

Wise And Foolish Men!

Our Text: **Matthew 2:1-12** *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, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

As we have been looking at the Gospel of Matthew for the past two weeks we have seen that Matthew has given us evidences of the legitimacy of Jesus absolute royal right to the throne of David:

- We saw the evidence of Jesus’ royal genealogy and
- We also saw evidence of His virgin birth
- Now we will see the testimony of the magi, who came to give homage and gifts to the infant Jesus
- We will also see evidence of Christ’s kingship is shown in the hatred of Herod.
- And next week we will focus on the evidence of Christ’s kingship given in second half of chapter 2 presented through four fulfilled messianic prophecies. (there are over 300 of them in actuality {near 330})
- Some three hundred thirty Old Testament predictions concern Jesus Christ. In chapter 2 Matthew points out four of those prophecies that were fulfilled during Jesus’ infancy. There is no reasonable possibility that even those four—much less all three hundred thirty—could have been fulfilled accidentally in the life of a single individual. That fact in itself is overwhelming evidence of God’s sovereign control of history and of the utter reliability of His Word.

Let’s pick it up here:

Wise Men Want To See The King!

Matthew 2:1-2 *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, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

The first thing we want to notice is that months have probably gone by between Jesus birth and when the Wise men arrived. How do we know that? Let's take a peek ahead at verse 11:

Matthew 2:11 *And **when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child** with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

This links many facts to this story:

- The Wise Men saw Jesus at a house, not at a stable. (it was the shepherds who saw Him in the manger)

Luke 2:8-16 *Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. **For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.**"*

_____And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

*So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." **And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.***

- Also, Jesus, therefore, would already have been circumcised
- Mary would have completed her time of purification (Luke 2:21–27).
- The fact that she offered "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24) instead of the normal lamb (according to Leviticus 12:6–8) indicates that the family was still poor. Had this offering been made after the magi gave their expensive gifts (Matthew 2:11) when they visited Jesus, the lamb could easily have been afforded and would have been required.

Bethlehem was a small town five or six miles south of Jerusalem, in the fertile hill country of Judea (Judah). It is cradled between two ridges and was located along the main ancient highway from Jerusalem to Egypt. It was once called Ephrath, or Ephrathah, but the town came to be called Bethlehem after the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, its new name meaning "house of bread."

- It was at Bethlehem that Jacob buried Rachel (Gen. 35:19)
- It was also here that Ruth met and married Boaz (Ruth 1:22; 2:4)
- It was also here that David, grew up and tended sheep (1 Sam. 17:12,15).
- In fact, by the time of Jesus' birth, it was often called "the city of David" (Luke 2:4,11).
- And, the prophet Micah specifically promised that the Messiah would come from this small village:

Micah 5:2 *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."*

There was also Herod. Because he was not Jewish, but Idumean (Edomite), Herod married Mariamne, heiress to the Jewish Hasmonean house, in order to make himself more acceptable to the Jews he now ruled. He was a clever and capable warrior, orator, and diplomat. But Herod was also cruel and merciless. He was incredibly jealous, suspicious, and afraid for his position and power. (*we will see this in a few minutes*)

Also notice the magi:

Wise Men = μάγος *magos* = *A sage. Wise man. Magi.*

Notice a few old wives tales are dispelled right away:

- We have no idea how many wise men were there. (we see in verse 11 they present three gifts to Jesus, but there is no record of how many of them were there)
- We have no idea their names
- We do not know how they came (it seems everybody has them riding camels)
- They were from the east (the Orient)
- They saw a star and followed it (this was NOT a natural phenomena as the star moved and guided them to Jesus)

Let's continue . . .

A Foolish Man Wants To See Him Too!

Matthew 2:3-8 *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.*

So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel." "

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

Since the magi were out and about and asking where Jesus, "the King of the Jews" was, Herod eventually got wind of this.

Notice the response for Herod was exactly the opposite of the magi:

• The Magi wanted to Worship:

Matthew 2:10 *When they saw the star, **they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.***

Rejoiced = χαίρω *chairō* = *To proclaim that the heart is full of gladness.*

• Herod was Troubled:

Matthew 2:3 *When Herod the king heard this, **he was troubled**, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Troubled = ταρασσω *tarassō* = *To be agitated like water. To be terrified and full of anxiety.*

Because of Herod's intense jealousy and paranoia, any mention of another king of the Jews sent him into a frenzy of fear and anger.

How do we respond to the Name of Jesus? Does it cause us to want to come and rejoice? Or, does it agitate us inside? This all depends on who is on the throne in our own minds . . . Jesus or ourselves!

Notice . . . Not only was Herod bothered, but according to verse 3, all of Jerusalem was bothered with him. The people knew that Herod's agitation usually meant maniacal bloodshed! He did not bother to identify his enemies carefully. The people's fear for their own safety was well founded:

Matthew 2:16 ***Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.***

Herod feared for the throne, which was not really his, and Jerusalem knew what Herod's fear meant. It meant rebellion, bloodshed, and terrible suffering.

