

## Matthew 2:1-12

"How Far Will YOU Go?"

Peter, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle speaks of the mind-blowing experience of spending time with Jesus. & It's almost as if he's acknowledging that the things he saw, the things that happened in his presence were so *fantastic*, so *extraordinary* that they would almost seem unbelievable had he not seen them for himself... & So he says things like, *"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."*<sup>1</sup>

He's saying, "Hey, we aren't telling you these things having been dragged along by some magical/mystical tale that someone just made up. (It wasn't 'once upon a time there was a man named Jesus.' No!) We reported that which we saw w/our eyes!" He said, "We saw Jesus transfigured before us on the holy mountain, we saw Him shining in glory, we heard the voice which came from heaven saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

But then he went on to say, "Yet there's a better witness, a more trustworthy source than even we are able to provide by reporting what we've seen w/our eyes... The more sure word of prophecy." *In other words, the bible (the scripture, the Word of God) is the only book that dares to stake it's validity, it's authenticity upon it's ability to give details of what's going to happen before it ever takes place w/100% accuracy & if it ever misses so much as one time, you can dismiss the entirety of it's content. Ladies & gentlemen the book of Mormon doesn't do that, the Koran doesn't do that.* There's no other book on the planet that will dare to prove itself as the authentic, unailing, infallible, inerrant word of God through prophecy... Yet God has said through the prophet Isaiah, *"Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'"*<sup>2</sup>

Family; only God knows the future. & He declares it to us in the past that He might assure us of Who He is, that it's His word spoken & that it's His work when it comes to pass, to show us that He's in control & working all things according to His will.

All throughout the book of Matthew we'll find him pointing to & showing the fulfillment of ancient prophecy by J.C. ... In Ch 1 we find the prophetic word fulfilled concerning *how* He was born, in Ch 2 we discover the word fulfilled of *where* he was born. Notice.

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Pe 1:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Is 46:9-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## Vs 1-2

When the curtain opens and the stage is set for Matt Ch 2, it would seem as though over a year, but less than 2 has passed since Ch 1 (we'll see how we can know that as the Ch unfolds).

In truth, when Jesus was born, apart from some small buzz by some shepherds, it was nothing more than an ordinary, uneventful night. They sought to spread the news, but there was no revival, no awakening, no seeking out of the Son of God... things just seemed to drone on, business as usual. Fast forward a year, maybe a year & ½, & suddenly some *Gentiles* show up on the scene & begin to stir things up.

Now there are a few things that we want to stop & consider right here in these 1<sup>st</sup> 2 Vs. #1, not to ruin your manger scene (but to ruin your manger scene), the wise men weren't there the night Jesus was born, as a matter of fact they weren't there the *month* that Jesus was born, they never made contact w/the shepherds, they never saw the manger, they showed up over a year later! (Or sometime relative to that)... So the next time you set up your manger scene, set the wise men out away from the manger as though they're still on their way if you want to be biblically accurate ☺. If you want to simply have a sentimental scene (no harm no foul) just put them all together.

But we're given a time marker here as for the relative time period of Jesus' birth. We're told that this happened in the days of Herod the king, this was Herod the great. Herod wasn't a Jew, he was an Edomite (he was from Esau, not Jacob) & on the one hand he was a genius & on the other hand he was a highly paranoid individual who bordered on insanity. He was really a puppet king appointed by the Roman Senate at the request of Mark Antony, but as I said he was brilliance & paranoia all wrapped up in one. He was a great builder, an incredible administrator, skilled in war... But very suspicious, he had his wife killed because he was suspicious of her, he had more than one son killed because he was worried about conspiracies, Emperor Augustus said that it was safer to be his sow (his pig) than his son. But he died around 4 BC. So that tells us that Jesus was born a year, maybe 2 before that (again we'll see that later on in the Ch [next week]).

Now the Jews couldn't stand him & he couldn't stand *that* so he sought to appease them w/all these great building projects, (including remodeling the temple), but the bottom line is that he had no legal right, no bloodline authority to be on the throne. That's why when these men show up asking about one who was "born" King of the Jews. It was troubling to him, one born of Jacob (he was born of Esau), one who rightly belonged to be on the throne would radically destabilize this already fragile political climate. (His job was in jeopardy).

