

EPIPHANY 2022

1. Wise Men Worship Jesus as King

Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany is a season in the liturgical calendar of the church that centers on the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world as the Son of God. The first Sunday following Christmas is sometimes called **Three Kings' Day** because it centers on the event recorded in [Matthew 2:1-12](#).

In Matthew 2 we're given the account of an event that is commonly associated with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but really is not. Yet it does find a home in the record of the coming of Jesus into world. If the story of the birth of Jesus was a sentence, the coming of the wise men is the exclamation point of the sentence — because they came to worship the one who was *born king of the Jews*.

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, 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.

Let's walk through this:

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

Wise men is a translation of the Greek word *magi*, from which we get our English word magicians. These were not magicians, they were scholars who studied the stars — ancient astronomers. It is very possible that they were from the area of Babylon.

In the Old Testament there is a very enigmatic character by the name of Balaam. Balak, the paranoid king of Moab hired Balaam to pronounce a curse upon the Israelites. Balaam was from Peor, which was by the Euphrates River, which was near Babylon. Every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse the Israelites the Holy Spirit came on him and he blessed them instead. In the last of his prophetic declarations he said this —

Numbers 24:17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

It's interesting that some believe that these *magi* came to know about messianic prophecy because of the godly influence that Daniel had in the courts of Babylon and the Medo-Persian empire during his captivity, particularly concerning matters of Israel and prophecy.

HERE'S THE BIG IDEA — God met these men right where they were. These men were watchers of the stars — God used a star to call them. **That's** the way God works! Some thirty years later this little boy in Bethlehem would step into the lives of some Galilean fishermen by means of a great catch of fish. It would be by means of that amazing catch of fish that Jesus would call them to become fishers of men. For a star-gazer, a star; for a fisherman, a fish. God, who is the master-fisherman, knows exactly how to fish in the

waters of each of our lives — exactly how to capture our hearts and bring each of us to Christ.

The Lord will often use our human vocation, or some human passion, as the very means by which He steps into our lives. If you are into sports, He might step into your life by means of a Christian team-mate, a Christian coach, or a Christian sports hero. It was in the coach's office where I was invited to meet the man who would lead me to Jesus. It was as a coach that I was disciplined by two guys from Athletes in Action. God used my position as a coach to speak to the lives of scores of young men.

God IS speaking! There are voices everywhere calling you to Christ. You don't need to go on some pilgrimage to find His everlasting mercy.

A star was an unlikely thing to lead these men to Jesus, but an *infinitely wise* God *knew* that it was the *best way* to bring these star-gazers to His Son! It may seem that your job is an unlikely thing to bring you to Jesus, yet the Lord might use it to lead you to Jesus.

I pray that the Holy Spirit would turn your favorite *pursuits* into *opportunities* for God to bring you to Jesus. Maybe for you it isn't star-gazing. Maybe for you it will be in the garden, the mountains, or the beach. I pray that the Holy Spirit would show you how your favorite *pursuits* or your *profession* can become *opportunities* for the Lord to use you in bringing another to Christ. YOU might be their star.

Daniel 12:3 *And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

¹.... behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"

SEVERAL THINGS FOR US HERE —

1. When these *magi* came to Jerusalem they didn't say, ***Is there a king born here? Has this happened?*** There was no doubt in their mind. They say simply, *Where is he? Where is the King of the Jews?*

By the way — this is the first question of the New Testament. God is so amazing in regards to the detail of his Word. Not just in the exactness and the fact of it. But it is *mystically* beautiful in many ways. Here is the first question of the New Testament, *where is he that is born King of the Jews.* What a great question to start the New Testament with.

2. Jesus wasn't born to *become king* — He was "*born king.*" He has forever been King of heaven, sovereign of the universe. He was the creator and King of the nation of Israel. In an act of infinite, incomprehensible condescension, Jesus left His throne in heaven — but not to be in a palace or to sit on a throne. Instead He was born in a back alley of 1st century Bethlehem — wrapped in strips of cloth — was laid in a stone feeding trough — grew up in a town that was essentially voted worse place to live in Israel — and inaugurated His Kingdom from a Roman cross! Jesus is a King unlike any other kings — and that's why His Kingdom is unlike any other kingdom!

