

Wise Men Still Seek Him

Matthew 2:1-23

August 1, 2010

Intro

It might seem a little out of place to be in the middle of summer and studying about the visit of the Magi in Bethlehem as they were seeking the King of the Jews, but it's actually very appropriate timing. This is because all of our nativity sets are incorrect. The common arrangement is for Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, farm animals, and the wise men all to be around the baby Jesus as he lay in the manger, just hours after his birth.

But the wise men came from the East a long distance of perhaps 900 miles or more and with a large group of people, which would have been the only way to travel safely in those days, and it would have been many months before they arrived in Israel. And in fact it tells us that they visited Jesus at "the house," which clearly suggests they were not still living with the animals by the time the wise men arrived.

Therefore, they probably arrived at just this time of year. Well, at least this is as good of an estimate as any other.

This is an interesting part of the story of Jesus and Matthew makes a point of showing us how these events are the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.

There are three different groups of people in the story and each of them become instructive for us in regard to our own relationship to him as well. It's important for us also to understand that the king they were seeking is the same in our lives as well. How we respond will reveal our heart just as it revealed each of theirs.

I. Pay Homage to the King

- It wasn't enough for the Magi to simply discern that the King of the Jews had been born in Israel, once that truth has been revealed to them, and they knew that the great King was born, they knew that they must seek him.
- But they wanted to do more than simply find him; they wanted to pay homage. That means they wanted to recognize who he was by giving him gifts and by humbling themselves before him.
- But God also used the Magi to announce his presence to the world; for once it was known that the King of the Jews has been born in Israel, each person must decide how they will respond.

A. Come to worship Him

- It would appear from a straightforward reading of the text that the Magi were expecting the birth of the King of the Jews to be well-known.
- You can imagine what a stir this entourage from Persia who were seeking the King of the Jews would've caused.
- But they made their purpose clear, they came to worship Him.
- The Lord's working through these men is a fascinating part of this story. You can see the sovereign hand of the Lord all through it. God had prepared for them to learn of the King many centuries before this, and then would use the Magi as an announcement that the King was born in Israel.

- Many scholars believe that these men would have come from Persia or Babylon where there had been several great prophets of the Jews and who had foretold of the Great Son of Man who would reign forever.

Daniel 7:13-14 That all nations and peoples will serve Him.

- The prophecies of Daniel spoke of terrible kings and powerful nations, but he also spoke of one who would come that would make an end to sin and would give the kingdom to His own people.

Daniel 7:27, “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

- Even the prophecies of Balaam foretold that a star would come forth out of Israel that would be mighty in power.

Numbers 24:17, “A star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel...”

- And their response is the correct one, “We have come to worship him.” This is what the apostle Matthew meant when he spoke of the Rock of Israel.

Matthew 21:44, “And he who falls on the stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter them like dust.”

B. Give the gift of highest honor

- If the Magi recognized that there would be a King born to the Jews who would bring peace to mankind and would be King over all other kings, then they would bring gifts appropriate to the degree of His honor.

- I am convinced that these gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh are small tokens in comparison to their wealth. They were, however, very appropriate gifts that would recognize the purpose for which He came.

➤ **Gold; for a king**

- **Frankincense; and expensive element of the priest’s incense and anointing oil. It is obtained by slashing the Boswellia tree and allowing the resin to bleed out into tears. The tree has the unusual ability to grow on solid stone.**

- **Myrrh; gathered from the cuts of Myrrh tree, used in embalming, mixed with wine it was offered to Jesus on the cross (but refused), was used in anointing His body after death. This gift recognizes His death, which was the reason He came.**

- But in coming so far and then falling down and worshiping him they give him the greatest honor of all.

- Even when coming to God many people don't understand what it means to truly recognize his authority in their lives. They want God on their terms, but God doesn't do terms.

