

## **The Magi's Worship**

### **Matthew 2:1-23**

Sometime after Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, God sends some men a message about His Son's arrival to the earth. These men are called "magi" or "wise men" and they live far to the east of Jerusalem. Today, we arrange Nativity scenes to include these guys in the worship of Jesus around the manger in Bethlehem. And though these wise men DO INDEED play a very important part in God's telling of the story of His Son's incarnation, Nativity scenes mislead us as to some details about their story.

Though the wise men are very familiar to us through songs and statues, we actually know very little about them.

We do not know their number. We do not know their names. We do not know their national identity. We do not know their exact biblical knowledge. These details are all unsure because the only reliable document that we have about them is Matthew's record here in the New Testament. And Matthew does not give us these details.

#### **What does Matthew tell us about them?**

**Matthew tells us that they are "men".** So they are male in gender and are more than one. They may have been 3 or they may have been dozens. From logical reasoning, I believe these men travel in a large group. Travel in the Ancient Near East in their time is dangerous and they are carrying very valuable treasure with them.

**Matthew tells us that they come to Jerusalem "from the east".** If you travel east from Jerusalem, you run into modern day Iran or Iraq. These countries identify with ancient Persia or Babylon. So I think these men are from this region. If this is so, then the Wise Men travel over 800 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem. 800 miles! Wow. I do not know how many miles a camel can take you in a day, but let us imagine they cover 20 miles a day. It takes them 40 days just to arrive! These guys are motivated! And they also have very understanding wives!

**Matthew tells us that they are called "wise men".** Their own people esteem these guys as scholars who possess **unusual knowledge**. These men are very learned in all the major subjects . . . mathematics, history, astrology, science and religion. These are men who think deeply about the BIG QUESTIONS of life and search God's creation for answers to those questions.

Though we are not sure what documents these scholars had access to, **I do not think it is a stretch to believe that these guys would have studied the prophet Daniel's writings.** Remember that Persia is where the prophet Daniel had been exiled five centuries earlier. When Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he is promoted to be "chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon". I think these wise guys read Daniel's prophecy about a future King/Messiah.

*"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."* (Daniel 7:13-14 *ESV*)

**Remember also that Daniel gives us a very detailed time table for the coming of the future King/Messiah in Daniel 9.** These wise men MAY HAVE calculated Daniel's prophecy and realized that they are living in the days when the LORD's promised King would come to the earth. But again, this is speculation because Matthew does not tell us.

**Remember also that another prophet from this same area in Babylon prophesied about this future King.** His name was Balaam. He lived centuries before Daniel. Not Balaam is not a godly man. **Balaam is a Gentile whom you may remember is dumber than a donkey.** Yet the LORD uses Balaam to make this statement about His future Messiah:

*"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, . . . the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, . . . I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;"* (Numbers 24:15-17 *ESV*)

I believe that the Wise Men said, "We have seen HIS star" because they read Balaam's prophecy of a star coming out of Jacob that points to a "scepter" . . . a King who rises out of Israel. They seemed to know that this star is specially assigned to this King just as Balaam predicted. Regardless, something caused them to be really excited about a star!

**One thing we KNOW for certain from Matthew's Gospel, God clearly communicates the revelation of the birth of His King to these wise men.** The LORD may have used scripture to tell them. He certainly uses a unique star in the sky.

These men know that they are hearing God speak directly to them. **Their conviction about the Savior King is not speculation to them, but this is clear revelation from God.** They KNOW that this star is directing them to the Messiah who is a Savior King.

With great confidence and conviction they say to Herod when they reach him,

*“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”* (Matthew 2:2 [ESV](#))

Because Matthew tells us that these men are from the east of Jerusalem . . . he is telling us that they are not from Israel, but are Gentiles. This is a very significant fact in the Christmas story! So far, all the people involved in the story are Jews. Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds, Mary, Joseph. All Jews. **But in a surprising manner, God sets believing Gentiles right into the middle of His story!**

**Why would God choose to reveal the birth of His Messiah . . . His King to Gentiles who lived hundreds of miles away from the land where He chose for His Son to live?**

**Answer: God designs to make His Son’s glories known to the nations from the very beginning. Jesus is a universal Savior King who rules over all peoples.** Jesus is not some tribal deity or ethnic Savior. The salvation He offers is not confined to a small group of people, but expands to the whole world!

