

Matthew 2:1-12
The Determined Worshippers

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose^[b] and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They 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.””

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And 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.” ⁹ After 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And 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. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

May the living God add his blessing to the reading and preaching of his holy Word.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, our heavenly Father, we come with awe and reverence before the sacred scriptures today. Truly what we just read was inspired by the Holy Spirit and given through the ministry of the apostle Matthew. We desire that you would teach us of Jesus Christ our Lord today, and teach us about the wise men, what we can learn from them. Build us up in the knowledge of our holy faith, we pray in Christ's precious name. Amen.

Matthew's Gospel is a tremendous revelation of the fulfillment of the OT prophecies in the arrival of the Messiah, the Christ, into human history. Why did Christ come? He came in order that God would redeem a people for himself out of both Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel of Matthew has a particularly Jewish flavor, but the aroma of redemption also encompasses the far-flung peoples of the earth.

Matthew's Gospel quotes from the OT 61 times, compared to 31 in Mark, 26 in Luke, and 16 in John. Today's passage, in fact, quotes from the prophet Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, which we see recorded in verse 6:

**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.”**

This is the great prophecy as to where the Messiah would be born – it would be in the town of Bethlehem, which is about 5 miles south of Jerusalem. He would be the great Shepherd of his people, their ruler, that is, their king.

Let's consider today, first of all...

I. The Announcement in the Heavens – v. 1-2

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose^[b] and have come to worship him.”

During those days Herod was the king in Jerusalem. He was actually not a Jew, but an Edomite, from the land of Edom, east of Judah, and he had been put in power by the Roman government.

But into his city arrived one day a group of men from the east, the actual word is Maji. They were Maji, that is men who were probably knowledgeable in astronomy and philosophy and science. It is likely they were from Persia or Babylonia, that is, present day Iran or Iraq.

They came to Jerusalem because they had seen a star that arose and it was a sign to them that the king of the Jews had been born. This, of course, is very unusual, and we naturally ask, “How did they know this star was indicating the birth of the king of the Jews?”

We do know that the Jewish people had been scattered throughout the region of those nations east of Israel. The Assyrians carried off the northern 10 tribes around 722 BC and they were scattered and never returned. We read, for example, in 2 Kg. 17:6 - ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Then in 587 the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar carried off thousands of the Jews to Babylon where they remained 70 years. Wherever the Jewish people went, they took their religion and their scriptures, written out on scrolls, with them. And so in the course of time they shared their knowledges of Yahweh and their sacred texts with the people around them. This is likely how the magi learned of the prophecies of the

coming Jewish Savior who was known as the Messiah, the One anointed with the Spirit, who would fulfill the ancient promise to King David that he would never fail to have one of his descendants sit on his throne.

So what was it in the OT that communicated to these wise men that there would be a star associated with the coming of the Messiah? The likely text is Numbers 24:17: ***a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.***

It must have been through reading the Hebrew scriptures, and especially this one, that the Holy Spirit revealed to these wise men that the promised Messiah of Jews had been born. It was likely also from other OT texts that they had gained a true understanding of this coming one's greatness, even his divinity. For example, they may have been familiar with Isa. 9:6:

***For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon^[a] his shoulder,
and his name shall be called^[b]
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

And so they read and so they meditated and so they saw this star arise and they knew the Messiah-King had been born. And they knew they had to go and see this great thing that God had done, that was happening in their very day. The Holy Spirit, no doubt, was compelling them to go.

The Announcement was made in the Heavens and they had to go.

Next we read in v. 3-4 about...

II. The Opposition of the People v. 3-4

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.

King Herod was not a devout man – in fact he was the opposite – he was known to be cruel and ruthless. And he enjoyed his position as king, so when he heard about this new-born king of the Jews he was very disturbed – he wanted no rival to his throne. But the amazing thing is that not only him, but the people were disturbed also. Instead of rejoicing in the possibility that the promised Messiah-King had been born, they were worried that their comfortable relationship with their Roman conquerors might be in danger.

So, besides the opposition of King Herod and the people of Jerusalem, we see:

III. The Prediction of the Prophet v. 5-6

So, the chief priests and scribes quoted to Herod the prophecy in Micah 5:2:

**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.”**

These men who were familiar with the OT scriptures knew exactly where the prophecy is found which tells the place from which the Messiah would come. Bethlehem means “city of bread” – here the true bread from heaven would appear – it was the City of David – and this coming One would be a descendant of David. We read, in fact, in Matthew 1:1, the lineage of the Messiah:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. And Matthew traces his lineage all the way down to Joseph, the husband of Mary, the legal father of Jesus.