Illus - Do we say, “This is the way I want God to be! I want him to make my life easier, I want him to bless me with great prosperity, I want him to keep me from all sickness and diseases, and I want him to honor me as a faithful servant of the Most High God.”

Or do we say, “Lord, I recognize that your ways are higher than my ways, I humbly bow myself before you, teach me to walk as your Word instructs me to walk.”

Luke 6:46-47, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like:”

C. Obedience is also worship

- One of the other people that is central to the story is Joseph.
- After the Magi had departed, he was warned in a dream that he should immediately flee to Egypt. The point is; he did it. You can almost hear him say, “If that's what God wants me to do, I will immediately follow his Word in my life.”
- Then later, after the death of Herod, Joseph was again instructed in a dream to go back to Israel.

Illus – Jesus would have been 4 or 5 years old at that time. It would have been an amazing trip with Jesus coming out of Egypt taking a leisurely walk to Israel. Would have asked “why” 100 times?

- Then, in verse 22, he was warned by God in another dream not to go to Judea, which is how he came to Nazareth. He seems to have the

ministry of sleep. That would be an interesting ministry. The point is, however, when God gave his Word, Joseph listened. That is itself worship.

Philippians 2:8-9, Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name...

II. He Will Reveal the Hearts of Many

- God uses the Magi to announce the birth of God's Messiah to the world. But people respond very differently to the news. For the Magi, it revealed their earnest desire to seek God and to understand what God was doing in the world.
- But the reaction of King Herod was very different. The reaction of the Pharisees was also interesting and very instructive for each of us.
- In fact, in the book of Luke, this very thing was spoken of him...

Luke 2:34-35, And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed-- and a sword will pierce even your own soul-- to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

A. Fear is a terrible way to live

- One of the key figures in the story is Herod the king. When he heard that the Magi were seeking for the one who was born King of the Jews, he was greatly troubled by it, and all Jerusalem with him.

- We know a lot about Herod. He was given the title “King of the Jews,” himself, but he wasn't a Jew. His father was personal friends with Julius Caesar and because of his family's personal relationship he was given the title of King of the Jews. But the Jews wouldn't let him into the Jewish portion of the Temple, even though he was the one who had rebuilt it.
- But we also know that he was driven by fear and insecurity. He had his own mother and mother-in-law killed, he had his eldest son and two other sons killed. In fact, Caesar Augustus said of him, “it's safer to be Herod's pig than his son.”

Illus - when he was near death, he ordered the most illustrious men of the whole Jewish nation to be imprisoned in Jericho and commanded his sister Salome to have them executed upon his death so that there would be mourning when he died. Fortunately, they didn't do what Herod asked.

- When Archelaus, Herod's son, reigned after him, he also was cruel and hateful. He hated his father and so he became the thing that he hated.

Illus – Joseph is an example of a man who was treated poorly and did not hate. He loved God and so he became an example of the truth that you also become like that which you love.

B. Indifference is passive rebellion

- The Magi arrived in Jerusalem with a great entourage asking to see He who has been born King of the Jews, the Jewish leaders are asked to inquire of the Scriptures where the Messiah was

to be born. They knew the answer, “In Bethlehem of Judea.”

- Wouldn't you think that they would at least make the 7 mile walk to Bethlehem and see for themselves?
- They were in the religion business and wanted nothing to do with spiritual reality.
- They knew the scriptures, but they didn't understand them and they certainly didn't recognize the power of God.

Matthew 22:29, But Jesus answered them and said to them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the scriptures nor the power of God.”

Illus – When Pastor George was here from Nairobi he asked me if I could have done something else other than being a pastor. “I said yes, I was in business.” He said, “Many in Africa become pastors because it's a way to have a job, but their hearts are not after God.”

- Passive rebellion is when someone conforms on the outside, but is inwardly hard of heart. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were examples of what God does not want us to be.

Joel 2:13, And rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness.

- Rend your heart on the inside and then what God wants to change on the outside will follow.