**Main Idea:** I borrow from Isaac Watts to focus our thoughts about this one thought this morning:

***Joy to the world, the Lord is come  
Let earth receive her King  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and heaven and nature sing***

Let us lean in to the wise men and listen to what they tell us about Jesus’ majesty as the King of heaven and earth. Four testimonials that enrich our joy and appreciation of this One who is OUR KING.

## The Wise Men's Testimonials to Jesus' Majesty

### Testimonial #1: Jesus is a King for every person.

**The Wise Men teach us that Jesus is both the King of the Jews AND the King of all the world.**

The Father is not content for His Son to rule ONLY over a small group of people in a remote place. The Father passionately pursues the glory that is due to His Son. In this pursuit, the Father sees fit to elect a group of men from a place far from Israel to come to the infant Jesus and to pay homage to Him as the King of all Kings.

Centuries before God's Son took on a human nature, Isaiah prophesied this about Him:

*“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6 [ESV](#))*

Remember the angels message to the Shepherds the night of Jesus birth:

*“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” (Luke 2:10 [ESV](#))*

Remember what Simeon said in the Temple just 40 days after Jesus is born:

*“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32 [ESV](#))*

The Wise Men are the beginning of the fulfillment of God's intention to bring people from every tribe, every tongue and every nation to bow at the feet of His Son . . . the King of Kings. **Jesus is a universal Savior King.** Jesus is not some tribal deity or ethnic Savior. The salvation He offers is not confined to a small group of people, but expands to the whole world!

**God designs to make His Son's glories known to the nations from the very beginning. These wise men from the east represent the love of God for the**

**whole world!** Jesus' birth had eternal impact not only upon the nation of Israel, but upon the whole world!

Consider how unlikely it is that these Gentiles would worship a Jewish baby. They live in faraway Persia where little is known of the living and true God. They are born and raised in a spiritually dark place! They only have small portions of God's Word available to them. And yet we find them loving and worshipping Jesus.

**How do we account for them?** The only answer that I can offer is that these wise men found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

**The Holy Spirit made them wise unto salvation. The Holy Spirit convinced them of their need for a Savior no human was preaching repentance to them.** The Holy Spirit revealed that Jesus is the Messiah/King whom they needed to if they were to possess spiritual life and life. No one preacher came to their town to proclaim the Gospel yet we find them leaving their homes to worship Him. The wise men's testimony seems impossible! Yet here they are!

Friend, if you are in Christ, what accounts for your salvation? Answer: We have found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God performs a miracle in us!

**Truth: God loves to save people who it seems are impossible to save!**

**Question: Do you know anyone who seems impossible to reach? Call upon the LORD for their salvation. The LORD can reach them!!**

**Jesus is a King for every Person. And MORE He is the ONLY King who can rescue the souls of men and women. Salvation is found only through His Name.**

**Testimonial #2: Jesus is a King needed by every person.**

**Without Jesus the Messiah, these wise men would be without God, without hope and without eternal life. The religion of their culture was powerless to save them. The gods of their people are no gods at all.**

The fact that God reaches the Wise Men is an illustration of the Gospel truth that every culture needs Jesus in order to possess God's salvation. If they did NOT NEED Jesus as their King, why would God speak to them to tell them to go to worship Him. If their gods were good enough, why the bother?

Jesus is the only King who can mediate between God and man. He is the only Messiah who can die in our place. He is the only Savior who can forgive our sins. He is the only King who can conquer death and give us resurrection.

**Truth: Every person needs Jesus to be his/her Savior. Without Jesus, no one enters heaven.**

**Protest:** It is arrogant to think that every culture needs to confess Jesus in order to have a relationship with God and an eternal home in heaven! The worship of other gods is just as valuable as the worship of Jesus.

**Answer:** Jesus is the only Messiah who can bring us to God. There is no other Savior who can take away the guilt of our sins. There is no other King who possesses power to defeat sin, Satan and death! EVERY PERSON NEEDS JESUS TO BE HIS/HER SAVIOR. Without Jesus, no one can see God. No one can have hope for eternal life. No one can be adopted into God's family. No one can be raised from the dead.

*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”” (Acts 4:11-12 *ESV*)*

I do not know all that the wise men understand. BUT this I know. They are convinced that they NEED to come to Jesus . . . to see Him and to worship Him. This is not a pleasure trip. This is not a scientific exploration made from academic interest. This is a desperate journey to find life and meaning. They MUST SEE JESUS!

**PROTEST CONTINUES:** But it seems so arrogant to think that there is only one way to God. How dare we claim that all other religions are false and that they have no value to lead us to eternal life!

