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Good Morning, for today's message we are going to continue on with our story from last week's service about "What Happened to the Wise Men". But I would like to change our focus just a bit and talk about "What happened to us, when the Wise Men visited the baby Jesus. To bring us up to date as to last week's message I would like to re-read a part of our Gospel reading from last week. This is from Matthew 2:9-12; ***When they (the Wise Men) had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*** You see our lesson last Sunday, introduced us, to who the Wise Men were. We learned that they had been magicians, astrologists, and priests. The Wise Men were also looked upon as the Scientists of their day. We also found out that they were very highly respected and played an important role in the selection of Kings in other lands. But the most important thing that we discovered about the Wise Men was that they became Christians when they first saw the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Their spiritual life changed in that moment as they felt Jesus entering their hearts. There was another important lesson that we learned last week and it was that God revealed to the world that the Jewish people were not the only ones whose lives would be changed with the birth of baby Jesus. The example of the changed lives of the Wise Men showed that every person on this earth was now able to enter into a personal relationship with God. God does not care about our past sins but welcomes us into His loving care when we acknowledge and truly receive the gift of His Son, Jesus, into our lives. I would like to begin our message this week by taking our thoughts back to the statement where the Wise Men were the scientists of their day. Thinking of the Wise Men as scientists does seem to present them to us in a different light than just being magicians and astrologers. When we think of the Wise men as being scientists it sort of elevates their prestige to a somewhat higher level. Today when we think about a scientist we may think of Albert Einstein, Carl Sagan, and Steven Hawking. We could even consider these three scientists as the Wise Men of our time. But there is one major difference between the Wise Men of Jesus' time and the Wise Men of our time. The difference is that our Wise Men never really found God in their lives. In my reading about these three scientists I found

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that two of them shared a spiritual viewpoint of being agnostic and one of them had a spiritual viewpoint of being atheist. Now when someone is agnostic they never really claim to have faith in God but they do not remove the possibility that God may exist. They are sort of in the middle. However, when someone is atheist in their spiritual viewpoint they firmly believe that there is no God. It was Albert Einstein and Carl Sagan that were agnostic and it is Steven Hawkins that is atheist. I recently watched a video about Steven Hawkins and at the end of the video Steven was sitting in his wheel chair and proclaiming that the universe has no need of a God and when you die that's it; nothing more. Each of these three scientists, were all gifted with genius level intelligences. Also these three scientists gave to the world some wonderful theories about how the universe came to be but somewhere they did not find God in their research. We could also think about the original Wise Men as being similar to today's scientists but they found Jesus in their lives. So why did they find Jesus and our modern scientists did not? Could it be that the original Wise Men saw the star of Bethlehem and chose to follow it to the baby Jesus? And by doing so they found the Baby Jesus and their lives were changed forever. And could it be that today's scientists also saw many stars and wonders of God's creation but chose not to follow them. Instead they chose a material existence that they could touch and see; and by doing so they were never able to see beyond the bounds of their physical universe. Maybe instead of looking to the physical universe for their spirituality they should have looked for no further than their hearts. In Acts 17:27 we find ***"That they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,"*** In Jeremiah 29:13 we find ***"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."*** And in Deuteronomy 4:29 we also find ***"But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul."*** I would like for us to consider this question in our minds; "Where does God reveal Himself to us in our modern times?" Many people find God in witnessing and experiencing His creation. Like sitting on a mountain top or watching the sunrise while sitting on a picnic table and overlooking Lake Michigan with my two daughters. I was blessed that morning and I continue to be blessed with that moment forever in my heart. You know Martin Luther was said to answer this question with his statement ***"God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars."*** However, Martin Luther's statement offer to us another place for us the discover God's word and how to apply it in our lives. Did you notice Martin

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Luther's mention of the Bible in addition to the trees and flowers"? Yes, Martin Luther was really big on discovering and understanding God's word while reading the bible. But as Christians and especially Methodists we need to also know that Martin Luther was not the only one who felt so strongly about reading the bible. Our John Wesley, rated right up there, in regards to his passion of reading and reflecting on God's Holy Word as it is presented to us through the Bible. You may have noticed that I just used the phrase "through the Bible" instead of "in the Bible". I did this because I felt it would be a good way for us to begin to understand that our relationship with the Bible is not only about being able to locate words and verses in it; but for us to feel the presence of God as we read those words and verses. I heard somewhere that you can tell the bible is about hearing the word of God because when you read it, a lot more information comes into your thoughts than just what the words themselves would bring. For me choosing the phrase "through the Bible" reflects this greater understanding as apposed to the phrase "In the Bible". John Wesley saw the bible as the most important way for us to discover a faithful revelation of God in Christ. For John Wesley reading scripture was the only way to experience the saving faith we can have in Christ. I would like to share with you this morning the first time I realized and experienced God's guiding presence in my reading of the bible. You see what happened through that experience changed my view of the bible from a book of words that was difficult for me to read, to an experience of feeling a relationship with Jesus through my reading of the bible. Now how did this transition come about? It came about when I took my first New Testament course in seminary. As I began my course, my assignment was to obviously read the New Testament. But my professor asked that I was to only read a few verses at a time and after reading the verses to stop and wright down what the verses meant to me. I was to note any thoughts that came to me as a result of reading the verses. It took me several months to read the New Testament in this manner and when I was finished I had a very large stack of notes. During my reading assignment I would meet with my professor and discuss what I was learning. But in the back of my mind each time we met I was wondering when the "Big Test" would come. You know the one where you study and study hoping you will be able to answer all the questions correctly. Well, after all my reading and writing notes I met with my professor and it was during this meeting that I made the comment " You know, when I read the bible in the way you asked, I began to notice it became easier to read. But what I really noticed was that I began to have thoughts that were like having a

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conversation. My thoughts were not longer just one sided. I actually felt like I was in a relationship with the bible and what I was reading. “ After my professor heard what I said he told me “You just passed, I wished all my students could learn what you just learned” Wow, what a shock. I passed and didn’t even take a written final exam. This was great news, but over the years I had always wondered if somehow I was supposed to do more academic studying and testing. You know I wondered about this up until our train trip returning from Portland over Thanksgiving. One evening I had met another Methodist pastor and we had a wonderful visit. I found out he was a Professor at a seminary in Dubuque, IA and during our conversation I expressed to him my small concern over the academics of my New Testament course. His response was really affirming in that he said that I had had a very wise professor and he too mentioned that he wished more of his students would learn what I had learned. So that is my experience in learning how to read and feel God’s word from the bible. So how can others learn what I learned with out taking a seminary course? According to John Wesley we need to just follow his example of discovering and hearing God’s word in the bible. Here are several quotes from John Wesley that will help us to understand his approach to learning from the bible.

***O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.”***

At this point we are going to conclude our message today and continue it next Sunday because what John Wesley has for us to learn about reading the bible can’t be respectfully covered in our time that remains today. So next week, we will be focusing on John Wesley’s approach to reading and learning from the bible. Amen.