Ok, let's talk about these "wise men", these "magi" for a moment. A # of things intrigue us about them. First of all we should note here that *Gentiles* are seeking the Lord, but the *Jews* are not, it's almost a foreshadowing of the entire life/ministry of Jesus. The Jews will show apathy/lethargy while Gentiles will seek Him diligently & desperately. Israel will reject Him, but Gentiles will receive Him.

These men (as we'll see) were wealthy, they were scholarly, scientists of their day (astronomers/astrologers) & in following the light that they'd been given & it led them straight to Jesus. Listen, any scholarly person who will follow the light that God gives them will find themselves (like these men) worshiping at the feet of Jesus. A true pursuit of wisdom, a true pursuit of knowledge will lead you to Jesus. The bible says that in Christ, **"...are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."**<sup>3</sup> A true, unbiased study of science won't lead you away *from* Jesus, won't lead you away *from* a Creator, it will demonstrate the reality of the Creator & will lead you *to* Jesus.

Btw, another thing that you should be aware of (as it pertains to your manger scene) is that nowhere in the bible are we told how many men made up the company of these "wise-men". The idea of 3 comes from the fact that there were 3 gifts presented. The truth of the matter is that there was probably a rather enormous company, a significant sized caravan. 3 men talking to Herod probably wouldn't have stirred him up too much, but a group of 300 would be a different story! Now I'm not saying there were 300, just that there's little doubt there were way more than 3. & They didn't *travel east*, they saw the star in the east (*they* were in the east), it led them *west*.

But here's the question; where were these guys from & what led them to believe something of such significance was happening in Israel that it caused them to travel hundreds of miles to the capital city of Jerusalem? Well, we can't know for sure where they were from because the bible simply doesn't say. However I think we do well to suspect that they may've been from *Babylon* & the seeds were planted to be looking for the supernatural coming of the King of Israel by another man who was in Babylon who was actually placed in charge *over* all the wise-men/Magi of that entire region some 5-600 yrs earlier by the name of... Daniel.

Perhaps you remember that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream & called all the wise men of Babylon to interpret it & none of them could.

<sup>3</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Col 2:3] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But God gave the interpretation to Daniel & so we read in Ch 2 of the book that bears his name, *"Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon."*<sup>4</sup>

Later on in Daniel (Ch7) we find that he himself has a vision, & He sees the Ancient of Days, one like the Son of Man coming w/the clouds of heaven & to Him was given dominion and glory & a kingdom; that all peoples, nations & languages should serve Him & His dominion would be an everlasting dominion.

So Daniel was planting these seeds, sharing his visions even then, they were to be looking for this coming One. He also shared w/them the exact time that He would come to Jerusalem in Dan Ch 9 (The date we refer to as the Triumphal Entry). **So there's little doubt that they were filled w/anticipation, looking for some sign that would lead them that way. But why was the star the sign they received? Couple plausible reasons. #1 They were astronomers, they studied the heavens & they knew when something was out of the ordinary (in that we can say that God met them where they were). #2 There was a prophecy given by Balaam in the book of Numbers that read like this, "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."**<sup>5</sup> "A Star" & "a Scepter". A Star in the area of Israel, the *scepter* speaking of a King. Now whether or not the star referenced in that Vs is a literal star, it's certainly how they would've interpreted it. **So they're reading the writings of Daniel, looking for a King who will rule the earth, they know His city will ultimately be Jerusalem & they're counting down the days of his prophecy. They're looking for a celestial sign that will accompany the One who's to wield the Scepter & then "Bam" they see a star appear in the heavens over the region of Israel & they caught the 1<sup>st</sup> camel out!**

Now listen, they traveled hundreds & hundreds of miles (took them months & months); not to get *from* the Lord, but to give *to* the Lord, not to *receive* but to *worship*. **I've known people who won't travel more than 10-15 miles in the comfort of a vehicle on smooth paved roads to go to church because it's inconvenient for them & these guys traveled in a caravan for hundreds of miles not in hopes of *getting* something, but because they wanted to *give* something. They didn't want to *consume* (what's in in for me) they wanted to *contribute*... They wanted to worship at the feet of the King.**

<sup>4</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Da 2:48]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Nu 24:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

How far will *you* go? How committed are you to worshipping your King? Are you out if it's inconvenient? Or committed no matter the cost? These guys weren't content to see the *star*; they were determined to see the "Son", & to worship Him.

