

THE MAGI WORSHIP KING JESUS

Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse: 2:2

“...and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’”

In this passage, some mysterious men called Magi come to worship the baby Jesus. Among the gospel writers, only Matthew tells this story. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is the King sent by God, and that Jesus is worthy to be worshiped by all people, small and great alike. This story inspires us to realize that we are made to worship God. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us. When we worship Jesus, we find the true meaning of life and true happiness. Lord, help us worship Jesus today.

First, Magi from the east came to worship Jesus (1-2).

Look at verse 1. “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem....” Jesus had come into the world, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. This was the greatest event in Israel’s history, and the history of mankind. Jesus came to save us from our sins. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us. After his birth, Magi from the east came to see him.

Who were the Magi? They have certainly become famous as key figures in the Christmas story. During the last 2,000 years, they have been mentioned in many Christmas messages and dramas throughout the world. They appear in the epic movie “Ben-Hur.” According to tradition, their bones, now known as relics, lie in the famous Koln Dome in Germany. The insignia marking the 600th anniversary of Koln University shows three Magi coming to worship the baby Jesus and offering their gifts to him. History study tells us that the Magi came from ancient Persia or Babylon, out of a religious caste devoted to astrology, divination, and the interpretation of dreams. They were scholars, who believed in spiritual revelation as well as scientific reason as a basis for truth. They were advisers to kings and highly respected in society.

Why did they come to Jerusalem? Look at verse 2. “...and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’” They were looking for the king of the Jews. How did they know about him? They saw his star in the east. They studied the stars. They believed that the stars foretold man’s destiny, and special stars signaled the birth of great men. One night, as they surveyed the sky, they saw a great star. They knew that it signaled something special and began to research its meaning. They might have referred to Numbers 24:17a, spoken centuries earlier by Balaam, which says, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” The Magi realized that the star signaled the birth of the king of the Jews. They realized that this king of the Jews was not just another political king, but the Savior promised by God, and he was to be worshiped. The Magi had mastered various fields of study. They were truth seekers who wanted not only to know the truth, but to follow the truth. When they found that the king of the Jews had been born, they made a long journey to Jerusalem to find him. Upon finding him, they wanted to worship him.

The Bible says that worship belongs to God alone (Mt 4:10). To worship God is to express intense love for God. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” These Magi wanted to worship God. This was their motive in coming. They had left their homeland, saying farewell to family members, and had made a long and dangerous journey, spending much money, to find the one they could worship. God made man in his own image with a strong desire to worship God. The desire to worship God urges us to cry out for God, like a little child cries out for his mother. Psalm 42:1-2 says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” St. Augustine said, “God made man with an empty spot that only God can fill; man is a restless wanderer until he finds his rest in God.”

All people are made in the image of God to worship God (Gen 1:27). If men do not worship God, they worship created things, and become wicked and depraved (Ro 1:18-32). So the Ten Commandments begin, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything...” (Ex 20:2-4). However, in our time, many worship

created things, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, sports stars or rock stars, technology, human achievement, and money. This is sin against God. It damages one's soul and leads to restlessness and ruin. Those who worship created things must repent, like the Samaritan woman in John 4. She had worshiped men, thinking the right man would make her happy forever. Instead, she found heartbreak and misery. Jesus gently led her to repent and to worship God who is Spirit. Then she found healing, peace, and eternal life.

The Magi followed their desire to worship God. They were willing to sacrifice to worship God. They were hungry and thirsty for God; nothing less would satisfy them. On the outside, they looked noble and dignified. They were well educated and highly honored. But things of the world could not satisfy them. Only God could satisfy them. Realizing this, they sought God with all their hearts and souls and strength. Let's seek God to worship God, like the Magi.

Second, Jesus is a shepherd king (3-8).

Look at verse 3. "When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." King Herod ruled Israel from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. He was known as Herod the Great. He had ten wives and many sons, and his family line ruled Israel for four generations. Their struggle to gain political power was marked by tragedy. Once, Herod executed his own sons for conspiracy, and many innocent people perished with them. When Herod heard from the Magi that the king of the Jews had been born, he was not happy. Rather, Herod thought that the baby Jesus was a threat to his kingship, and he was disturbed. When he was disturbed, all Jerusalem was disturbed with him. People who depend on the system tremble when it shakes.

Look at verse 4. "When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born." Herod already knew about the Christ, and that the Bible was the place to learn more. So he called Jerusalem's Bible teachers for a conference. His motive was not to worship Jesus, but to eliminate Jesus. The religious leaders knew the answer precisely, based on the Scriptures. The Christ would be born in Bethlehem, just a few miles from Jerusalem. The religious leaders were so near the birthplace of Christ. But they made no effort to go there. What a great contrast with the Magi!

Though Herod's motive was evil and the religious leaders were corrupted, the word of God shone brightly, like sunshine in the darkness. Look at verses 5-6. "'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "But you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."'" The king of the Jews would be a shepherd of his people.

