

Seeking The Savior
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Allen Power

Matthew 2:1-15

Opening question: **What are some of your fondest childhood memories of the Christmas season? Can you name a Christmas tradition or activity you look forward to each year, without which Christmas just wouldn't be the same?**

Our memories and traditions cause us to look forward to celebrating Christmas each year. There's nothing wrong with that. Unfortunately, though, most people today are all about the celebration and not the Savior. This morning a familiar part of the Christmas story conveys why those who are "wise" seek the Savior.

Matthew 2:1–15 (ESV)

The Visit of the Wise Men

2 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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

6 " '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.' "

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 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." 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 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. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

The Flight to Egypt

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

- Verse 1 sets the timing (after Jesus was born); the place (Bethlehem); the political climate (in the days of Herod the king); and the event (wise men came from the east to Jerusalem).
- **Question: Who were these “wise men” or Magi (MAY-dzai)?**
- They were likely from Persia and they were respected men of high position who studied the stars and planets...either astronomer or even some kind of astrologers.
- *[The historian] Herodotus said the rulers of the East commonly utilized the magi’s knowledge of astrology and dream interpretation to determine affairs of state. The magi were, therefore, concerned with what the movement of the stars, as signs and portents, might signify for the future affairs of history. Such an interest could account not only for the magi’s interest in the star in Matthew, but also their conclusion, shared with Herod, that the star’s appearance signified the birth of a new ruler of great importance. (Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words)*
- **Question: When you picture these “wise men” in your mind what do you see? How many of them were there?**
- The reality (this is important to the next part of the story) scripture doesn’t tell us how many of them there were but it could have been three or even a dozen, and they would have likely had an entourage of troops with them. Imagine the commotion they would have caused when they showed up in Jerusalem!
- **Verse 2: What did the question the wise men were asking, and their stated intention tell you about their belief about this baby?**

John MacArthur tells us:

“...the word proskuneō, means to kiss the feet of or to stoop to kiss, or to kiss reverently. When the New Testament uses that word, it is always used of something truly or something supposedly divine, it is a word that is only fit for deity...”

- They said they saw “his star.” There’s lots of speculation of what they saw. Some say it was a rare meeting of Jupiter and Saturn. Some say it was a comet or a super nova.
- Some Bible scholars have another theory.
- Question: In Luke chapter 2’s familiar telling of the Christmas story, what did verse 9 say the shepherd’s witnessed? Luke 2:9 (ESV) 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.
- Some believe what the wise men saw was the glow of the Shekinah glory of God.
- Whatever it was, the point is this: God can orchestrate His world to reveal His Son.
- Verse 3: “Herod was troubled and all of Jerusalem with him...”
- **Question: Why would a powerful king be so disturbed by this little baby?**
- “King of the jews?” “I am king of the jews...appointed by Rome!”
- The people of Jerusalem were upset because Herod was upset. He was a ruthless, maniacal tyrant approaching the end of his life and he would do ANYTHING to keep his position. He had killed some of his own wives (he had 10) and sons.
- *“Herod the Great was so cruel and unpredictable that when he was upset, everyone was afraid! A notable example of his cruelty was that when he was near death, he was afraid no one would mourn his passing, so he imprisoned many Pharisees who were to be crucified when he died. This would ensure that the day of his death would be a*

day of grieving. The order was not carried out, but this illustrates his character.” Bob Utley - First Christian Primer: Matthew

