

Matthew 2:1-12 ▪ Come to Worship Him

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Advent 2020 / Birth of Jesus; Worship

Intro: There are a few details about Christmas that many people get wrong. First, contrary to the tradition, it's unlikely Jesus was born on Dec. 25. It wasn't until the 3rd century that Dec 25 became the date. Dec 25 was a pagan holiday on the Roman calendar. It would mean a day off of work. Some people believe that Christians took the opportunity to worship and take the glory away from Roman gods and give it to Christ.

Also, Jesus was probably born around 6 B.C. King Herod died in 4 B.C., so Jesus had to be born before then.

But these in one sense are trivial details about Jesus's birth; none of these are game changers in our faith, or meaning and message of Christmas. If they were that important the Bible would have put them there.

Q: So what is important for understanding Christmas?

- Christmas is captured in v2—it says the wise men “have come to worship him”.

A right understanding of Jesus, the King of Kings, is about true worship. The desire of God for us is to intensify our worship of his Son on this earth. God's desire for us is that we have a relentless pursuit of knowing his Son

- We will see today how God's surprising grace moves some unlikely men who actually get it.

Lessons from Pagan Astrologers

The Request (1-9)

- Our passage opens with some familiar, but misunderstood characters: The Wise Men.
- Even non-Christian people can connect the wise-men and Jesus's birth.
- Most nativity sets have 3 of them; The text says nothing about there being only 3—it's assumed b/c of 3 gifts.
- It's likely that they would have had a large caravan that included soldiers and servants.
- They were likely astrologers from the royal court of Persia or Babylon. They probably had access to some OT scripture, maybe the book of the prophet Daniel or other exile writings.

- The star:

A plethora of explanations are out there:

Non-supernatural side: planetary alignment (Jupiter, Saturn); supernova, comet

I have a friend who has a PhD in physics and several years back purchased a large book with heavy research about what type of star this could be. He devoured it, and I'm still not sure he has his answer.

All the info in the text: "his" star.

Supernatural act

- The star could just be supernatural—what Matthew Henry calls "extraordinary star"

There is already a virgin-birth; God directing people in dreams...we don't need a "natural" explanation for the star.

The heart of the passage is not about the star, but what the wise men seek.

- Where is the new Jewish king born (v2)?

Bethlehem: It's a significant biblical place. Jacob was buried there ([Gen 35:19](#)); Ruth met Boaz, and it was King David's hometown. It's a place of birth, life, romance and death.

- Yet the Magi are seeking something else—not just a place, but something more targeted....*worship*.
- They represent the nations-Gentiles; a sign that God's goal to truly gather worshipers from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
- **Very fitting for a Gospel that closes with God's call to bring the message of Jesus to the nations.

Apply: The request shows us something very important with how God works; *sometimes it's the people we least expect who end up actually honoring Jesus.*

You wouldn't expect a group of Persian Astrologers to be some of the first to honor Jesus.

The more I read the Bible; the more I see God work, the more I see people fit the "you would not expect" people end up honoring Jesus!

- › The request shows us how far-reaching God's grace really goes. God's grace is not contained, not minimalistic, can't be measured; it's surprising and very broad.

Apply: It should also keep us keenly aware that God often works in places and people we may least expect.

The Response (10-12)

- As the wise men encounter Jesus, we can learn a few things with how they respond.

They give us a picture of what it looks like to encounter Jesus

1. Great joy/rejoicing (v10)

- The text communicates their joy very emphatically.
- It's actually the joy of anticipation—the star was leading them to the house where Jesus was.

Is the joy in our life connected to knowing Jesus? Where do we find our greatest and most emphatic joy?

I visited a man once in a nursing home a few days before he died, Mr. Hugh. I knew he was nearing death and asked if he was ready to see Jesus.

I just remember the unusual peace and joy as he said he was so ready.

The reason his heart was in that place is because he spent his life finding great joy in encountering the grace of Jesus.

2. Worship (v11)

- Last week we saw that the presence of God (Immanuel) is a theme that appears in the beginning and end of the Gospel
- Same is true with worship—note the response of the disciples when they encounter the Risen Christ

Matthew 28:17 ESV

“And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.”

