

Come To Worship Him

Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse: 2:2

“and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews. We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”

Today’s passage is one of the most well-known in all the world. Those who don’t know anything about religion still somehow know about elderly, scholarly men traveling with gifts to the baby Jesus. “Oh, that’s the Magi,” they will say. For being so well known, the Magi are still some of the most mysterious people in the Bible, like Melchizedek, who appear and then disappear without a trace. Yet, their short intervention changed the story of Jesus and the Bible forever. Some scholars say the Magi were so extraordinary and mysterious, they must be a myth. But they are not a myth. They are the most wonderful example of those seeking and worshiping the Messiah, the King of the Jews. May God help us to learn from the Magi the meaning of worship, and like them, come to worship him, Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Verse 1 introduces us to the Magi. It says, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem....” In last week’s message we learned how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem. It was the work of the God through the Holy Spirit. It was the most important event in the history of the world because Immanuel, God with us, had been born. Yet it went largely unnoticed. Most people were oblivious to the birth of the Messiah. Why? Because they were not really looking for the Messiah. Prophecies of the Messiah had been known to God’s people for centuries. For example, Isaiah 9:6 says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” It is such a wonderful prophecy it became a main song in Handel’s “Messiah.” But most had given up the hope of the Messiah in their hearts. They lived in a difficult world. Verse 1 says it was in the time of King Herod. It meant it was the time of the brutal Romans, whose empire was like an iron beast that ate up everything. What was worse, Israel was under the puppet rule of the despotic murderous Herod. There were constant wars and suffering. People became jaded thinking there was no hope for a better existence and no one to bring relief. The prophecies became forgotten stories. Our lives can become like them. The lure of human comforts and the harsh realities of living make the promises of God seem distant and irrelevant. Many people go to church because that is what they do. But the promise of the Messiah is distant. I asked one person in church if they will celebrate Thanksgiving this year. They said “no” but would go shopping on Black Friday, because they get what they want cheaper. I was shocked. I realized seeking and thanking God had been replaced by black Friday.

But the Magi were very different. They never lost the promise of the Messiah in their hearts. Look at verse 2. “...and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews. We saw his star when it rose and we have come to worship him.’” When I began to prepare this

message, I realized I knew very little of the Magi, so I read the book, "Mystery of the Magi"¹ by Dwight Longenecker. Magi are used synonymously with "wise men." The Magi were scholars and dignitaries. Legends say they came from Persia or even India. But more likely they came from the Arabian kingdom Nabataea. This is important because scholars believe the prophecies of Isaiah and the history of Abraham were well known in the region of the Nabateans. These wise men must have studied and learned the prophecies of the Messiah. They likely were also astrologers. So, they were fascinated by the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:17, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth." Isaiah 32:1 promised a righteous king. It says, "See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice." Isaiah 32:16 & 17 describe the Messiah's kingdom, which they must have longed for. They say, "The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever." Next week we will begin a study of the book of Revelation. Ultimately it is the promise of the Messiah's eternal kingdom, with the judgment for those who reject him and eternal glory for those who receive him. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus says that he himself is the morning star. It says, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The Magi came to Jerusalem because their souls were captivated with the promise of the King of the Jews, the Messiah. They believed he would give them and all people peace and bless them forever. With such faith burning in their hearts, they came to Jerusalem to worship the king of the Jews. Christmas time is the time to renew this great hope through the birth of the Messiah. As God showed astrologers a star, the Lord reveals to each of the Messiah when we are looking with all our heart. May God give us such a wondrous faith and hope. One young man has studied the Bible for about one and half years. During that time the wonder of the Messiah grew in his heart. This year when he attended one Christmas prayer meeting, he was so moved to worship the coming King, he said, "I must come every day." Though he had finals, he came to every prayer meeting and even participated in the dramatic dance. God blessed his finals too. There are many like this among us. Praise God for giving us the glorious promise of the king of the Jews. May this promise captivate our hearts and motivate us this Christmastime and throughout our lives to worship the king of the Jews. Amen!

In verse 3, we learn another response to the message of the king of the Jews. It says, "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him." Herod was disturbed because he viewed the baby Jesus as a political threat. Disturbing Herod meant the whole nation was on edge, wondering what terrible thing he might do. Herod called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. They replied, quoting the prophet Micah 5:2 & 4, "But you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." It is astounding the Herod knew of the Messiah and the religious leaders knew all the details of the Messiah's birth. But they completely missed his coming. Moreover, they didn't understand the nature of the Messiah's kingdom. The Messiah's kingdom is not one of oppression

¹ Dwight Longenecker, *Mystery of the Magi: The Quest to Identify the Three Wise Men* (Washington DC: Regnery History, 2017)

but of that of a shepherd. Jesus is the Shepherd King who will shepherd his people Israel. Throughout his life Jesus shepherded so many people. He shepherded a Samaritan woman and a lost religious leader, Nicodemus. He shepherded a man born blind until he could see and his twelve disciples until they could become great men of God. Finally, Jesus laid down his life on the cross for all mankind to pay the penalty for their sins. Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus is the good shepherd who bore all our sins on the cross and rose again to give us eternal life. Herod had nothing to fear with Jesus. In fact, Jesus came to bless Herod too. I know many who are suffering with many kinds of problems. The good news is that Jesus, the Shepherd King, has been born to care for us like a good shepherd. One young man grew up without mother or father. He tried to end his life three times in the last several years, because he thought his life had no meaning. Earlier this year he began to study Genesis and learned God's plan and care for his life. Hope grew in his heart for the first time. He overcame despair and sought a higher paying job, which God gave him. He began to believe he could make a success and began studying many things. He has faithfully studied the Bible every week to renew God's hope and learned Jesus is a good shepherd. Praise God for Jesus who is the good shepherd for all people. Also, this is why one-to-one Bible study is so important. Through us, Jesus the good shepherd leads others to him. May God bless us in 2020 to lead many suffering people to Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Once Herod learned that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, he called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he pretended to want to worship him as well, saying "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." We are speechless before such a duplicitous man. What was the difference between the Magi and Herod? The Magi sincerely wanted to know the Messiah, whereas Herod loved power and had no room for the King of the Jews in his heart. May God help us to seek the Messiah from our hearts.

