

Matthew 2:1-12

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[a] 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^[b] 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 wiseman said, “Looks like we’re taking the long way home.” Let me ask you something: Do you think that meant the EASY way or the HARD way? What does the LONG way usually mean? The hard way, right? *The long way for the wisemen represented obedience to God.* Remember, the wisemen were warned in a dream NOT to return to Herod. Who do you think gave them that dream? God did! Indeed the long way represents obedience and the wisemen obeyed. You see, these men had already come a LONG WAY. They were from the East...and that’s a long way...

Matthew 2:1

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem,

Now Bible scholars tell us these wisemen were most likely from the area of Persia or Babylon or what is called Media. Take a look at this map...



See where it says, “Medo-Persian Empire?” That’s modern-day, Iran and Iraq, therefore, at a minimum they’ve traveled over 1,000 miles. Folks that’s a long way without a car or plane. They were traveling in a caravan with camels and other beasts of burden. Something like this:



They’re coming a long way and they need food and tents for shelter on a journey that would have taken many weeks or months. And there would have been servants and cooks and perhaps even some sort of security force as well. But, what do we think of when we hear of the wise men? The Christmas Song, “We Three Kings...”



Three of them, right? Why? Because of the gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. But, that’s just not true, because just three men on camels would never have troubled an entire city...

Matthew 2:3

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

Herod and all Jerusalem were “troubled,” meaning: upset...in an uproar...agitated, or shaken. Now three guys on camels won’t shake anybody...but a caravan of 40, 50, 60 people... That would do it. But, the question is: Who are these wisemen? The Greek word is “Magi,” and it refers to priests, experts in mysteries and can also be applied to a wide range of people that include astrologers and those who study sacred writings. Often times the wisemen are pictured as very wealthy and rich...



Why?...because of the gifts they brought...gold, frankincense and myrrh. Expensive!

Now as I've studied these men through the years, my thinking has come into agreement with those who believe these men came from the area of Babylon or Persia...(some say they could have come as far as China...and that's possible.). But, here's why I lean to Babylon and Persia. How would these guys have known to come looking for a king...without some way of knowing there was a king to come looking for. How would they know this?

Let me give you some Bible history here...in the year 586 BC, some 600 years before Jesus was born, Israel was taken into captivity and hauled off to Babylon... Now if you know your OT history, you know that Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego would rise to prominence in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar and so would Daniel...in fact, Daniel would serve under Darius the Mede and also Cyrus of Persia. Daniel would write down many things through his years of service and it seems that some of his writings and the writings of many of the other prophets made their way into the hands of the wisemen. Thus, the wisemen became familiar with the OT prophecies about the coming Messiah...King of the Jews.

And then a star appeared...something they've never seen before... It just "rose..."

Matthew 2:2b

...For we saw his star when it rose^[b] and have come to worship him."

This star is something that's supernatural. Literally in the Greek verse 2 says, "the star which they saw in its rising." This star had never existed before...at least not in its present form. That's what had to draw the attention to these "studiers of the stars." And there's something else about this star that's amazing...it stood over Jerusalem and then disappeared...but, reappeared over Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:9-10

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.

Well, the make it to Jerusalem and Herod and all the city are in upheaval...wondering, why is this massive caravan here...is this the leading edge of an invasion? The wisemen come to Herod the Great and tell him why they're there...no invasion...worship...

They come to Herod...Herod the Great.



Now, remember the name Herod is a family name...there are many Herod's (remember it was Herod Antipas who would preside over one of Jesus' trials before His crucifixion) This...Herod, Herod the Great was panicky... Here's a 70 year-old-paranoid King. He's King in Israel, because he wormed his way into that position by being a puppet of Rome and who he married. You know he was married 9 times and he's so afraid of losing his throne that he killed several of his wives, and some of his sons, and even killed two brothers.

Herod was so twisted that historians tell us that when he died HE KNEW no one would mourn his death, (because he was so hated)...so to remedy this...he made a decree that at his death his soldiers were to: "collect all the finest people in the city and kill them," then he said, "there would be mourning in the city when I die." BTW...Herod died an excruciatingly, painful death. He died of a chronic kidney disease that caused a terrible stench the emanated from him, and severe pain in his groin. He tried to commit suicide, but his cousin stopped him. Herod was a sick, twisted man.

To the point that...you remember...what decree did he make about the baby boys under 2 years of age in Bethlehem? Kill them. He wanted to ensure that no one would take over his throne (even though he's 70 years old, and how is a 2-year-old going to do that in his lifetime?). The wisemen come to Herod and he's panicky and he wants answers about this new King...

Matthew 2:4-8

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."

Do you believe that? No! He wanted to kill him! Church, what we've seen pictured here in the verses we just read are three VERY different groups of people and their reaction to the birth of Jesus. Here they are:

#1 Hostile #2 Indifferent #3 Worshipful

#1 Hostile...Herod...doesn't want to lose his power, so he wanted Jesus dead. Herod had to protect his position. You know for the elite of ANY age, it's always about power and control and when you encroach on that power, the elites don't want to live with you...they don't want to tolerate you...they want to crush you. Christians are seeing this more and more in our day. Get used to it. For Christians we will more and more be cast as enemies of the progressive elites. For the hostile...they will never take the long way...no...it's their way or the highway. Now the 2nd group:

#2 Indifferent... Some would call it apathy. It's a nonchalant, flippant attitude toward Jesus. The chief priests and scribes were the very men who should have been looking for the Messiah. What's their deal? They've been waiting for the Messiah to come for centuries... They know the prophecy...Micah's prophecy, it says the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem...go check it out! Nope! They paid absolutely no attention. Totally Indifferent. You would think they would follow the scriptures...but they don't. They were apparently too engrossed in their lives and had no inclination to look for the Messiah...even with the knowledge of these men travelling for months all this way...because of a supernatural star...you'd think they'd at least be curious? But, then again, seeking Jesus means taking the LONG WAY and that means you have to leave what you know...get out of your comfort zone, leave what is safe. They wouldn't do it. They wouldn't take the LONG WAY, like the Wisemen...no...the scribes and chief priests wouldn't go at all. **BTW...about 30 years later, these chief priests and scribes, led by the High Priest, Caiaphas...**



would have Jesus killed, executed on a cross...they moved to HOSTILE group. We must remember that Jesus came to his own and His own received Him not. This happens today folks...people go from being indifferent to hostile...look at your family, what do you see?

#3 Worshipful Herod said he wanted to worship Jesus...but, of course that's a lie...but these men...Gentiles no less...they want to worship this King AND SO they choose to go.

Matthew 2:9-11

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.

The wisemen came to a house...don't miss that. Why to a house?



There was scandal in Nazareth...Joseph would have never found work there...so they stayed in Bethlehem...thus, Jesus was a toddler...and that's why Herod killed the boys under two years of age. They were in a house, not a stable behind the inn.

AND SO, the wisemen worshipped Jesus...“worshipped” the Greek word is: “proskeneo,” it means to bow with one’s face to the ground...they did that...but, they also gave that which was tangible, material things as well. **We should too! Are you giving to the Lord? Materially? With your money?** You see, it was the value of those gifts that could be used to get the family to Egypt and escape Herod’s wrath. It would be a LONG WAY to Egypt, but the money from the gifts got them there. Once again, God provided for Joseph and Mary...from the stable-cave in Bethlehem to gifts from Gentiles...God always provides the resources we need at just the right time. Remember, the Lord’s provision usually comes as we need it and seldom before...remember that.

Three groups of people, three reactions. Which one are you? Are you hostile, indifferent or worshipful? We could easily answer, “Worshipful...I’m here.” True... But, remember, the indifferent were the religious...that could be us too. The indifferent ones were the religious ones. They missed Him...because they wouldn’t go to Him. Listen church, BOLD STATEMENT here...Jesus would rather have hatred than indifference. Jesus said, “They honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.”

Please listen today, the Sunday before Christmas... Jesus desires YOU. He wants to fellowship with you and that’s called: WORSHIP. Worship is fellowship. Listen...this is the crux of the message...it’s been said “the soul has eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear, but the soul can grow blind and the ears deaf from disuse...” Today, do you need to take the long way home and come to Jesus and truly fall at His feet in worship? Have you become indifferent? Oh listen, we can become blind and deaf because of familiarity and ritual...oh that we would become conscious of Him again...in our spirits, oh, may we open the eyes of our heart...that we might be aware of His presence and want Him more! The Psalmist said...

Psalm 119:37-40

³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways. ³⁸ Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared. ³⁹ Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. ⁴⁰ Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life!

Listen...if you want to worship Jesus...you will do so in righteous living. You will not walk with the world; you will walk after Jesus...and you can’t follow Jesus into sin...because He doesn’t walk there. AW Tozer says to follow Jesus, we must make a break from the world’s parade...

“Our break with the world will be the direct outcome of how we see Jesus. For the world of fallen men does not honor Him. Millions call themselves by His Name, it is true, and pay some token respect to Him, but a simple test will show if He is really honored among them. Let the average man be put to the proof on the question of who is above all in his life, and then his true position will be exposed. Let him be forced into making a choice between Jesus and money, Jesus and self, Jesus and human love, and Jesus will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However the man may protest and say that it isn’t true, the proof is in the choices he makes day after day throughout his life. Yet, the moment we make up our minds that we are determined to exalt Jesus over all, we will step out of the world’s parade.” A.W. Tozer, pastor, author

Have you stepped out of the world’s parade? What do your daily choices reveal? Please listen, the moment we make up our minds that we’re going to seek after Jesus...to really and truly follow Him,

when we finally get serious and really want to experience Him and learn of Him...we'll quit making excuses and get into His Word...sit in His presence in prayer...AND nothing else, and I mean nothing else will matter. We will drop out of the world's parade and join His! I can tell you what that looks like but I won't...because God is telling you this right now...what does it mean for you to step out of the world's parade.

You know what I'm afraid of? I'm afraid many Christians are like grapes that have never been broken:



No! You can't taste the juice until you break the grape. I believe for many people, they're indifferent...and there is no flow of sweet juice coming from them...they're hard, and calloused and offer nothing to anyone... Isn't it time that we're broken...



crushed under the weight of our indifference...our sin of apathy to release in us the sweetness of God's presence in our lives? You see, the crushing...the breaking comes when we are obedient and are willing to take the Long Way home won't be easy, but folks...there are no shortcuts in following Jesus. If you will go after Jesus with your whole heart...to worship Him...holding nothing back...He WILL be found and it WILL be sweet. But, whatever you choose to hold on to or hold back from him, WELL...He'll let you have that as your god. So many today are living fruitless live because they've become indifferent to Him. Oh Jesus, break us in your love! Help us to step out of the world's parade...and take the long way home... Bow your heads.