IV. The Deception of the King v. 7-8

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And 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.”

And we know from reading the rest of Matthew 2 that Herod was lying to the wise men; he only wanted to find out where the child was so he could send his soldiers to dispatch with the child’s life. Then he could sleep better at night, knowing that any rival to his throne was exterminated.

V. The Adoration of the Magi v. 9-11

⁹ After 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And 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.

It seems the guiding star they had seen in the east must have disappeared when they arrived in Jerusalem, but as they left and headed toward Bethlehem, some 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem, it reappeared and guided them straight to the house where the child was found with his mother Mary.

When they went into the house it seems that all the OT prophecies that they had read about the Messiah-King rushed with fresh vision and power upon their minds and realizing who this child was – the Promise of the Ages – he was right there before them – they were overwhelmed and fell down in worship before him.

Some godly interpreters of the Scriptures believe they were just honoring him as a great earthly king, something like the British people honor their king or queen and call them

“your majesty” but I believe there is more than just honor here happening, it is the actual worship of the Messiah – giving him glory and honor and obeisance and sovereignty as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I believe they knew enough of the OT scriptures to realize who this actually was and they did not want to fail in giving him the worship and adoration due unto his holy name.

The gifts they brought were costly, fit for a king, and likely secured at great expense and even sacrifice.

What we witness here in these scriptures is an amazing event in God’s plan of redemption for the world. Paul talks about this in Col. 1:26-27: ...

the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Through the arrival of the wise men, men who were not Jews, men who were Gentiles, God is revealing the first fruits of the great Gentile harvest to come. Here at the very beginning of the Messiah’s life, God sends Gentiles from far-off Persia or Babylonia to worship the newborn child. They know who he really is, they have a God-revealed Biblical understanding of his earth-shaking, cosmic significance.

The people of Jerusalem were dull in their spiritual understanding, they were lethargic, even oppositional to the purpose of God. But not these wise men: God had given them understanding of the great significance of this new born child:

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Gal. 4:4-5

And they responded with the only proper response: they worshipped the Christ. The word here in the original Greek that the NT was written in is:

Προσκυβε’w = proskuneo – to worship, fall down and worship, kneel, bow low, fall at another’s feet.

This is what the wise men did when they found the Christ-child. Leon Morris notes that

p. 37: “The worship of the Christ was important to Matthew and he refers to this worship 10 times in his gospel. For example:

Matt. 14:33 - ³³ And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Matt. 28:9 - Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb..... ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him.

These wise men worshipped the same Jesus. They were determined men. God had shown them this great event that he was doing – he was sending the Messiah for the redemption of the world. They would let nothing stop them from going and offering worship to him who was worthy of their worship.

The wise men “spared no effort” in their desire to worship the Messiah-King. We can only imagine what trials and hardships and opposition they faced when they determined to go and worship. But they persevered, they resisted the opposition, they faced the hardships – and they accomplished their great desire and goal – by the sovereign help of God they found him and worshipped him and gave him their gifts, and then left, satisfied and rejoicing that they had seen Yahweh’s Messiah-King.

What about us today? Are we willing to spare no effort in worshipping this same Jesus Christ of Bethlehem and Nazareth? This Jesus of the cross and the empty tomb and the ascension back to heaven?

There are many voices in our culture and in our lives beckoning us to give our time and attention to them. But there is another call to us, a call from the Lord Jesus Christ himself to his people. He would say, “Come to me and worship me, do not neglect the gathering of my people, but come, let nothing stop you – give your attention to me, your devotion, your sacrificial offerings. Bow before me, for I have redeemed you for my own sake. Come before me, learn of me, eat the true Bread of Heaven and drink from the cup of my shed blood. Like the wise men, be determined to worship me and let nothing stop you.”

Let us follow the wise men and follow the scriptures to be devoted and determined worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, you have opened heaven’s door to this dark and sin-engulfed world. You sent your Son to redeem, to purchase people from every nation, tribe and tongue. We thank you unceasingly for your tender mercy to us in rescuing us by the blood of your Son. Help us to live faithfully to your calling as people committed and determined to worship you in the midst of the worshipping congregation. Grant us the joy of ever-increasing worship, in Jesus’ precious name we pray. Amen.

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