Finally, the Magi were on their way to Bethlehem. Again, the star they had followed went ahead of them. Look at verse 10, "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." Here the word "overjoyed" in English is "rejoiced with exceedingly great joy" in the original Greek. They were filled with the most incredible joy. I really want to rejoice with exceedingly great joy! Do you want to rejoice with exceedingly great joy? How is it possible? The Magi experienced such joy when they realized the Lord had not abandoned them but was leading them to the Messiah. They had become distracted by the kingdom of Herod, and lost sight of the star. From time to time we too become distracted by the things of the world. But the Lord is still there waiting to lead us to the Messiah and eventually his eternal kingdom. The Lord is faithful to us and waiting for each person. When we are on the path to worship the Lord Jesus we can experience such joy every day. Our lives should be those of exceedingly great joy, not forced joy, but joy from our souls. After a difficult year, usually I want to take a break. But this year Pastor Kevin asked me to give the message this Sunday because he was going to give the message in Toledo. Giving a message is so difficult. I could not rest or sleep many nights. But you want to know a beautiful thing? Through struggling with this message, I could focus on seeking the Messiah Jesus. And you know what? My soul is rejoicing with exceedingly great joy! I am so blessed because I can look to Jesus, the King of the Jews, and renew my hope in him and decision to follow him. Thank

you for all your prayers. Whatever situation you may be in, may God give you a new heart to seek the Messiah Jesus and rejoice with exceedingly great joy now, in 2020 and forever.

Look at verse 11, "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." At last they came to the house where the boy Jesus was. It was not at all what they had probably expected. It must have been an ordinary house, like a Chicago bungalow, and in it was a boy, probably a toddler, and his mother Mary. It did not look special or glamorous. But they knew God had led them to the King of the Jews. What did they do? Verse 11 says, "...they bowed down and worshiped him." These distinguished, learned and honorable men all bowed down to the boy Jesus. In fellowship we have a precious toddler Isaac John Goh. He is so cute. But we can't imagine bowing down to him. Yet, the Magi knew this boy was the Son of God, the King of the Jews. With full reverence they bowed down and praised God for leading them to the Messiah. Their humble hearts move us to tears. May God help us to worship the Messiah Jesus with such humility and reverence every day.

Verse 11b says, "They opened their treasures and presented him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." Not only did they worship him, but they opened their treasures and gave him costly gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They were the perfect gifts for the Messiah: gold for the King of the Jews, frankincense which is used in the priesthood, and myrrh, which is used for anointing someone who will die. The Magi may not have known it, but their gifts perfectly reflect the meaning of who Jesus is. They gave their treasures. Nothing was too great for them to give the Messiah. In fact, nothing is enough to give to Jesus who would give his life for the sins of the world and the King of heaven. What did they do after they presented their gifts to the boy Jesus? Verse 12 says, "And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route." They simply returned to their country, avoiding Herod on the way. Their worship was pure worship. They came to bow before Jesus, give him precious gifts, and left, not expecting anything in return. They reveal to us the true nature of worship. They also reveal to us the true duty of mankind. Mankind is created to worship and serve the Lord in such a way. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Everything we do can be worship to Jesus. Amen! Many years ago, I met a family who moved to Chicago from Korea. They were quite wealthy and secure in Korea. But the husband said he felt his love for Jesus was growing cold. So, he left to serve Jesus in America as a missionary. Since then he struggled with jobs, had heart surgery and received little recognition. But he faithfully served Jesus. This last year in his 70's he would take the Chicago El train downtown from the Center to teach one person the Bible every week. The person he taught just left for a better job in Seattle. So, he seems to have lost. But is exactly like the Magi who loved Jesus expecting nothing in return. I only praise God for this wonderful family and pray I can grow to be like them. I am also so thankful for my wife. In her 20's she was offered teaching positions at Yale and at Northwestern. But she turned them down because the Lord called her to serve UIC ministry. She eventually taught anatomy and physiology at Wright College so she could care for our children and serve God's ministry. She has served so many people who have come and gone. Now she is serving families in our ministry. Last week she retired as our prayer for our daughter. She has given up so much.

But she offered all her treasures as worship to Jesus and just left. I admit I have only done two things right in my life and they are God's two great graces in my life as well: 1) Believe in Jesus, and 2) marry Helen. There are so many like this in our midst and among all believers around the world. We can only praise God for them, and pray to worship like them.

Today we learned the beautiful worship of the Magi. Through their study of the promises of God, faith in the Messiah grew in their hearts, and they were moved to worship and give everything to Jesus. May God help us to study God's word until faith in the Messiah is overflowing in our hearts, and we can worship the King of the Jews like them. And may God bless each of us to rejoice with exceedingly great joy through worshiping the Messiah in 2020 and forever.