› From beginning to end, the picture of The Lord Jesus is one who is worthy of our worship

3. Gratitude (opening up their treasures)

- In the ancient world, when you meet a King, you give a gift.
- These gifts would have helped to pay for traveling expenses—now they were laid at Jesus' feet.

This provides a great picture of what our lives should look like if we truly encounter Jesus.
Whatever we treasure we need to be willing to lay it at Jesus's feet.

- › Jesus is not looking for us to have just a touch of religion...he's not looking for a token offering... but to be so moved that we freely offer our treasures in gratitude.

4. Obedience (v12)

- Just like Joseph, when prompted in a dream, they obey the Lord's leading.

Genesis 49:10 ESV

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,

nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,

until tribute comes to him;

and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Sum: Those 4 marks show what a life drawn to Jesus looks like: there will be joy, a draw to worship, offering up treasure, and obedience.

The Ruler (v6)

Biblical passages are often written like sandwiches. The bread on the outside is nutritious, but the meat is where the protein is.

- The meat is in v6—the OT quote from Micah.
- One character we need to focus on is Herod. It is Herod who taps the scholars to see where the Messiah is to be born (4-5).

Herod: Herod the Great

- He was a wealthy, politically gifted leader with impressive administrative skills. He led the rebuilding of the Temple in 20 BC. Many Jews did not care for him b/c of heavy taxes; as he grew older he grew more and more paranoid—even to the point of having his wife and two sons killed.
- Herod had 10 wives and many children, so there were legit threats to his throne as sons grew older—he lived around many people he could not trust.
- He was so ruthless that he told his sister to order soldiers to kill innocent Jewish people on the day of his death, so there would be mourning. That background helps makes sense of v3---he was “deeply disturbed” (CSB).
- The story really extends into vs 16—Herod only pumps the Magi for info—the fact is 2 kings don't work well together.

Herod serves to show us a few things:

1. He is the epitome of hypocritical/ false worship. In one sense, Herod foreshadows the hostility Jesus will face from all Israel's leaders.
2. He is also biblically dull—far from the ideal King.

Deuteronomy 17:18–20 ESV

“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Furthermore, Herod's next actions (ordering the death of Jewish male children) show his cruel leadership reflects the self-centered, cruel hearted, ruthless leadership described in

Ezekiel 34:2–4 ESV

“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

- V6 is not just about location—we are getting a picture of how God works.

—Last week we saw God's work to *save his people* (1:21).

—Here we see God's work is also to *shepherd* his people.

*Shepherds don't rule harshly—they protect and provide for the sheep

- › In Jesus, God provides not only the Savior we need, but the right kind of ruler we long for—a ruler who actually shepherds us.

Matthew 9:35–36 ESV

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

“Without a Shepherd” —No earthy leader doing his job.

- › With Christ we have a compassionate shepherd.
- › The healing ministry of Christ, the lifting of affliction, shows us what kind of shepherd he is...one who is compassionate.

Our Reaction

It's interesting to see how people react to Jesus; in this text we have 3 different ones.

Herod—deeply troubled. Essentially Herod refuses to bow to the authority of another king. You may not react well to Jesus because you love to hold on to your own throne, your own power.

Religious Leader—overall complacent. They gave the Bible answer but seem to care little about actually seeing Jesus. They don't join the magi. There is just silence and stillness.

That may be your reaction today as well. You've heard the story over and over....but there is only silence and stillness.

Magi— they are the surprising/shocking group

The Magi stand out as ones who react surprisingly well to Jesus.

They also offer us a challenge even at the end of a strange and challenging year.

- › **The Magi had a relentless pursuit of wanting to see Jesus.**

Conclusion

I've been really challenged here personally. Many agree that this year has been a challenge.

Would this year be described as a relentless pursuit of wanting Jesus?

Is having a relentless pursuit of Jesus even on my radar? Is it something I pray about, really want? Do I just want life to "return to normal" if that normal does not include a relentless desire for more of Christ?

May God give us a heart of relentless pursuit for the one who relentlessly pursued us by his saving grace.

