

The King Worshipped
December 20, 2015
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Matthew 2:1-12

What are some creations in nature, or natural phenomena that really remind you of the power of God?

Our text this morning is the familiar account of the Magi...the Wise Men. As I've said many times, familiar passages present a real challenge. It would be easy to feel we've heard all there is to hear and mentally "check out." My prayer is that we challenge ourselves to expect to learn some new truth from this text.

Here's the BIG IDEA of this lesson: God will always make himself known to us. The issue is how we respond to him. The only correct response is worship.

Let's read this passage. Then we'll ask our three questions: What does it say? What does it mean? And, how should it change me this week?

Matthew 2:1–12 (ESV)

¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, "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."

³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

⁵They 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.' "

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

⁸And 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.”

⁹After 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.

¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

¹¹And 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.

¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Dr. Ray Prichard said of this passage and these Wise Men:

“Surely one of the great stories of Christmas is the story of the visit of the Wise Men from the East. Wherever the story of the birth of Jesus is told, so too is told this delightful tale of strange men from some faraway land who brought gifts to the baby Jesus.

The story comes to us only in Matthew’s gospel. All that we know about the Wise Men we find in chapter 2. They show up in verse 1 and disappear in verse 12, leaving behind many unanswered questions:

- 1. Who are the Wise Men and where did they come from?*
- 2. How many were there?*
- 3. What is the star they saw and how did it lead them to Bethlehem?*
- 4. How long after the birth of Jesus did they arrive in Jerusalem?*
- 5. How did they know that the baby was going to be the king of the Jews?”¹*

- Verses one and two set the scene: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem; when Herod was king in Judea; wise men came to Jerusalem asking questions about a strange star and a new king.
- There’s an expression: “You’ll know it when you see it.” **Why do people say that?**
- The Magi from the east, studied the stars for signs of great things. This star motivated them to travel for between 750 and one thousand miles to see for themselves this great occurrence. This was more than just an astronomy field trip. Though these men were from another country, and likely pagan, they knew the sign of a king when they saw it!

- These men were not “kings” as the old carol says. They would have been highly educated intellectuals who advised kings. They were “probably from Persia. They combined astronomical observation with astrological speculation. They played both political and religious roles and were figures of some prominence in their land.”²
- The Magi go all the way back to the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. In fact, Daniel 5:11 tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar had made Daniel “chief of the magicians’ [magi] because ‘the spirit of the holy gods...light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him...’ (Dan. 5:11).³
- These men would have traveled in a great caravan that would have attracted a lot of attention when they showed up in Jerusalem.
- **What about the “star” they followed? Was it a star at all? What theories do you know about?**
- “A new star in the sky was often believed to herald the birth of a significant person in the land over which the star shone.”⁴
- Some scholars have argued that the star was an unprecedented astronomical event, such as a supernova, comet, or a spectacular alignment of the planets⁵
- Maybe it wasn’t a star at all. [T]he term “star” could be another way of saying an angel guided the Magi (Allison, “Magi’s Angel,” 17–41).⁶
- One commentator speculates: Could it be that “the star” which the Magi saw and which led them to a specific house was the Shekinah glory of God? That same glory had led the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years as a pillar of fire and cloud. Perhaps this was what they saw in the East, and for want of a better term they called it a “star.”⁷
- The fact is, scripture doesn’t explain it beyond this truth: God in His sovereignty used a unique light to guide them right to the Christ-child.
- That reminds me of a truth: God will always find a way to get our attention and point us to Jesus. The question is how will we respond?
- That leads us to where I want to take our discussion this morning. I want us to look at the reactions of the key players in

this drama: King Herod; the people of Jerusalem; and the Wise Men.