Now evidently this star wasn't shining constantly, because they went to Jerusalem. Perhaps from the words of the prophecy of where the King would reign ultimately (Dan 9). Perhaps because they reasoned that if the news of the coming King were anywhere it would be there, we don't know. But they headed to Jerusalem to find out more. I mean surely the Jews would be aware & excited about the birth of their Messiah... but they would soon discover such was not the case at all...

P.S. I find it kind of interesting that they called Jesus, "The King of the Jews". Do you remember what Pilate placed on the sign above His head upon the cross? "The King of the Jews". This title sort of served as book ends to His life didn't it?

### Vs 3

Herod was troubled for obvious reasons... Let's not forget he was radically insecure & paranoid to begin with & now he hears that one w/legal rights to the throne of Israel has been born *in* Israel & people are coming desiring to pay homage to Him... He's freaking out thinking he may have an uprising on his hands. & When Herod was troubled... all Jerusalem was troubled w/him because there's no telling what he might do & the blood he may shed... I mean the man assassinated his own family!

### Vs 4-6

Listen family, this should be blowing our minds! These religious leaders didn't have Google this information, they didn't need time to look it up, they were instantly able to give the scripture reference that pointed specifically to the birthplace of the Messiah. Only 5-6 miles south of where they were, in Bethlehem. They had the right information, but they refused to make *application* of God's word.

They were apathetic (at best) in their desire to see Jesus. Remember that "more sure word" of prophecy we talked about? Micah 5:2 prophesied some 750 yrs prior that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem (it's interesting that the word "Bethlehem" means "house of bread" & Jesus would refer to Himself as "the Bread of Life" who came down from heaven).

But there in the book of Micah had they finished quoting that Vs is goes on to say that the Ruler who would come forth from Bethlehem, the Shepherd (the One who would protect & correct them, who would lead & feed them)... His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting... In other words, He's eternal in nature; God Himself.

& You would think that upon the arrival of these Magi, this company of men who'd traveled hundreds of miles & are now inquiring of the Messiah; that they would say, "Why are you asking? Do you have reason to believe that He's here? You mentioned a star, what could you tell us about that & if you don't mind we'll go down to Bethlehem w/you!"

But there's none of that. It's like they were satisfied that they knew the word of God but they had no real interest in the God of the word... Here these magi had traveled hundreds of miles, spending a lot of money, expending all kinds of energy to seek the Lord & they won't go 5 miles out of their way to even investigate the claims of God's word... How far will YOU go? Will you be as these men, or the magi?

Listen, be careful that you don't fall into the trap of thinking that *knowing* the Scripture is good enough. We're not to be content in knowing the word of God, our pursuit is the God of the Word. Jesus said, *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."*<sup>6</sup>

These Magi are great examples of what it means to seek the Lord. They didn't care the cost, they weren't tied to creature comforts, but the religious leaders wouldn't seek the Lord if it meant their inconvenience...

### Vs 7-8

Herod calls a secret meeting & he's all, "So exactly when did you see this 'star' you're talking about? Oh, I see, well listen, go on down to Bethlehem & search for this young Child carefully & when you find Him come let me know so I can come worship Him as well."

Of course we know that he doesn't want to worship Jesus, he wants to kill Jesus & that's why he wants to know when they saw that star, he's trying to figure out approximately how old He is at this point (we'll see that next week). He's just *saying* what he needs to, *doing* what he needs to, to *get* what he needs to. He just heard a great bible study on the birthplace of the Messiah, but the seed fell to the wayside, it never even got a chance to sink in before it was snatched right off the surface of his hardened heart.

