

“The Little Man Behind the Curtain”

Matthew 1:18-2:12
December 24, 2010
Peter Hiatt

Scripture Reading

Matthew 1:18-2:12:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Now after 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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Special Music

“Somewhere Over the Rainbow”

Sermon

[*Wizard of Oz* movie clip #1:]

The face of the Wizard of Oz, surrounded by smoke and fire: *Come forward! I am Oz, the Great and Powerful! Who are you?*

[Peter enters the dark stage. Candles are lit around him.]

“I am the Great and Powerful Oz! Behold my power and be filled with wonder!”

[Peter waves a light around in the darkness.]

-or-

“Behold my power and be filled with fear!”

[Peter does a fire trick.]

I can tell that you are completely astounded.

[*Wizard of Oz* movie clip #2:]

Oz' face, surrounded by even more smoke and fire: *The Great and Powerful Oz knows why you have come!*

You have come because it is Christmas Eve! [Peter claps on the lights. He is dressed as a wizard, using a Middle Eastern accent.] And that is why I have come and did come many years ago. I am a wizard. I am knowing that you say “wise man” or “king.” I’m really not a king, but I am a king maker. Your Bible says that I am a *magi*. It is where you get your word magician. We magi were astronomers, astrologers, and psychic weathermen.

Long ago, I came from the east, from a region called “Orient R,” just before “Orient S.” Now you are calling this region Iraq, Iran, and maybe India. If that would be surprising you—a wizard from Persian on Christmas Eve, remember that the first sign of God’s covenant was a rainbow—a rainbow over all the earth. I came from Orient R, but now I come from over that rainbow.

My complete name is Balthaser Ozwaldo Jones. But you may call me Ozzy. Now, I know what you are thinking: What does a magi-wizard from Orient R do with his time? Actually, most of the time, I would be “doing a deal.” People would be coming to me for wisdom, and I would say, “Hello, my good man. Is that your camel?” He would say, “Yes,” and—Caboom! I would blow it to smithereens [with a wand]. “Hello, is that your goat?” Caboom! Then I would say, “Now that you are filled with shock and awe, let’s do a deal.” It was a very effective business plan.

Mostly we would use smoke and mirrors, and make up big words like “latent bio-chemical psychosis compounded by halitosis.” Smoke, mirrors, big words, and pain in the neck demons. That is how we would control people and enchant those people to us. I would be doing deals with demons in order to be doing deals with people. But the more I was doing deals with demons, the more demons were doing deals with me. And the more I was controlled by

demons, the more I became a lie and the more I could not keep my promises. And so, my friends, I appeared to be great and powerful, but I was very small and weak and scared, and very, very lonely.

[*Wizard of Oz* movie clip #3]

[Dorothy and her friends stand shaking as Oz continues.]

Oz: *Do not arouse the wrath of the Great and Powerful Oz! I said come back tomorrow!*

Dorothy: *If you were really great and powerful, you'd keep your promises.*

Oz: *Do you presume to criticize the Great Oz? You ungrateful creatures! Think yourselves lucky that I'm giving you audience tomorrow instead of 20 years from now.*

[Toto pulls back a curtain on the side to reveal a man speaking into a microphone and working levers.]

Oz: *The Great Oz has spoken! Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain! The Great Oz has spoken!*

[Dorothy goes to the man behind the curtain.]

Dorothy: *Who are you?*

Oz, speaking into the microphone: *I am the Great and Powerful...Wizard of Oz.*

Presently, I will not be showing you any more home videos. But do you see? I wanted people to like me. But the me, that I, was wanting them to like was a lie. So I kept saying, "Pay no attention to the little man behind the curtain," but I was the little man behind the curtain: small, weak, scared, and very, very lonely.

Maybe you would be feeling this way now. You have built a very impressive curtain constructed of degrees, awards, pretend powers, and fake laughter. It helps you to do a deal...but behind the curtain you are small, weak, scared, and very, very lonely. Your pastor (a dear, sweet man, God bless him)—he was telling me that he feels this way much of the time, like a stupid wise man or a lonely wizard. You see, I am not the only wizard in this place. Your society is full of them.

