

Let Us Bow Down and Worship Him
Matthew 2:1-12
Key Verse: 2:11

"...and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'"

We thank and praise God for blessing Christmas worship services in 2008: here in Chicago, throughout the United States and Canada, and around the world. To conclude one month of celebrating Jesus' birth, today let's study the Magi's pilgrimage to worship Jesus. They teach us that worshiping Jesus is a way of life. It is not a seasonal activity reserved only for Christmas. It is a lifestyle that we should practice all year around. Then we can have the joy of Christmas every day! We can live truly meaningful lives, and be successful and happy. How, then, can we worship him? Let's learn from the Magi.

I. The Magi were truth-seekers (1-2).

Verse 1 says, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem..." Jesus was born, according to God's promises. Jesus came to save men from their sins. Matthew 1:21 says, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Sin defiled our hearts, wounded our souls, and broke all of our relationships. There is no human cure for sin. But God sent Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus washes the stains of sin from our hearts. Jesus heals our souls and restores the image of God in us. Jesus restores our relationships with God and with other people. Jesus' coming is good news of great joy for all people.

However, according to Matthew's account, this great event was going virtually unnoticed by the people of Israel. It was the time of King Herod. He was a megalomaniac who killed many people for political purposes. He is the one who ordered the death of all the baby boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under (16). During his reign, people were oppressed. In response, some became freedom fighters, seeking political liberation. Others became selfish, like tax collectors. In general, men were frustrated and frightened. After a day of hard work, they treated their wives harshly, though they tried not to. Women became sorrowful, then depressed, and had no strength to serve. Children despaired, ignored their homework, and escaped into virtual reality. The Messiah had come; but people's hearts were hard.

Then, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem. Magi are also called "Wise Men." They were great scholars--highly valued as advisers to kings. They had mastered many fields of study, especially astronomy. They sought revelation about the future. They wanted to know about the rise and fall of rulers. They wanted to know where the world was going. They eagerly sought the truth by whatever means it might be found. They probably came from ancient Persia or Babylon. Why had they come to Jerusalem?

Look at verse 2. "...and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'" The Magi discovered from the stars that the king of the Jews had been born. As they surveyed the night sky, they found an unusual star that shone with special brilliance and mystery. It was "his star." This star has been the subject of much study. Professor Frederick Larson of Texas A&M University spent ten years researching this star, though his field is not astronomy. By the help of computers, he reconstructed the positions of the stars and planets at the time Jesus was conceived. He shows that there was a special alignment that was spectacular. Moreover, the planet Jupiter, the "king planet," did a "coronation dance" around Regulus, "the star of kings." Other researchers have found similar explanations. Science is gradually catching up with the revelation of the Scriptures. The Bible says that the Magi saw "his star." They realized that it signaled the birth of the king of the Jews.

Psalms 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." The truth that God exists, that he created the universe, and that he is to be worshiped by his creation, is inescapable. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." God's power, wisdom,

goodness and glory permeate everything God has made. Through the study of the natural world, truth-seekers can know that God exists and something about his character.

God's presence is manifest in all fields of study. Albert Einstein (1879-1955) explained his motive in research, saying, "I want to know God's thoughts; the rest are details." Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) said, "There is a God-sized vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator made known through Jesus Christ." Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) said, "The more I study nature, the more I stand amazed at the work of the Creator. Into his tiniest creatures, God has placed extraordinary properties." They could appreciate God's divine character through their study of nature. When we master a field of study we can learn the hidden truths of God through it. Many universities were founded for the pursuit of truth. Northwestern's motto begins, "Whatsoever things are true...." (Philippians 4:8). Harvard's motto is "Veritas"--"Truth." Yale's motto is "Lux et veritas"--"Light and truth." University life should be an adventure of seeking the truth. Students should be bubbling with a spirit of discovery. Dr. Samuel Lee shared a prayer topic to raise 1,000 Ph.D. shepherds in America. We thank God for those who have obtained their Ph.D.s, especially in the last year, such as Dr. Jose Ahn and Dr. Alan Wolff. However, the influence of pragmatism has robbed many of a truth-seeking desire. Some study, not to know the truth, but to get a better job in the future. This makes student life a drudgery. They turn to aimless distractions which leave them empty. God made man to be a truth-seeker. Let's pray to be truth-seekers, like the Magi.

Truth seeking requires sacrifice. The Magi traveled hundreds of miles, leaving behind their beloved families and promising careers. They were probably gone for at least a year, and perhaps longer. They dropped everything and made a long journey to pursue the truth. Truth is valuable. We must be willing to sacrifice to obtain the truth.

Truth seeking requires commitment. During their long journey, the Magi confronted many hardships. Most likely they traveled by camel. This is most uncomfortable, especially in getting on and off of the beasts. They must have experienced water shortages and fatigue, as well as the threat of bandits. In addition, since they were crossing borders, there were language and cultural barriers. If they were half-hearted, they would have given up. They persevered because they were committed to the truth. Such people will give their lives for the truth. There are truth seekers in the world, sometimes in the most unexpected places. In 1833, four such people were described in a letter by William Walker in "The Christian Advocate and Journal." Walker encountered four Indians who traveled from the Pacific Northwest to St. Louis because, in their own words, "the white people away toward the rising sun have been put in possession of the true mode of worshiping the Great Spirit; they have a book containing directions." These four Indians made a perilous journey of 3,000 miles. It was so demanding that two of them died of sickness and exhaustion after arriving. But they died happy because they found the truth.

Truth-seeking leads us to worship Jesus. It is because Jesus is the truth. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." To worship Jesus is to worship our Creator God. As beings made in God's image, we long for God, as a child longs for his mother. We long to love God and be loved by God. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength." When we worship God, our souls find absolute meaning and true rest. The Magi did not think they were doing a favor for Jesus. The truth compelled them to worship Jesus and through him, the Creator God.

