

# "THE MESSIAH AND THE MAGI" Matthew 2:1-12

Christmas is almost here. It's certainly an exciting time of the year. Rip off the colorful wrapping paper and the bright bows and what do you have? I think you might be left with a view of Christmas that matches the description that Matthew recorded in his gospel account.

Keep in mind that Matthew wrote primarily to a Jewish audience, so he presented Jesus as Israel's Messiah and their rightful King. To make his case, the Holy Spirit inspired him to sprinkle in fulfilled O.T. prophecies throughout his gospel account.

In chapters 1-2, he weaves in the story of Joseph as it relates to the glorious incarnation of Jesus. In seeking to describe the indescribable, I misspoke last week when I said that the Holy Spirit placed

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the embryo of God's eternal Son in the womb of the virgin Mary. Listen to J.C. Ryle's words . . .

**Let us not attempt to explain things which are above our feeble reason. Let us be content to believe with reverence and not speculate about matters which we cannot understand. Enough for us to know that with him who made the world nothing is impossible. Let us rest in the words of the Apostle's Creed: "Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the virgin Mary."** (J.C. Ryle, Expository thoughts on the Gospels: Matthew, p.9)

With that simple and vital truth rooted in our minds, let's move into the story of "*THE MESSIAH AND THE MAGI.*"

**Matthew 2:1-2... Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."**

Our entire text narrates events in Bethlehem and nearby Jerusalem which was about 5 miles to the south. Bethlehem ("House of Bread") was the birthplace of King David. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who would eventually state that HE WAS THE BREAD OF LIFE (John 6:35) was born in THE HOUSE OF BREAD!

**Herod the king** had been appointed by the Roman government in 40 BC, and he was extremely insecure and paranoid about any threats to his position and power.

**The Magi** were not kings, and we're not given their names. They carried out both political and religious roles and were figures of some prominence in the land of Persia or Babylon. God used their astronomical observation with astrological speculation to reveal to them that the KING OF THE JEWS had been born in Israel and to lead them to Jerusalem initially.

Look carefully at verse 2—"**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?**" This sentence is the

only words the Magi uttered in Matthew's gospel. The words they used mean "BORN KING" not "born to be king." They focused on who He is, not what He would become. These men came to worship the King!

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

Needless to say, Herod was "troubled." That is, he was "in turmoil", even "terrified" by this potential threat to his power and position. He was not alone.

"All Jerusalem" refers to the religious leaders of Israel. Many of them had been personally installed by Herod, therefore what affected him affected them. The rejection of Jesus by Jerusalem foreshadows his similar fate at the end of his life.<sup>1</sup> Herod and the religious leaders were more interested in saving their positions and

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 63.

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power than they were in the salvation of their souls! F.F. Bruce stated the obvious . . .

**The main purpose is to show the reception given by the world to the new-born Messianic King. Homage from afar, hostility at home; foreshadowing the fortunes of the new faith: reception by the Gentiles, rejection by the Jews.<sup>2</sup>**

**Matthew 2:4... Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.**

Surely these religious leaders would know where the Messiah would be born and they did. Here is one of those times where Matthew refers to an O.T. prophecy written by the prophet Micah approximately 700 years before the birth of Messiah. . .

**Matthew 2:5-6... They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the**

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<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, [\*Word Pictures in the New Testament\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Mt 2:1.

**prophet: 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' "**

This showed that the religious leader's failure to believe was not due to ignorance. They knew precisely where Messiah the anointed King would be born, however it was the Gentiles who made a long, arduous journey to worship Him.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew's quotation of Micah's prophecy reveals another aspect of the work of the royal Messiah. He will not only rule but also **"shepherd"** the people of Israel.

**John 10:11...** "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

**1 Peter 2:25...** For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, [\*The Gospel according to Matthew\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 38.

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returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

**Revelation 7:17**... for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

**Matthew 2:7-8**... Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."

The end of v. 8 is therefore a bold-faced lie; Herod had no intentions of worshiping the one born King of the Jews.

**Matthew 2:9-10**... After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

The Magi recognized divine guidance when they saw it. They were filled with exceedingly great joy. Jesus, now about 2 years old, was born in obscurity was recognized by Gentile wise men as the promised Messiah, the King of Israel.

**Matthew 2:11... After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

Matthew was not interested in how many wise men there were, the length of their journey, or the star. Every time he mentions the mother (Joseph is not even mentioned here) and her child Jesus is referred to first (13, 14, 20, 21). Matthew's main interest is Jesus. Furthermore, he was focused on the fact that Gentiles came to worship the Jewish Messiah. He was also focused on the significance of their gifts . . .

- **Gold for His royalty**
- **Frankincense for His deity**



- **Myrrh for His humanity.**<sup>4</sup>

Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote. . .

**We see from the symbolism of these gifts that the eternal royalty and holiness of Christ were announced from his earliest years. He had come forth from heaven to perform the work of redemption, and he was prepared in every way to do the Father's will.**

**Matthew 2:12... And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.**

They were instructed not to go back to Herod, and they were obedient to God. They went back home without reporting to Herod!

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [\*Matthew\*](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 36.

## CONCLUSION

We call them "*The Wise Men*." The story we've looked at today calls them "*The Magi*." I do think these men demonstrated great wisdom. Wisdom is learning how to succeed in life. It begins with God and one's faith in Him

**Job 28:28...** "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.' "

### GOD'S WISDOM LEADS TO TRUE SUCCESS!

These men were "*wise*" in the true sense of the word. Do your actions reveal the wisdom of God and the success God wants you have in life? Using the Magi as an example, here are 3 action steps you can take . . .

#### 1. SEARCH FOR THE LORD.

God revealed to these men that the King of the Jews had been born. Although they were far away

from Him, they spared no effort in going to Him.  
Are you wise enough to begin this search today?

**Jeremiah 29:13...** "You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart."

## **2. LEARN ABOUT THE LORD.**

The Magi were the intellectuals of their culture. Some in their position would have let pride stand in their way, not this group of men. They listened to the Word of God and discovered that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, not the palace and not the temple. What they learned was vital.

The Magi had to travel a long distance to find him, but you don't have to travel a long distance today. The Bible says. . .

**Romans 10:6–9...** But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down), **7**

or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." **8** But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, **9** that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

### **3. SURRENDER TO THE LORD.**

The Magi wanted to know about Jesus, but they were not interested in knowledge for knowledge sake. They knew when they found him that they would worship Him, give Him their gifts, and surrender their lives to Him!

The starting place is to pray: "Heavenly Father please lead me to Jesus. I admit that I do not even know what that may mean. But I do promise that if You reveal yourself to me, so that I discover Jesus as my own personal Lord and Savior, I will be yours forever, and I will follow you wherever you lead me."

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**What if you have already found him?** What if you have already become a Christian? If that is the case, offer him your gifts, as the Magi did. Offer him your gold, your incense, and your myrrh—the best that you have!