3. Most people think that there were **three** wise men. We've grown up thinking that there were three wise men because of the three gifts that they presented.

These were men of wealth; they were scholars—scientists in their own right. There is no evidence that men of this stature would have ever traveled alone on a journey this long. They would have traveled with an entourage of aids and servants. Think of a scientific expedition — interns and aids carrying everything necessary for the expedition. Three men didn't show up in Jerusalem — a caravan pulled into town — a caravan large enough to trouble the whole city. Many scholars feel their may have been upwards of a hundred people in this troop.

1.... wise men from the east came to Jerusalem..... 2 For we saw his star when it rose

These men traveled from afar — they knew that this astronomical phenomenon would take them to one who would be born

² For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

They understood that this star would take them to someone who was more than a geopolitical ruler. It would take them to someone worthy of their worship.

There are a lot of brilliant minds in this world; people who have made tremendous scientific discoveries; people who have been able to open up amazing scientific realms. But here's what made these wise men really wise: They **pursued Jesus** despite all of the inherent uncertainties (how far would this journey be/how long would it take to find this King). They **pursued Jesus** at great cost in time and money.

HERE'S THE POINT — Getting close to Jesus was more important to them than the astronomical phenomenon. Getting close to this one born a king was more important than anything else; worshipping Him was more important than anything or anyone.

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.' "

DON'T MISS THIS — **In one way**, there's something very wrong with this picture. Herod gathers the religious leaders of Israel to essentially ask them if these guys are National Enquirer astrology nuts or if they're legitimate. They affirmed that the birth of the Messiah was promised to be in Bethlehem. Then — they quote chapter and verse! Then — the religious leaders did.... NOTHING!

By contrast — these wise men weren't descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were strangers to the covenants and promises that God had made with Israel. They were pagan men from a pagan land. The chief priests and scribes of Israel believed that these men (and all gentiles) were actually made by God to fuel the fires of hell. Yet these gentile men were on a mission to find the Messiah of Israel — they diligently exerted themselves in responding to the light that God had given them, and they would stop at nothing, they would travel wherever that star led them, to worship Him and bring gifts to Him!

I have seen this tragic contrast so many times over my years in ministry. There are so many who have been raised around church, who have been given tremendous light in the Scriptures, who can quote chapter and verse about Him, yet they have little desire to seek Jesus — walk in the way of Jesus — or pour out their time, talents and treasures in worshipping Jesus.

By contrast — there are those who have been raised in the most godless of environments, who knew nothing of Jesus or the Bible; and when God *shined into their hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus* they would do anything to seek Him — know Him — love Him — follow Him — worship Him — serve Him. They lavish upon Jesus the treasures of their time, talents and treasures. Getting closer to Jesus is more important to them than anything else. They are the first in the door for Bible study and the last to leave. They are the ones singing the loudest, serving the most. Whatever they do, it's to Jesus and for Jesus. Wherever they are, whatever they're doing, it's where they want to meet Jesus (home, school, family, recreation). They can't stop telling others about the one *"born King of the Jews!"*

So there is one way in which something is very wrong with that picture. But there is another way in which this picture is so beautifully right! It is so beautiful and so right to see **these** men — these non-Jewish men — seeking after Jesus because from the very beginning, Jesus came to be *"the Savior of the world"* (John 4:42).

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

It was probably at least two years earlier because Herod is going to order that all the male children of Bethlehem from two years old and younger be murdered.

So these men have been following this star from quite a while; which by the way — should encourage us concerning the ways of God in the saving of souls. From our side of heaven it “seems” that some come to meet Jesus almost instantly. It “seems” that way because we don't know what God has been doing throughout their life in bringing them to the moment they would meet Jesus. But there are those who God brings Gospel light to over a long period of time before they meet Jesus.

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.”