But first, Herod was going to try to play it cool. He called the chief priests and scribes together for a meeting:

Chief Priests = ἀρχιερεῖς *archiereus* = *The religious leaders.*

Scribes = γραμματεῖς *grammateus* = *The historical recorders. The intellectual leaders.*

They then were going to share with him the prophecy of the verse we looked at earlier in the book of Micah:

Micah 5:2 ***“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”***

After Herod received the information he wanted from the Jewish leaders, he secretly called the magi, and asked them at what time had the star appeared? Notice his concern was for the time of the star's appearance, not its meaning or significance. It was enough for him to know only that the sign pointed to the birth of someone who could be a threat to his own power and position.

Herod then instructed the magi to proceed with their mission and then report their findings to him as they returned home. Since he was a liar and a hypocrite, he gave them a good sounding reason for wanting to know the exact location and identity of the Child . . . *“in order that I too may come and worship Him.”* However, his true intentions, of course, were made clear by what he actually did later.

But God was not going to let the foolish Herod have his way . . .

The Wise Men Find Jesus!

Matthew 2:9-12 *When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

- Once again, some suggest that it was Jupiter, the “king of the planets.”
- Others claim that it was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, forming the sign of the fish—which was used as a symbol for Christianity in the early church during the Roman persecutions.
- Still others claim that it was a low-hanging meteor, an erratic comet, or simply an inner vision of the star of destiny in the hearts of mankind.

There are problems with all of these views and since the Bible does not identify or explain the star, we cannot be dogmatic, but I believe it was probably the Shekinah glory of the Lord!

Shekinah is derived from a Hebrew verb. In Biblical Hebrew that Semitic root means literally *to settle, inhabit, or dwell*,

Exodus 40:34-38 *Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.*

This would be consistent with the same glory that shone around the shepherds when Jesus’ birth was announced to them by the angel:

Luke 2:9 *And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and **the glory of the Lord shone around them**, and they were greatly afraid.*

Throughout the Old Testament we are told of God’s glory in presence being manifested as light, God radiating His presence (*Shekinah*) in the form of ineffable light:

Exodus 13:21 *And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a **pillar of fire to give them light**, so as to go by day and night.*

Exodus 24:17 *The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.*

Exodus 34:29-30 *Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses’ hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that **the skin of his face shone** while he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel **saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone**, and they were afraid to come near him.*

When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John:

Matthew 17:1-2 *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and **He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.***

On the Damascus road, just before Jesus spoke to him, Saul of Tarsus was surrounded:

Acts 9:3 *As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and **suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.***

He later explained:

Acts 26:12-13 *“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road **I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.***

In John’s first vision on the Island of Patmos:

Revelation 1:16 *He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and **His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.***

In his vision of the New Jerusalem:

Revelation 21:22-23 *But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. **The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.***

Very early in the Old Testament the Messiah is spoken of as a “star”:

Numbers 24:17 *“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; **A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.***

At the end of the New Testament He refers to Himself:

Revelation 22:16 *“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. **I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.**”*

I believe the Shekinah glory of God had led men who wanted to worship the Lord, and stood over Bethlehem just as, centuries before, it had led men and stood over the Tabernacle in the wilderness. And just as the pillar of cloud gave light to Israel but darkness to Egypt, only the eyes of the magi were opened to see God’s great light over Bethlehem.

Then the magi worshipped Jesus (note they did not worship Mary or Joseph):

Worship = προσκυνέω *proskyneō* = *To adore and bow one’s self in adoration.*

The word worship is full of meaning, expressing the idea of falling down, prostrating oneself, and kissing the feet or the hem of the garment of the one honored.

Their giving was not so much an addition to their worship as an element of it. The gifts were an expression of worship, given out of the overflow of adoring and grateful hearts.

It should be the same with us . . . Right worship is always, and must be, the only basis for right giving and right learning and right service.

- Giving that is generous but done apart from a loving relationship with God is empty giving.
- Learning that is orthodox and biblical but is learned apart from knowing and depending on the Source of truth, is empty knowledge, like that of the chief priests and scribes.
- Service that is demanding and sacrificial but done in the power of the flesh or for the praise of men is empty service.

- **Gold was a symbol of nobility and royalty.** (see Genesis 41:4; 1 Kings 10:1–13). Matthew continually presents Christ as the King, and here we see the King of the Jews, the King of kings, appropriately being presented with royal gifts of gold.

- **Frankincense was a symbol of Jesus Deity.** It was a costly, beautiful-smelling incense that was used only for the most special of occasions. It was used in the grain offerings at the Tabernacle and Temple (Leviticus 2:2–16), and in certain royal processions (Song of Solomon 3:6–7), and sometimes at weddings if it could be afforded.

(Origen, the great church Father, suggested that frankincense was the incense of deity. In the Old Testament it was stored in a special chamber in front of the Temple and was sprinkled on certain offerings as a symbol of the people's desire to please the Lord.)

- **Myrrh was a symbol of Jesus Beautiful Humanity.** It was also a perfume, not quite so expensive as frankincense but nevertheless valuable. Some interpreters suggest that myrrh represents the gift for a mortal, emphasizing Jesus' humanity as it was mixed with other spices it was used in preparation of bodies for burial, even Jesus' body (John 19:39).

Have we visited and worshipped Jesus today?

- Have we recognized His Royalty and seat on the throne of our lives?
- Have we understood His Deity and that God has come and dwelt among us?
- Have we come to grips with His Humanity and understood that He took on a body of flesh to die for us?

Have we received the gift of Jesus?