I understand. Many in Jesus day rejected Jesus as a NECESSARY KING too!

*“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”” (Matthew 2:3–6 *ESV*)*

Please notice the attitude of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They had an intellectual understanding of the Gospel, but no real faith in it.

**J C Ryle comments, "Their heads were better than their hearts."** They understood what Micah 5:2 said about the birthplace of the Messiah. They read this prophecy that was over 700 years old and they intellectually affirmed it. They likely had robust discussions about the text of scripture! They certainly celebrated religious rituals every week as an external form of worship to God.

Yet they did not take a day hike of 5.5 miles to see the newborn Savior King. The Gentile wise men gladly traveled 800 miles, but the most religious people on earth would not travel this short distance between Jerusalem and Bethlehem to worship the new born King.

I think they would have stayed home even if you gave them a free chariot ride. WHY? **They had intellectual interest in God, but no personal passion for the workings of God in bringing the Messiah to our world.**

**Question:** Why were they not interested in finding out more personally about this baby who is born Savior and King?

Answer: They did not believe that they needed a Savior. They thought that their religious efforts made them right with God. **They had no interest in a Savior that required them to bow their knee in submission to Him as King.** They were liking life with KING SELF on the throne. They were comfortable keeping God at arms length rather than inviting Him to come into their souls and make His home there.

**Truth: A person may have much head knowledge of God and the Bible and of Jesus, but still remain outside of God's saving grace. A person may participate in many externals of worship without experiencing the internal reality of new life in Christ.**

Friends, everyone NEEDS Jesus to be their Savior. There is NO ONE who is excluded from this giant necessity.

Illustration: Birthday cup. Displeased Santa. "You're all naughty!" Then at the bottom Romans 3:10-12. I was telling people that I liked the fact that it said, "YOU'RE all naughty." Because that meant as long as I held the cup I was excluded from the condemnation. But then bright soul pointed out that Santa was on BOTH

sides of the cup! So the Santa was looking at me too! Yes! I AM included in the guilt. Romans 3:10-12.

*"as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."'"*  
*(Romans 3:10-12 ESV)*

Friends, being religious gives us NO RIGHT STANDING with God. Being nice to our neighbors gives us no right standing with God. Being earnest in obeying the 10 commandments gives us no right standing with God!

**What does give us right standing with God? One thing! The wise men understood this! Jesus.**

**Truth: IF you have Jesus as your Savior King, then you have right standing with God. If you do not have Jesus as your Savior King, then you do not have right standing with God.**

The priests and scribes lived their whole lives close to the truth of God and yet most of them refused to bow their hearts to Jesus from the beginning to the end of His ministry on earth.

Do we not see this same phenomenon happen in our day? **Those who are closest to the bright light of God's revelation are those who most quickly and energetically close their eyes to it?**

Sometimes these reject Jesus with **heated hostility like Herod did.** Sometimes with a **zealous disinterest** like these scribes and priests. But what a sadness. **To have lived life so close to the grace of God and yet never experience God's life changing power for oneself!**

May we all take warning that our head knowledge of Jesus can lull us to sleep of our personal spiritual need for Jesus. Please do not be content with knowing much about this Savior King. Pursue Him with all diligence like these wise men until you see Him and KNOW HIM!

Question: Do you have Jesus as your personal Savior King? Have you heard God's call to go to Jesus to obtain spiritual life? Have you obeyed?

**Testimonial #1: Jesus is a King for every person.**

**Testimonial #2: Jesus is a King needed by every person.**

### Testimonial #3: Jesus is a King rejected by most people.

*“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, . . . Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”” (Matthew 2:3, 7–8 ESV)*

The word “troubled” means “agitated, disturbed, shaken.” This really powerful ruler is shaken to the core by a baby born in poverty to common teenage parents in a non-descript village.

**Why is King Herod so troubled?** He feared that Jesus would take away his glory, his autonomy. He did not want to give up his authority over himself and over others. He hates Jesus for claiming authority over him.

Some reject Jesus through apathy like the priests and the scribes. Others reject Jesus through open hostility like Herod. **But either way the main response of the world to the arrival of Jesus is rejection.**

*“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (John 1:11 ESV)*

*“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” (John 3:19 ESV)*

*“but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,” (1 Corinthians 1:23 ESV)*

We often evaluate whether something is true or false, good or bad on the basis of its popularity. We ask, “How many others think this product is worthy?” **For instance, my grandson Malakai was asking for a specific Christmas gift and so I was showing him some of the options on Amazon. Malakai kept asking, “How many stars does it have?”**

That is OK for evaluating a toy or some tennis shoes. **But evaluating Jesus on the basis of His popularity would be the exact WRONG way to decide upon a Savior King.**

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied that this Savior King would be rejected by the masses of humanity.