- There IS something interesting about Herod’s reaction. Look at verse 4.
- **Question: What does v.4 tell us about what Herod thought about what the wise men were asking?**
- The fact that he called together the “theologians” of the day tells us Herod put some stock into what the wise men were asking about.
- The theologians quote the prophet Micah (5:2) in verse 6: Little ole Bethlehem won’t be so little...from Bethlehem would come the “ruler who will shepherd...Israel.” The Christ the promised Messiah.
- So Herod hatches a plot thinking he’s successfully recruited these wise men to find the child and report back to him, so he could destroy this threat! The wise men head to Bethlehem.
- Question: Did it ever occur to you that the scribes and Pharisees (theologians) didn’t go with them? Anticipating the Messiah was HUGE in Jewish life...why wouldn’t they go the six miles to Bethlehem?
- **What does that say about the priorities of the theologians?**
- Let’s talk a minute about the reactions of the wise men; Herod; and the theologians.
- **Question: What ONE WORD would you use to describe the reaction of Herod?**
- **How about the scribes and Pharisees (theologians). One word?**
- **The wise men? What one word describes their response?**
- Not much different from today, huh?
- Some respond with HATRED for Christ. Most respond with INDIFFERENCE. Those who are “wise” are drawn to seek Him and WORSHIP Him.
- **Question: What is worse...hatred of Christ or INDIFFERENCE to Christ?**

Most Christians think hatred of Christ is what is killing our culture. There’s a good argument to be made that INDIFFERENCE to Christ is what’s killing our culture!

- **Verse 9: As the wise men headed to Bethlehem, what did God supernaturally do? What was the reaction of the wise men?**
- Lesson: If we are SEEKING JESUS, God will direct our path. It brings great joy!
- Verse 11: Look at two words: “house” and “child.” **What do those words say about the “accuracy” of your nativity set at home?**
- Verse 11: How did they react to Jesus? “fell down and worshiped him.”

Matthew Henry points out:

“We do not read that they gave such honour to Herod, though he was in the height of his royal grandeur; but to this babe they gave this honour, not only as to a king (then they would have done the same to Herod), but as to a God.”

These prominent, learned men fall FACE DOWN in a humble home to worship a TODDLER! How many prominent, learned people today REFUSE to do that?

The Life Application Study Bible tells us:

The Magi traveled thousands of miles to see the king of the Jews. When they finally found him, they responded with joy, worship and gifts. This is so different from the approach people often take today. We expect God to come looking for us, to explain himself, prove who he is, and give US gifts. But those who are wise still seek and worship Jesus today, not for what they can get, but for who he is."

- Also, in verse 11: The wise men brought gifts every five-year-old in Awana can name.
- **Question: What did each gift symbolize?**
- **Practical question: How do you think the gifts were used by Joseph and Mary?**
- Verse 12: "And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."
- I have two thoughts on that verse: 1. If we're really SEEKING God's direction we won't be taken in and sidetracked by the evil plans of those who hate the things of God.
- Once someone TRULY falls down to worship Jesus as Savior and Lord, they don't go back the way they came!
- So, what have we learned today from this familiar story?

John Piper summarizes this passage well:

"There are at least five truths that Matthew wants us to see in this story about Christ and worship 1) Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and should be honored as such. 2) Jesus is to be worshiped not just by Jews, but by all the nations of the world, as represented by the wise men from the east. 3) God wields the universe to make his Son known and worshiped. This is his great goal in all things - that his Son be known and worshiped. 4) Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him and brings out opposition for those who do. 5) Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts."

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Did you ever consider that, WITH NO EXCEPTION, when it comes to Jesus Christ, every person falls into one of those three categories:
- You HATE Him.
- You are INDIFFERENT to him.
- Or you WORSHIP HIM as Lord and Savior.
- Only the last one assures you of ETERNAL LIFE. Where do you fit in?
- If you haven't asked Him to be the Lord of your life, what a great way to celebrate Christmas by receiving the greatest gift known to man!
- For those of us who HAVE received that gift of eternal life, are we directing others toward the star or have we grown INDIFFERENT about that?
- The wise men brought Him gifts. What gifts can WE give to Jesus this week?
- Gold is a gift for a King. How can we acknowledge Him as KING this week?
- The myrrh was a symbol that He came to die...for you and me. How can we acknowledge Him as our redeemer...the lamb that was slain?
- The frankincense symbolized his deity. This week, how can we acknowledge that Jesus is the ONE TRUE GOD who came to earth for our salvation?