

The Wise Men who Came from the East to Worship the True King

Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12 - *“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, ² saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ ‘ But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.’

⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.”

Background Notes

The story of the wise men is normally read and preached on at Christmas time. In fact, it's hard to read this account and not think of nativity scenes and Christmas cards! Sometimes it's good to study the “Christmas stories” just as Scripture, without thinking of Christmas trees and nativity scenes.

In fact, a nativity scene having three wise men standing around the manger with the shepherds is not really true to the biblical account. The wise men came to Bethlehem after the shepherds (Luke 2), possibly almost two years later. Notice that the wise men came to the house (not the barn, not the stable), and saw the child (not the baby) (v 11). This is an indication that they came some time after the birth of 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...”* (v1).

Most likely the star appeared when the Lord was born, but it took some time for the wise men to make the long journey from the East. Remember also that Herod killed all the male babies two years old and under, another indication that their visit was some time after the birth of the Lord Jesus.

The Bible never states that there were three wise men. In fact, there were probably more than three. The tradition of three comes from the three gifts - gold, frankincense, myrrh. And the wise men were not kings, in spite of the Christmas carol, "We Three Kings."

Who were these wise men? Were they Jews or Gentiles? Most likely they were Gentiles from Babylon or Persia. Jews had been living in those areas with their ancient Scriptures ever since the days of the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BC. These wise men (or "magi") were not magicians or mystics. They were **scholars**. They were experts in the study of the stars and of literature, including Hebrew literature. It's quite likely they were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and the prophecies about a coming king. Perhaps they knew of Balaam's Messianic prophecy in Numbers 24:17 - *"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult."*

In addition, these wise men were probably aware of Daniel's prophecy giving a timetable for the birth of the King, recorded in Daniel 9. After all, Daniel wrote this prophecy in Babylon.

What about the "star" that the wise men followed? Was this a juxtaposition of several planets, or a comet, or was it some other natural astral event that God used? A few years ago, we went as a family to the Adler Planetarium in Chicago during Christmas vacation to see their special seasonal program entitled "Star of Wonder." The biblical account of the birth of Jesus and the visit of the wise men was given in the program, and the question was posed: "Did the wise men witness an exploding star, a comet, or an unusual meeting of the planets?" The program took us back to the skies as they appeared in the Middle East in the years 2 BC - 3 BC. In the skies of those years there was a juxtaposition of certain planets, and this could have been the "Star of Bethlehem." The Adler Planetarium took the biblical account seriously!

God could certainly have used a natural astral event, and the miracle was in the timing of the natural event. Or, on the other hand, the Star of Bethlehem could have been a special miraculous star. I tend to go with the idea of a special miracle star, because this star reappeared and guided the wise men right to the very house where Jesus was! *"When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was" (v9).*

Doctrinal Points

Our three doctrinal points are drawn from the three reactions to the announcement that the King was born.

1. Some people know the Scriptures, but they don't know the King.

These people are like the chief priests and scribes. *"And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: [and then the quote from Micah 5:2], ' But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not*

the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel” (v4-5)

The scribes were the professional students of the day. They were the official interpreters of the Scriptures. They copied the Scriptures, and taught the Scriptures to the people. The chief priests were also very familiar with the Scriptures. So the chief priests and the scribes certainly knew the Scriptures, and they had no problem pointing Herod to Micah 5:2 and the prediction that the coming King would be born in Bethlehem.

Now if you were one of these chief priests or scribes, don't you think that you would have gone to Bethlehem to check things out? After all, Bethlehem was only about five miles away from Jerusalem. But apparently the chief priests and scribes never left Jerusalem.

They are like many people today. They know enough Scripture to be saved, but they don't commit themselves to the truth of Scripture. And as a result, they don't know the King.

Let me ask you - do you know the King? Is the Lord Jesus Christ your Savior and King? Or are you like one of those chief priest or scribes? Maybe you've known the Scripture from Sunday school days, and you could quote John 3:16 to someone who asked you how to be saved - but you've never believed the Scriptures yourself, and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. I hope that that you are a true believer. Sadly, some people know the Scriptures, but they don't know the King.

2. Some people hear the Scriptures, and they reject the King.

These people are like Herod! Herod didn't have a problem hearing the Word and seeing what its implications were. He was even troubled, as we see in verse 3: *“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”* But for Herod, accepting the King would mean a total disruption of his own selfish lifestyle, as well as a change in his evil policies. So Herod rejected the King.

In the same way, many people today hear the Scriptures, and they understand the implications of Scripture - and yet they openly reject the Lord. They don't want to submit to God. They don't want God to disrupt their self-indulgent lifestyles. And just as Herod tried to eliminate the true King, so these people will do whatever they can to eliminate the Lord from their lives, and even from our culture. They bash the Bible and the Christian message whenever and wherever they get a chance. Their constant harping on “separation of church and state” is really a mask for getting rid of God altogether. Did you notice how soon after the tragedy of 9/11 there was a drift from “In God We Trust” to “United We Stand?” Did you notice that? Why? Anything to get God out of the picture! Some people hear the Scriptures, and they reject the King.

3. Some people believe the Scriptures - and they receive the King!

These people are like the wise men. They follow the light that God gives them, and they're brought to the Savior! And those who seek **will** find (Matthew 7:7)! Notice how God used the Scriptures to bring the wise men to the Lord. The wise men were probably exposed to Hebrew Scripture in their studies in the East. They believed the promises and prophecies and followed God's Star. When they got to Jerusalem they believed the specific prophecy of Micah 5. So they came to Bethlehem and found the King! And what did the wise men do when they found the Lord? They worshiped Him, and they presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

This is the normal way that people find the King today. God leads them to the Scriptures in some way, and then they believe the Scriptures, and by faith they receive the Lord Jesus as Savior. Romans 10:17 *"... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Where are you with in your relationship with the Lord today? Are you like the chief priests and scribes? You know the Scriptures, but you still haven't come to faith? Are you like Herod? You've heard the Scriptures, but you reject the truth of the Scripture? Or are you like the wise men? You believe the Scriptures and have received the Savior, and now you worship Him! Are you in "wise men category"? Some people believe the Scriptures - and they receive the King!

Practical Application

Return home a different way.

"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way." Do you see the spiritual picture here? The wise men went back home, but they didn't return the same way they came. Things were different now that they had met the King! They went back to their homes and jobs and families and friends, but there's no doubt that they were **changed men** - for **life!**

That's how it should be when we receive the King. We return home "a different way." We return to the same homes and jobs and situations and problems, but **we** are different! We now follow the Lord and look to Him in all our circumstances. If you're not true Christian yet, you can "return home" a different way - a changed person!

If you trust in Christ as your personal Savior today, you will be changed **forever!** Why not return home a different way?