Well, in 3 B.C. I was lonely, I was scared, and I was angry. Presently, if I am to be honest with you, I hated God. We called Him the Great Silent One. Even stupid wise men know: Pain-in-the-neck demons did not make the world; the Great Silent One did. But He was silent, and I hated Him. I was jealous of His greatness and His power. I wanted to be knowing Him, but I was terrified to be meeting Him. "Ozzy, is that your camel?" Caboom! "Ozzy, is that your goat?" Caboom! "Ozzy, is that your heart...behind the curtain?"

For many years, we had been knowing that the Great One existed behind an immense curtain in a stone temple in the west, in the land of Judah the lion. And we knew that if a man like me looked behind that curtain, he would most certainly be destroyed. And so, you might now be

asking, "Ozzy, why did you go? Bearing gifts you travelled afar, field and forest, veil and mountain, following yonder star." That's easy. I went for the very same reason that many of you came to church tonight: to schmooze. I would be schmoozing the Great Silent One. I wanted to do a deal with Him before He looked behind my curtain and blew me to smithereens. I attempted to schmooze the Great One.

When the star appeared, I calculated, "Now is my opportunity." People argue about this, but you can be knowing that in September of 3 B.C., the Star of the Great King (that you now call the planet Jupiter) aligned with Regulus, the Little King Star, three times...all in the constellation of Leo the lion. Then at dawn, behind Leo the Lion rose Virgo the virgin, clothed in the sun, with a new moon at her feet (just like in Revelation 12). Clearly a king would be born in Judah, to a virgin. He would be the Faithful One, like the moon: faithful to reflect the light on a dark world.

And now I should be telling you that the Great One spoke to us through stars, but now He speaks to you in a far more excellent way. So do not ever be ruled by stars. It is forbidden. Be ruled by only the Great One.

Nine months after Jupiter crowned Regulus, Jupiter (the Great King) came into conjunction with Venus, the bright and morning star. It was the brightest star anyone alive had ever seen. It set in the west and clearly forebode two things:

1. It was a very good time to be picking up chicks.
2. The King of the Jews—the Faithful Witness—was now born in the west, and we must go schmooze Him.

My fellow wizards Melchior and Gaspar and I would attempt to enchant the Great One to ourselves. But now I hope you see the inherent difficulty in that proposition. How do you do a deal with someone that great? What do you get someone who owns everything? If He owns everything, and you give Him anything, it must be His own stolen something that you give Him. And that is bad schmoozing.

But, alas, we were stupid wise men. And being stupid wise men, we brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh, with which we planned to construct a very impressive curtain of wealth, wisdom, and power, behind which we planned to be protected, and with which we planned to schmooze the Great One.

On our way across the desert, we were making up a song for schmoozing. Gaspar sang, "Gold I bring to crown Him again, king forever ceasing never, over us all to reign." Then Melchior: "Frankincense to offer have I, incense owns a deity nigh, prayer and praising all men raising, worship Him God on high." And me: "Myrrh is mine, it's bitter perfume, breathes a life of fathering gloom, sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in a stone cold tomb." They kept saying to me, "What are you, being nuts? Ozzy, those are not words for schmoozing. Why are you singing that?" I said, "I don't know. But it rhymes. Perhaps our song would be needing one more verse."

When we arrived in Jerusalem, we made quite a commotion. We had each brought about 200 servants, and most of those were soldiers. You see, the Jews were still perturbed about a little incident that they referred to as the Babylonian Captivity. Well, when news that king-makers from the east had arrived in town asking about a new king of the Jews, the old King Herod became very interested in us. He was a very small and lonely man behind a very large curtain.

He would be driving a very large pick-up truck if he were here today. He ruled all of Judah but did not rule one heart. When he died, he left orders to have hundreds of people massacred so that tears would be shed upon his passing. And that, my friends, is the problem with great power and big curtains. With these things you cannot capture a heart or win a single tear. Herod had already massacred three of his sons in fear. But being stupid wise men, we asked him upon arrival, "Where is the one born king of the Jews? In his bedroom, perhaps? Perhaps the royal nursery? Or even the Holy Place in the Temple?" King Herod did not know, so he consulted his Bible wizards. His wizards informed him, "The Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem."

Bethlehem is five miles to the south of Jerusalem. And, behold, the star moved and stopped. Actually, on the 25th of December in 2 B.C., due to what you now call Planetary Retrograde Motion, the King Star stopped directly over Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. Well, whether or not that was, in fact, what I saw, presently I am knowing that the Great One arranged all things including Planetary Retrograde Motion.

