DIVING DEEPER DISCUSSION GUIDE

TEXT SUMMARY

The Gospel of Matthew might be understood as an extended commentary on the words written later by the Apostle John: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). Our text, Matt 2:1-12, shows us that Israel's rejection of Jesus as her King and Messiah began even when He was a baby.

INTRODUCTION (OBSERVATION):

1. Herod, a puppet king appointed by the occupying power of Rome, was notoriously paranoid about threats to his power: he had both his son and his wife killed because he suspected them of plotting to overthrow him.

    - How did Herod react when he heard what brought the impressive visitors to Jerusalem?

    - The people of Jerusalem knew of Herod's madness and capacity for violence. How did the city react to the news that Herod was troubled about the arrival of the visitors?

2. Israel's wise men were the "chief priests and scribes" (v. 4). When Herod asked them where he could find the baby sought by the strangers from the east, he got an answer straight away. Where did Israel's wise men get their information? (Footnotes in your Bible can tell you where the quotation is found.)

DISCUSSION (INTERPRETATION):

One interpretive problem in our text is the question of how old the baby Jesus might have been when the wise men visited. What clues are there in the text that Jesus might have been a toddler and not a newborn? (Hints: the venue for the visitation and the extent of Herod's order)

SO WHAT? (APPLICATION):

1. **This week's blog post, "The Blindness of Biblical Literacy Alone," deals with the problem of the non-response of Israel's wise men.** We know that God's Word is powerful, yet many of Jesus' most implacable enemies were life-long students of the Scriptures. They knew God's Word, yet they failed to recognize the Author of that Word when He walked among them. This ironic non-response is not unusual.

   If God's Word is powerful (and it is), how can someone who knows Scripture so well be so unresponsive to God Himself? avHHave you ever seen this dynamic – a deep-seated hardness of heart in someone who knows the Scriptures intimately? Was there ever a time (perhaps now) when you sensed that your own heart was growing cold and hard toward God even while you attended diligently to the Scripture?

2. **Jesus' Gentile visitors were not just curious: they were persistent and generous.** Their journey would have been arduous and risky, and they brought expensive gifts to the newborn King of the Jews (assets which probably funded the family's flight to Egypt).

   - What is the difference between casual curiosity (exhibited by Israel's wise men) and genuine spiritual hunger (manifested in the Gentile wise men)? Have you ever experienced one without the other?

   - Was there ever a time (perhaps now) when you were extravagant in your expression of gratitude to God?