the chief priests and scribes, harbor much knowledge of Christ and Christianity yet refuse to humble themselves and seek Him out in all humility. It is interesting that, although the priests and scribes knew where to search for Him, we are not told that any of them journeyed to Bethlehem to pay Him homage. Knowledge is no substitute for Faith.

The second lesson that we can glean from this passage concerns God’s offer of salvation to all. Why did God permit the star to vanish over Jerusalem? No doubt, He knew that the Magi would assume the Christ Child was in the King’s palace and seek Him there. Surely much bloodshed and agony could have been avoided had the star simply avoided the city limits of Jerusalem and taken the Wise Men by another route. In this, however, we see the mystery of God’s offer of salvation and our human freedom to accept or reject it. It was fitting that the leaders of the Jews should know that the long awaited Messiah was born. Later, in His ministry, Jesus did not hesitate

to reach out to all the scribes and Pharisees with His message of salvation, knowing that, in the end, many would reject it. Such is the mystery of our free will. Those who end up in Hell have no one but themselves to blame; God offers salvation to all.

Finally, we have a curious incident where even Mary and Joseph find themselves searching for the Christ Child. In his last snapshot of our Lord’s youth, St. Luke tells us of one particular Passover where Mary and Joseph lose Jesus only to find Him again three days later in the Temple. When asked why He had done this to them, Jesus responds, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49)

The word “sought” that is used by St. Luke in this passage is the same word he uses in the resurrection account when the angel tells the women at our Lord’s tomb, “Why do you **seek** the living among the dead?” (Lk 24:5). In both instances, the implication is that the hearers should have known better. Why should the women have known better? Because Jesus had already told them that He would rise again on the third day: *“Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise.”* (Lk 24:6-7) Why should Mary and Joseph have known better? Because they knew that He was a divine person: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” God is found in the Temple.

Here we have a final lesson in seeking for Christ: While He may be found anywhere and anytime, even “among the pots and pans” He is, first and foremost, to be found in His Temple; that is, in our churches and, specifically, in the tabernacle. He is also found in the other Temple that is always close at hand: a soul living in God’s grace. As our Lord tells us, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (Jn 14:23)

So let us resolve to seek our Lord every day, whether in the Eucharist, in our souls, or in our daily lives, recalling that He promised that if we seek Him we will find Him.