But what a strange moment! You see, Bethlehem is a trailer park, and I was expecting a palace. I kept saying, "Go, star, keep going, star," but, alas, it wouldn't go. We were directed to a poor, little shack. Inside a lamp was lit. The shack had a curtain for a door. I knew that we were close to something because of the incessant chattering in my head. A rather disturbing side effect of my chosen profession was the constant chattering of pain-in-the-neck demons. Sometimes it was like a bad committee meeting convening in my head. That night they were all screaming, "Turn back! Turn back, Ozzy! If you look behind that curtain, the Great and Powerful Oz will die!"

I was frozen in terror when Melchior said, "We came all this way. We should at least leave a note: Happy Birthday, King of the Jews." Just then, from inside, a young woman drew back the curtain. I could tell that she was a little taken aback at the sight of 603 Medo-Persians, many in full battle gear. But when we mumbled, "We seek the King of the Jews," she smiled and yelled, "Joseph, bring the baby to meet some nice wizard men from far away!" Just then, a young man holding a baby boy about seven months old came into view. The very moment I laid my eyes on the boy, every chattering voice fell silent and every demon fled like darkness before the dawn. And I knew I was in the presence of the Great Silent One. But now He was not silent. He was babbling. His word was, "Abba, abba."

The young man looked up and cried, "Mary, Mary! He said *abba*! Jesus said *abba daddy*! Did you hear it?" It was entirely extraordinary, wrapped in completely ordinary. Presently I am knowing it was Immanuel: God with us, God incarnate. It means, "God in meat." (I saw a photo recently of Lady Gaga in a meat dress...in-carnate. It was like that but much, much better.)

The young lady said, "Joe, let the nice wizard hold Jesus." And all at once, I was holding the King of kings in my arms. And all my terror turned to holy terror and then turned to joy. I was knowing that He came from over the rainbow. He came from the other side of the covenant. He is Great One wrapped in a curtain of flesh. And that is when I saw the great truth, which exposed the ancient lie which keeps us all in bondage: We think our God is just the most powerful wizard—that He is great because He can blow every other god to smithereens. But our God is *not* just the most powerful wizard. He is the Anti-Wizard.

I was a wizard, a frightened, little man behind a big curtain of lies and stolen power.
He is all-power and all-truth behind a little curtain of weak, baby flesh.

I was terror and pride always taking.

He is fearless love, always giving. He is fearless, free, unlimited, unending love.

The young lady said, "He would like it for you to kiss Him." So I kissed Him. He giggled and smiled at me. The Great One smiled at me...not the Great and Powerful Oz but *me*: the little man behind the curtain. He liked *me*. I had always said, "Pay no attention to the little man behind the curtain," but all He cared about was the little man behind the curtain. He was not impressed with the Great and Powerful Oz. Actually, He hated the great and powerful Oz, for the Great and Powerful Oz was a lie—a lie which separated Him from the little man behind the curtain.

That night, the Great and Powerful Oz died. And I, Ozwaldo, was free.

Wizards hide behind big curtains to capture people with fear. The Great One hid behind a baby curtain to capture me with kisses and set me free. I came to enchant the Great One with power, and He had enchanted me with love from behind the curtain. I could not stop weeping and laughing and kissing Him. Gaspar said, "Ozwaldo, let me have a turn to hold the King of Kings." I handed the King of Kings to Gaspar and fell to my face weeping, "Abba, Father." The Word of the Great One was now in me.

I worshipped, and I was so very, very not lonely. God is love, and I had been terrified of love, because love destroys every curtain. It was completely astounding! The thing I feared most was the thing I most desperately desired: love. God is love. The Great Silent One is love. As I worshipped, I remembered the gifts for schmoozing, and then I couldn't stop laughing, for there was nothing left to schmooze. Everything was free. And how silly of me to try to do a deal with the Great One. Presently, He was a baby. He didn't want gold, frankincense, and myrrh. He wanted hugs and kisses, and maybe a Tickle Me Elmo doll. Our gifts of schmoozing were ridiculous. Still, I knew that we had to give them.