David had been a shepherd king. It was because he understood the heart of God. In Psalm 23:1-2 David says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." A shepherd king protects his people. A shepherd king provides for his people. A shepherd king loves and serves his people like a father. This week we have Founders' Day. We remember Dr. Samuel Lee and his shepherding of people one by one. Once, Jim Cook was struggling with depression. At the time, Dr. Lee was also suffering with pneumonia. Yet, Dr. Lee drove down to UIC repeatedly to visit Jim and pray with him. By Dr. Lee's faith and prayer, Jim overcame that difficult period and became a man of strong faith. Now he is happy in Jesus and works hard for the glory of God.

When a good shepherd loves and cares for sheep, they grow to be shepherds. Pastor Paul Dang of Milwaukee has cared for Jeff Cummings for over ten years. Jeff has dyslexia, causing him to see things differently than others. With a shepherd's heart, Pastor Paul searched for the way to turn this weakness to strength. He found the true story of a dyslexic salesman whose boss sent him to a foreign country to sell shoes. All other salesmen who had tried came back discouraged, saying, "No one in that country wears shoes. There is no market." But the dyslexic salesman said, "No one in that country has shoes. This is the best market for selling shoes." He saw things differently, and made a great success. Pastor Paul prays for Jeff to see things from God's point of view and to pioneer the University of South Florida in Tampa. A good shepherd leads God's children to overcome themselves and live a fruitful and happy life for the glory of God.

There are many examples of those who care for others with compassion. But only Jesus is "the good shepherd." Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." To save us

from our sins, Jesus died on the cross. Jesus took our shame, pain and eternal punishment, and bore it in our places. Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." In this way, Jesus frees us from sin and the devil. Only Jesus could do this for us. Those who receive Jesus' saving grace are brought from death to life. They realize that their lives belong to Jesus. They overflow with thankfulness and are happy to love and serve Jesus. They are like those who sing in Revelation 5:12, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" It is the best news to everybody that Jesus came to be the shepherd of his people.

After hearing about the good shepherd Jesus, King Herod should have fallen to his knees in repentance. It was good news for him too. But he was not really paying attention. He only got the information that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Then he called the Magi secretly to find out the time the star had appeared. It was to carry out his plot to kill Jesus. King Herod was smart and he seemed to outwit the Magi. However, God was in control. God helped the Magi find the Christ through the Bible study. Later, God warned them in a dream to avoid Herod and go back to their country. God protected the Magi and the baby Jesus. Sometimes evil people of the world make us fearful. We feel that we must become more clever. This is the devil's temptation. When we follow the truth with a pure heart, God will protect us.

Third, the Magi bowed down and worshiped Jesus (9-12).

Look at verses 9-10. "After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." When the Magi resumed their journey, suddenly, the star they had seen in the east appeared again. It was sent by God to lead them to the child. When they saw the star, they realized they were on the right track. When they saw the star, they realized that God was with them and was guiding them on their journey. When they saw the star, they knew they were about to meet the one they had struggled so hard to find. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

True joy comes to those who seek Jesus with all their hearts and strength. The Magi were overjoyed because God confirmed through the star that they had made a right choice to seek and worship baby Jesus. Deuteronomy 4:29 says, "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul." This requires a decision of faith, and perseverance through trial. It is not easy. But in the end it gives us overflowing joy and eternal life. Around the world, we can see so many missionaries who have left everything to follow Jesus. Their lives are full of sufferings and trials. However, they are most blessed and most happy, and they laugh a lot. On the other hand, people who seek selfish pleasure and benefit spend most of their time complaining in bitterness and die in regret.

Look at verse 11. "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh." The Magi's hearts were thoroughly prepared. They could see God in the baby Jesus. They knew he was not an ordinary child in an ordinary home, despite the appearance of things. They knew without a doubt that he was God and he was the one they must worship. In this verse, we learn what true worship is from the Magi.

In the first place, they bowed down before the child Jesus. The Magi were noble and dignified people. They moved in the courts of kings. But they were very humble before God. They knew they were creatures before their Creator, and sinners before the Holy God. Moreover, through their act of bowing, they declared their loyalty to the child Jesus, offering themselves as his subjects. True worship involves bowing before the King, recognizing the sovereignty of God.

In the second place, they worshiped him. Simply speaking, they confessed their love to the child Jesus. It was the genuine outpouring of their admiration for God because of who he is and what he has done. No doubt, their worship was both universal and personal. They must have thanked him for their successful pilgrimage and for the great privilege to see God's salvation in the child Jesus.

In the third place, they opened their treasures and gave him gold, incense and myrrh. They worshiped not only with their lips, but by offering their precious treasures to him. The treasures were not only valuable in themselves, but they were carefully selected to convey the meaning of who the baby Jesus was. Gold was the gift for a king. These Magi knew the palace protocol. When going to a king, they must bring gold. It was not silver or bronze, but gold. When we come to God we must bring our best. They also brought incense. It signified the priestly identity of baby Jesus. And they offered myrrh. This was the embalming spice for one who dies. Though Jesus is King, he came to suffer and die for the sin of the world. We learn from the Magi how to truly appreciate and worship Jesus, the king of the Jews, who is God with us.

Today we learned from the Magi that we are made to worship God. When we seek God, find God and worship God, we can experience true joy and have eternal life. Mostly, we learned that Jesus is our shepherd king who laid down his life for us. He is worthy of our worship forever.