Herod was a wicked and deceitful man who would let no one, not even his own family, challenge his reign as king or prevent him from satisfying his fallen desires and passions. He ruthlessly defended his title as king — even to the point of murdering his own wife and sons because he believed they posed a threat to his crown! He was married at least nine times in order to fulfill his lusts and strengthen his political ties. It is no surprise that Herod was willing to slaughter innocent infants and toddlers so he might kill Jesus — because Herod alone wanted to bear the title “King of the Jews.”

What a radical picture of the real issue of salvation. The real issue of salvation is this — **Who will be king of our lives?** There are those who are driven — figuratively speaking — to kill anything that threatens their position as self-appointed sovereign. They terminate friendships that present Jesus as King. They terminate any sources of input that present Jesus as King. By contrast — the way to salvation is to pronounce the death sentence on your *Kingdom of One* — renounce your position as king in your *Kingdom of One* and bow the knee to King Jesus.

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.

The wise men didn't visit Jesus in the manger at the event of His birth. They met Jesus in a house when He was about 2 years old. So next Christmas, if you set up a nativity scene in your front yard, ask someone a few blocks from your house if you can put the wise men on their lawn because they were only on their way when Jesus was born!

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

This brings us back to what we learned in our mini-series that dealt with the Dynamic Range of Praise, Worship and Lament.

Introverts, too-cool-for-school young adults — too old to be cool adults — those who fancy themselves as cerebral theologians, and even those who are real intellectuals; whatever demographic you identify with in the church, there is no excuse for why there is no expression of joy in our life or in corporate worship. Some say, *Well that's just who I am!* Others say, *I'm a private-keep-to myself kind of a person;* or *My tribe just doesn't do worship like that.* News flash — Jesus didn't save you to leave you that way!

QUOTE: Paul Tripp — *The birth of Jesus is a radical visible announcement. God's not satisfied to leave us the way we are and we should not be either.*

You can't meet Jesus and not change. If you haven't changed, you haven't met the real Jesus.

Who Jesus **is** and what Jesus has **done** should cause **everyone** who has met Jesus to rejoice exceedingly! (What is it when after a song Jesus gets a little “gallery clap”?)

¹¹And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.

Worship = proskuneo. The prefix, pros = to be with face to face (John 1:1). The suffix, kuneo = to kiss. To face with the intention of kissing.

QUOTE: A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (BDAG) — to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (*fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to.....*¹

FIRST — Their actions are the result of a right appraisal of Jesus. They understood the concept of bowing before royalty. They had no doubt bowed before royalty in the east.

SECOND — These men knew way less about Jesus than we know about Jesus — yet they fell down and worshiped Him. They fell down and worshipped Jesus before Jesus had even preached a sermon, performed a miracle, cast out a demon, or died for our sins, and rose from the grave.

CHRISTIANS — We live out our Christianity from a position of tremendous privilege. We have the canon of Scripture containing the glorious record of the Gospel (all that God has done in the sending of Jesus to save us and place us in His Kingdom). We have centuries of great preaching that have unpacked for us the glory of the Gospel.

THIRD — Relate to expressing worship corporately and personally. The reality of “falling on our faces, bowing before Jesus!

FOURTH — Our lives should be lived from *that* posture of heart. Our lives should be lived from proskuneo. We should live out our marriages, our family life, our school/work, our free time, as an expression of proskuneo.

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.

¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (882). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

FIRST — Gold was the metal of kings; frankincense is a picture of prayers of intercession rising before God and myrrh was used for embalming. These gifts tell us that Jesus is our **King**, our **great high priest**, and **the sacrifice** for our sin

THIS IS HUGE — Our lives are **defined by**, our **identity** is **rooted in** the fact that Jesus is our King; the fact that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us; the fact that Jesus is the One who died in our place for our sins.

We need to **know** that Jesus is our King — the one who ever lives to make intercession for us — and the one who died in our place for our sins.

We should **relate to** Jesus as our King — as the one who ever lives to make intercession for us, the one who died in our place for our sins.