Man must worship God. If people love something else more than God, such as an idea, another person, fame or money, they become idol worshippers. Idol worshippers are fools who will experience disaster. We must learn to love God more than anything else. When I was young, I virtually worshiped pretty girls and human honor. This led me to grieve God and to suffer much. But God had mercy on me. God sent a sacrificial missionary who taught me the word of God and to worship the one true God. It was not easy for me to learn to worship God. For several years I struggled during worship services. It was hard to overcome my own human thoughts and to hear the word of God. Many times I did not feel real peace or rest in my soul, but a kind of frustration after worship service. But the Lord enabled me to struggle persistently. Gradually, I began to hear the word of God and to meet God regularly through Sunday worship service. I began to find true rest for my soul and lasting peace. Now, it is my life source and joy above all joys to worship Jesus. Jesus, who is God, is worthy of our worship. Let's worship Jesus Christ, and him alone.

II. Jesus is the Shepherd King (3-6).

Look at verse 3. "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." Upon hearing about the birth of Jesus, Herod felt his power and position were crumbling. Jesus was just a baby and Herod was past retirement age. Still, Herod felt threatened. Things of the world, such as political position, military power, or a big bank account, never give security. Those who trust in them are easily disturbed. When Herod was disturbed, everyone trembled, and with good reason. When Herod was disturbed, people died. Herod had already determined to destroy baby Jesus. He called together all the Bible teachers of Israel to learn where the Christ was to be born (4).

Look at verses 5-6. "In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" These verses contain deep spiritual truths that teach us about Jesus. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the prophecy made long before. This teaches us that Jesus is the king sent by God. Many evil men, like Herod, became kings by destroying their enemies. Jesus was born king. Let's consider the nature of Jesus' kingship.

First, Jesus is the shepherd king. The characteristic of shepherds is that they sacrifice themselves to take care of the sheep. Jesus sacrificed himself to take care of all kinds of people. One time Jesus met a man with a shriveled hand in the synagogue. The religious leaders watched him carefully to see if he would heal the man. They wanted to charge Jesus with breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus knew that he was risking his life. Still, he helped the man reach out his hand and receive God's healing. Jesus risked his own life to heal one suffering man (Jn 10:11).

Second, Jesus is the king who saves. Jesus did only good things while on earth. However, wonderful Jesus was despised and rejected by men. Jesus was arrested like a criminal, condemned and beaten. Jesus was finally crucified. Yet Jesus did not open his mouth to defend himself or threaten others. Instead, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). Then Jesus bowed his head and breathed his last. Isaiah 53:4-5 says: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus died on the cross for our sins. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus' resurrection opened the way to eternal life for us in the kingdom of God. Then Jesus ascended into heaven to take his place at the right hand of God Almighty. From there, Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in all who believe in him. The Holy Spirit bears the fruit of love, joy and peace in our souls. Moreover, Jesus gives us holy mission and absolute meaning of life. Jesus enables us to serve God in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days. Jesus is the king who saves us from sin and death. Thank you, Jesus!

Third, Jesus is the King of kings. Someday, Jesus will come again to this world, not as a humble servant, but as King of kings. Matthew 24:30b-31 says, "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." Philippians 2:10-11 says, "...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Those who accept Jesus as their king will be welcomed into his glorious kingdom (Mt 25:34). They will reign with him forever. Jesus, the Shepherd King, leads us to eternal life in the glorious kingdom of God.

III. The Magi bowed down and worshiped Jesus (7-12)

After listening to King Herod, the Magi came out of the palace. They must have been discouraged by wicked King Herod, lazy religious leaders and the indifferent people of Jerusalem. Look at verses 9-10. "After they had heard the king, they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed." Discouragement vanished and they were overjoyed. They knew that God was leading them and that their pilgrimage would be successful. The joy they had was not the fun of a cheap thrill that excites the emotions for a few moments. They had a joy that welled up from their souls and filled their minds and hearts. It was the joy of salvation and the joy of knowing that their lifetime quest was successful. Their pilgrimage ended with overflowing joy. Most likely, they began to do a whirling Arabic dance.

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 and of incense and of myrrh." To human eyes, Jesus looked like a mere child with his mother. Many people may have passed him by without having any idea who he was. But to the truth-seeking Magi, Jesus' identity was clear. They knew who he was and how to worship him. First of all, they bowed before the child Jesus. They humbly acknowledged that their lives and their achievements--all that they had and were--belonged to Jesus. They pledged their lives to Jesus as loyal subjects. Then they presented Jesus with costly gifts. They brought gold, the gift for a king; they offered incense, fit for a priest; they offered myrrh, the anointing spice for burial. After offering these treasures, the Magi went back to their homes. They had received nothing in their hands. But they had overflowing joy in their hearts. It came from worshiping Jesus.

Today we have learned from the Magi how to worship Jesus. First, we must have a truth-seeking heart. When we study math or music or biology, we must study to know the truth and to master that field of study. Most of all, with a truth-seeking heart, we must follow the star. What is the star? The Word of God is the star. 2 Peter 1:19 says, "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." We must study the word of God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. We must study the word of God until we meet Jesus personally. Jesus will reveal himself as our true God and our Shepherd King. When we truly meet Jesus, we have salvation. We can worship Jesus and have overflowing joy. Practically, to follow the star, we should choose a key verse for the new year and ask the Lord to speak to us through it. The Lord will guide us by the word of God. Whatever events may happen, we can find clear direction and the meaning of what is happening by looking at the star.

May God bless each of us to have a successful pilgrimage in 2009 by holding on to one word of God as the Magi followed the star.