There is a legend that some tell that is not true and yet it is very true. In the legend, an angel meets us at the entrance to that shack. At the curtain, the angel says, "All who enter must bring a gift." Gaspar says, "I have brought gold." The angel says, "Your gift must be of yourself and precious to you." Gaspar says, "So it is." But as he kneels to offer his gift, he looks in his hands. There lays not gold but a hammer. The angel whispers, "What you hold in your hand is the hammer of your greed used to pound wealth from those who labor for you, that you may live in mansions as they live in hovels." Gaspar bows and turns to go, for his greatness and power is, in fact, shame. But the angel blocks his way. "You have not offered your gift." Gaspar exclaims, "I cannot give this to the boy king!" "But that is why you came," the angel says. "You must leave it here, or it will destroy you."

Melchior brought frankincense won in battle at the side of kings. But it turned into his own spear: long and soaked in blood. "The enemy has cast a spell!" he cried. "That is more true than you know," replied the angel. "I cannot give this to the child; the spear could pierce his flesh!" cried Melchior. The angel said, "You must."

The angel then turned to me and said, "Is this myrrh precious to your soul?" My silver flask turned to a clay jar filled with vinegar. I heard, "It is what you drink, bitterness and lies. You clothe yourself with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but your curtain of glory is greed, violence, and lies. It is hammer, spear, and vinegar. Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar Ozwaldo, you must give these things to Him."

Do you see? That night, we did. I gave to Jesus my Great and Powerful Oz. And then I gave Jesus what He most desired: I gave Him the little man behind the curtain. And then we wise men went home a different way.

Jesus is the way.

What will you give to Him this Christmas?
What will you give the One who has everything?
How about the one thing He may not have, that He wants more than anything?
—the little man, the little woman behind the curtain.

Many years later, on a Friday, April 3rd, 33 A.D., the sky grew black and the earth shook. That night rose the blood red moon, the moon in full eclipse.

I understood that the Faithful One was destroying every curtain, every dividing wall. With an old hammer, they nailed Him to a tree. They pierced His side with an old spear. As He was dying, they gave Him vinegar mixed with myrrh. He drank my sin and wrapped Himself in my curtain of shame. He died to destroy that curtain of shame, and as He died, the curtain—in the old, stone temple, separating mankind from the Great One—ripped from top to bottom. Scripture says that curtain is Jesus' flesh. And His broken flesh reveals the heart of the Great One. And His broken flesh forms the eternal covenant. That covenant is God doing a deal, keeping all sides. And that covenant is our way home to the other side of the curtain, to the other side of the rainbow, to the land that you have always dreamed of.

And now listen to me. You are the land that He has always dreamed of. He likes you. He came to die for you and rise with you on the other side of the rainbow. That is your home, and there's no place like home. That Sunday, April 5th, 33AD, I finished my song. "Glorious now behold Him arise, King and God and sacrifice, alleluia, alleluia, sounds through earth and skies." And now I must go and get your pastor. Clap off. [The lights go off.]

[Music: "We Three Kings"]

[Peter returns to the stage in regular clothes.]

Communion

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it like a torn curtain, saying, "This is my body given to you." In the same way, He took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me."

A covenant is a deal. When I try to do a deal, it's called sin. When God does a deal, He keeps all sides. It's called grace. It undoes every other deal and takes us home to Him. Christmas is the invasion of grace. God gives you His heart, His Son, and all things with Him. What will you give Him? How about the little man behind the curtain?

Prayer

Pray this silently in your heart:

Thank you for giving your heart to me. I confess my curtain of arrogance to you. I give you my little man/woman behind that curtain. Thank you, Lord God, that that's what you want. That's why you set this whole thing up. Thank you that that's what you're after: each one of us, to bring us home. And so, Lord God, we thank you for Christmas, we thank you for your love, and we invite you to be born in us now. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Word of God, Light of the world, we thank you that when you came to this earth, you were not aiming for a manger. That was not your final destination. What you sought was *me* behind the curtain, each one of us behind the curtain. It is us you saw, and we are your home. So, Lord God, thank you that Christmas wasn't just something 2,000 years ago. It happens right here, right now, when we cry, "Abba, Father." In Jesus' name, Lord God, we thank you. Amen.

Benediction

So in the name of Jesus, may you have a very Merry Christmas both tomorrow and every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.