We're to **live as though** Jesus is our King — the one who ever lives to make intercession for us — and the one who died in our place for our sins.

SECOND — The wise men set an amazing example of worship. These men worshipped Jesus, not only in posture (bowed before); they brought gifts to Jesus! They ***opened their treasures*** — treasures that required a caravan to carry and guard — they worshipped Jesus with their treasure.

We're to worship Jesus, not only in posture; we're to ***open our treasures*** and bring gifts to Jesus from our treasures so that Jesus might be known as King, as the one who is for us in every situation, as the one and only sacrifice for sin. God doesn't "need" our gifts. God doesn't want our gifts to add to His portfolio. But He does receive them from us as an expression of worship and He uses them in His economy in making the name of Jesus great in the saving of souls and the making of disciples.

Think about this. We know Joseph and Mary were really poor. We know that because when Joseph and Mary went up to the temple in Jerusalem to

dedicate Jesus eight days after His birth, Luke tells us they brought an offering of turtledoves. The Law of Moses said that if the family could not afford a lamb they could offer the turtledove in the place of the lamb. The offering of Joseph and Mary was the offering of those in poverty.

In just a bit Joseph and Mary are going to receive word from Gabriel to take Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's slaughter of every male child two years old and younger. The gifts these men brought to Jesus would essentially underwrite their trip to Egypt and support them while they were there.

The self-existent, self-sufficient God didn't "need" their gifts. But it pleased Him to use their gifts in the human economy of the mission of Jesus.

That is the way God works. He does the same with the gifts we bring to Jesus. There is an economy on the human level in the advancing of the Gospel — in the building up of the Body of Christ (Rent — providing salaries for those serving full time — technology and media to get the Word of God out as much, as often and in as many ways possible).

We bring gifts of our time, talent and treasures to Jesus as an expression of worship. God uses the gifts we bring to Jesus in the mission of the church to make the name of Jesus known and make the name of Jesus great!

CLOSE WITH TWO THOUGHTS

FIRST — Imagine the expectations of these wise men when they first saw this astronomical phenomenon. They no doubt wondered, *What kind of majestic king must this be to have his birth announced by the stars?* They had seen palaces and kings — but surely, the regal splendor of *this* king would be beyond anything they had ever seen. Imagine their shock when the star led them, not to a magnificent city, but to the town of Bethlehem; not to a palace, but to the house of a young couple and their toddler boy, living in poverty.

But here's the deal — Hope for fallen man; hope for you and me, has come in the most unexpected form — two unremarkable people living in poverty

with a baby named Jesus. The wise men were wise because they were willing to accept Jesus even though He didn't fit any of their expectations.

Becoming a Christian means that you lay aside every preconception and misconception you have about Jesus and acknowledge Him as the rightful king of your life, worthy of your worship.

SECOND — For far too many men and women, young and old, Christianity is a very man-centered, me-centered thing. It's all about them. Christianity for them is essentially a commodity, a consumer good — that will meet their perceived needs. For them, the local church is the thing that will deliver the goods that they believe will meet their needs — and thus they float from church to church looking for the best “delivery system” of the thing, or things, they believe will meet their great need.

WRONG! These wise men tell us that Christianity is not a consumer good. These wise men tell us that Christianity is in its very essence all about Jesus. These wise men tell us that Jesus is of infinite worth. He does not earn the right to be king of our life — He is by nature our king.

This morning He wants to rule from the throne of your heart. Don't think your heart is unfit to be the throne for Jesus to rule and reign from. In His first coming He was found in an animal's feeding trough.

These wise men tell us that Jesus is worthy of our every effort to seek Him, know Him, love Him, worship Him, and serve Him. He is worthy of each of us opening our treasures for Him and lavishing upon Jesus our time, our talents and our treasures.

But all of that begins with acknowledging Jesus as the rightful King of your life. King by way of creation; King by way of redemption.

NEXT WEEK: We are going to see what happened when Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38). We're going to meet a man named Simeon and a woman named Anna.