It's like our text presents 3 types of people. Those seeking a relationship w/Christ, those indifferent to Christ (stuck in the mire of religion) & those who want to get rid of Christ (the nonbeliever), wanting to gain the world (losing his soul) & God is only standing in his way.



## Vs 9-12

Couple things in Vs 9-10. #1 We pick up on the fact that the star wasn't shining the whole time. It evidently appeared & they gathered it was over Israel & headed to Jerusalem. *But then after hearing of the Messiah being born in Bethlehem it appeared again & went before them leading them (notice) not to a manger but (Vs 11) to the house where not the infant but the young Child was. Jesus is toddling around at this time; perhaps a year, year & ½ old.*

Now people have tried to figure out what this star could've been. They say maybe it was a conjunction of planets, perhaps a supernova or a comet. I'm of the persuasion that it was supernatural in nature; perhaps even the shekinah glory of God like unto that which appeared in the O.T. *God was known to lead His people by a pillar of fire, a pillar of cloud, His glory appeared at the tabernacle, at the temple. Planets move west to east or east to west, not north to south, Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem. Plus this "star" (some wonder if it was an angel) went before them, led them right to the house. So it seems more along the supernatural lines to me.*

Be that as it may when they found the house, they entered in & worshiped Jesus. These dignitaries at the feet of a child, offering gifts fit for a king. Gold, frankincense & myrrh. Some see in this that gold represents Jesus as King, frankincense speaks of His priesthood & myrrh speaks of His death (it was a spice used in the burial process). Now I'm fairly certain they didn't give these gifts w/that in mind, but it's fitting nonetheless.

*Now Mary was there, but they didn't worship her, they worshiped Him. They entered into His presence & worshiped Him. & In their worship of Him, they gave of themselves to Him.*

Their pursuit of Christ involved their time, their talent & their treasure. They willfully gave all to seek Him, in their worship of Him... This is one of the reasons that I encourage you during the time of the tithe/offering that we give in a spirit, & from a heart of worship. *Because our gifts to the Lord is an aspect of our worship of the Lord... & it's not even what you give per se' that God is looking to (though He is worthy of our very best), but it's the heart of surrender behind that gift that's a blessing to God.*

Our worship of God will involve our giving to God... How far will you go in your pursuit of Christ?

Let's sum up a few life lessons we can learn from these men & from this passage.

To me the magi *embody* the meaning of Jer 29:13, **"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."**<sup>7</sup> To the religious leaders, worship had become a convenient pastime, but for the wise-men it was a committed, relentless pursuit.

Something else we learn is that those who truly seek Jesus will *find* Him, those who find Him will *worship* Him, & those who worship Him will consecrate their *substance* to Him (their time, their talent & their treasure).

What else do we learn from these wise-men? They implicitly/unreservedly believed God's word & acted upon it. They were told Messiah would be found in Bethlehem, so to Bethlehem they went. They allowed their lives to be governed & guided through obedience to God's Word.

Finally; it's found in Vs 12, they came to Christ one way, but they left His presence another way. Don't miss that. You may enter into the presence of Jesus one way, but you'll leave another. The bible says, **"...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."**<sup>8</sup> We come to Him one way, but we leave His presence another. Amen? These magi are worthy of our consideration, our mediation, the example they give us, their relentless, unwavering pursuit of Jesus. Discontented w/the star, they would only be satisfied w/the "Son". How far will YOU go?

### Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the richness of Your Word. We're not looking to study the scripture thinking that knowing it is good enough, we want to be drawn to You Jesus, we want to know You, we want to pursue You, to worship You, to give all that we are to You. We've come here one way, we want to leave another, pour out Your Spirit upon this place, these people & glorify Yourself.

It's interesting when we speak of pursuing Jesus, because when we finally encounter Him we learn that it's Him who has been pursuing us the whole time. The question is one of surrender. Jesus laid down His life, bled & died upon a cross, defeating death that we might have eternal life. Turn from your sin, trust in Him, you'll leave here another way than when you came in I promise you...

<sup>7</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Je 29:13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Co 5:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.