- When the Wise Men showed up in Jerusalem they began to ask: “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” This caused a commotion. Verse three says: “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;”
- When that verse says Herod was “troubled” it’s likely a big understatement. That Greek word means “stirred” and “terrified.”⁸
- **Why would Herod have been so upset at the Wise Men’s questions?**
- To understand Herod’s terror, you just have to review his biography.
- He had been appointed King by Rome. He was not a Jew. No doubt this talk of the birth of a true Jewish King would fuel his fears.
- Herod was a brutal and cruel regent whose “M.O.” was to crush and kill anyone who threatened him including his own family members.
- At this point he is old; sick; and incredibly paranoid.
- He sent for his theological advisers, the chief priests and the scribes.
- Where was the Christ to be born? They didn’t need to consult their scrolls.
- They probably quoted Micah 5:2 from memory. Matthew paraphrases it:
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.’ ” The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
- Verse seven: Herod summoned the Wise Men. **What did he ask them? Why was that information important to him?**
- Herod schemes by sending the Wise Men to Bethlehem on his behalf, asking them to inform him of what they found. This has always puzzled me. **Why didn’t Herod send soldiers with the Wise Men? Why didn’t he go with them himself? Bethlehem was six miles away. Thoughts?**
- If we know this story we know what Herod did. **What do 2:16-18 reveal?**

- King Herod's reaction to the birth of the Christ-child was one of VIOLENT OPPOSITION coming from EVIL INSECURITY.
- The last thing Herod needed was to have Baby Jesus mess up the domain he had created for himself. *"I'm large and in charge and I don't need a savior!"* Sounds like a lot of people today doesn't it?
- What about the reaction of the people in Jerusalem. Look back at verse three. Not only was Herod troubled, **what does it say about the people? Why do you think the average people in Jerusalem would have been troubled by rumors of the birth of a new King of the Jews?**
- They were gripped by fear. They knew if Herod got upset there would be painful consequences. They were right, ask the mothers in Bethlehem!
- Also, though oppressed by the Romans and by Herod, the people of Jerusalem had become "numb" and "callous" to their circumstances.
- They had been lulled into the belief that their existence was what it was and nothing could possibly make it any better... especially not a baby king.
- John Calvin wrote: *"the people...were so completely worn down, and almost wasted, by continued wars, that their wretched and cruel bondage appeared to them not only tolerable, but desirable, provided it were accompanied by peace. [they were]...so entirely broken by the long continuance of their afflictions, as to throw away the hope and desire of the grace which had been promised to them."*⁹
- Aren't people like that today? *"My life is the pits and Jesus won't fix it."*
- Did you see the controversial headline in the NY Daily News after the San Bernardino shootings? <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/02/the-new-york-daily-newss-very-provocative-front-page-on-the-san-bernardino-shooting/>
- God continues to supernaturally make people aware of His Son and their reaction is often to settle for the status quo instead of the abundant life.
- One more reaction and we'll wrap up. That's the reaction of the Wise Men.

- We don't know how long it took these men to get to Bethlehem, but 750 to one thousand miles on camel was no short commute. **Why do you think they put themselves through this? They weren't even Jews!**
- These wise, intellectuals followed with wonder God's supernatural leading.
- They would not be deterred from finding this newborn King. And when they did they responded with immediate worship and lavish gifts. They knew a King when they saw one and they fell on their faces in response.

So, What's the Takeaway for you and me?

- We can divide the world by the three reactions of the key players in this drama. When God reveals His Son as King, some are threatened; some are ambivalent; and others see Him as the extraordinary gift He is.
- God always demands a choice where Jesus is concerned.
- Will we violently resist? Will we be callously ambivalent? Or, will we worship Him for the King He is?
- It's kind of sad that sometimes, great truth becomes cliché. We dismiss the saying: "Wise Men Still Seek Him" as a bumper-sticker slogan.
- The reality is that wise people do come asking questions about the King.
- When people come riding into our lives asking questions, will we point them to Bethlehem? This season is a great opportunity to do so!

¹ Ray Prichard: - <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/we-three-kings/>

² The New American Commentary Volume 22 - Matthew by Craig L. Blomberg

³ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 595). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁴ The New American Commentary Volume 22 - Matthew by Craig L. Blomberg

⁵ Jennings, M. A. (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Star in the East. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁶ Jennings, M. A. (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Star in the East. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁷ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). Matthew. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 22). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

⁹ John Calvin's Commentary <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.ix.xix.html>