*“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3 ESV)*

**So if you are thinking Jesus is not worth radically following because He is not that cool anymore, you are walking on a bridge that will crumble under your feet.**

Seven centuries before God sent His Son into a selfish, sinful world, He told us that the world would reject His Son as King. **Sooooo . . . if we are looking for a Savior King sent by God to follow, then we better look for the One who is despised and rejected by man!**

**Truth: Jesus’ rejection by man is additional evidence that validates His Divine Kingship.**

**Testimonial #1: Jesus is a King for every person.**

**Testimonial #2: Jesus is a King needed by every person.**

**Testimonial #3: Jesus is a King rejected by most people.**

**Testimonial #4: Jesus is a King worthy of worship.**

*“After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. **And going into the house**, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:9–11 ESV)*

The wise men did not go into a stable with a baby in a manger, but **into a house**. Joseph and Mary did not stay many nights in the stable. They found a house where they decided to live for an extended stay in Bethlehem.

CONTRARY to some claims, Jesus was not homeless. **He had two responsible parents caring for Him.** They found a home. They paid for their lodging with hard-earned money that Joseph received from working as a carpenter.

Jesus may have been one-year-old by this time. The shepherds are not present. The cattle are not mooing. They are in a little house.

When the wise men see Him, these important, powerful, grown men fall prostrate on their faces and worship Him. Notice that they did not worship Jesus’ parents. They reserve their worship for the infant. **They see that Jesus even in infancy is worthy of worship and adoration. They see that this Little One**

**possesses authority far greater than any Caesar or earthly king.** They fall down in submission to Him.

They give Him valuable gifts . . . gold, frankincense and myrrh. There is symbolic meaning behind these three gifts.

Gold is the symbol of kings. This gift proclaims that Jesus is King of all Kings.

Frankincense is used in the Temple worship. This gift proclaims that Jesus is our Great High Priest who mediates between us and God.

Myrrh is used in embalming bodies for burial. This gift proclaims that Jesus will die as a sacrifice for our sin. Through this baby's death and resurrection, He will offer life to all who come to Him in faith.

Jesus is a **WORTHY** Savior King. He possesses all the necessary qualities we need in order to worship Him with joy and love.

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold him, born the King of angels;*

*Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;*

*Refrain:*

*O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!*  
--John Francis Wade

CONCLUSION:

The “hype” we make of Christmas only makes sense if the baby born in Bethlehem really is the worthy Savior King. The most secular of persons often puts up Christmas trees, decorates their lawn with Santa and reindeer, exchanges expensive gifts, drinks eggnog at office parties and sings Christmas songs. But it seems odd to me to do all of this for a make-believe story.

If God’s Son is not born to be our Savior, why would anyone celebrate Christmas with such vigor? How is the IDEA of hope worth celebrating IF there is NO HOPE? Without Jesus being the King who comes to save us and give us life then Christmas is a much ado about nothing.

Thankful that Christmas is still celebrated here in the US . . . even if most celebrate it for celebration's sake. **The celebrations give followers of Jesus an open door to share Christmas' meaning.**

Also, the celebrations remind me that even atheists know that this world is messed up and they long for some kind of redemption . . . some kind of salvation from the darkness that we long to escape. Christmas does communicate hope!

**But here is the truth: We have HOPE for our today and our tomorrow because King Jesus is real and true!! He is not fiction. He is not make-believe. He is born and He is present in our world today.**

Friends, let the wise men guide you to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

When God spoke, they listened.

When God promised, they believed.

When God called, they came.

**Do we do that?**

These wise men believed in Jesus as King before they ever saw Him.

They believed when the priests and the scribes were cold to him.

They believed when Herod threatened any who would bow down to Him.

They saw Him in His weakest form.

They did not see His mighty miracles.

They did not hear His profound sermons.

They did not see His glorious resurrected body.

They saw a dependent and helpless baby boy.

**Yet they believed. They fell down and worshipped Him.**

Mark how much more revelation from God you have than these men did! Yet they believed. Why would you be without faith? Why would you turn away from the One whom God has sent to give you life?

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