

## THE MAGI'S PILGRIMAGE

Matthew 2:1-23

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.'"

Matthew 2:1-23 is a story about Magi from the east who came to worship the baby Jesus during the time of King Herod. They say that Albert Schweitzer traveled 500 miles on foot to see a newly designed pipe organ. We can understand that he traveled such a long distance with a burning desire to see what he liked. But it is not easy to understand why the Magi traveled such a long distance to worship the baby Jesus, spending so much money and time. It seemed to be totally unnecessary for kingly people to see a [baby born](#) in a stable of animals and laid in a manger. Humanly speaking, it was not necessary. But from God's point of view, it was necessary for them to come to see the baby Jesus born and laid in a manger. Let's see why it was necessary for them to come to worship the baby Jesus. Today's passage includes the story about King Herod. His response to the birth of Jesus is quite a contrast to that of the Magi. Jesus had to escape to Egypt as soon as he was born. For this escape, Joseph took care of the [mother Mary](#) and the baby Jesus. He appears to be an extra. But Joseph was an indispensable person in God's work and history.

First, the Magi--truth-seekers (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...." Magi, traditionally called "Wise Men," supposedly lived in ancient Persia or Babylon. They were ancient astrologers who were highly regarded as great scholars and kingly people. In ancient times, many believed that a man's destiny was determined by the star under which he was born. According to Time Magazine, in 1969 there were 10,000 full-time astrologers in the United States, and in fact, they are all magic artists.

Where did the Magi get the idea to come to Jerusalem? Verse 2b says, "We saw his star in the east...." They saw "his star." In the course of seeking the truth, once they looked into the sky. They saw a bright star in the sky. The star was not an ordinary star. It was an extraordinary star which captured their souls. They were convinced that it was "his star," which symbolized the King of the Jews. The Bible teaches us that Jesus himself is the Star. Revelation 22:16b reads, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The bright Morning Star is the beginning of brightening the whole world every day. Matthew 4:16 says that Jesus is "a great light." When the Great Light began to shine, the Magi caught its light from his star, which was solely reflected by the Great Light. When they had a burning desire to seek the truth, God showed them his star.

The Magi came from a faraway country in the east, despite intractable difficulties and harrowing hardships, spending much money and sacrificing their life-careers. Their impelling motive was to see "the king of the Jews" (2). How did they know about the king of the Jews? They must have heard the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah concerning the Messiah, the Savior of the world, handed down by word of

mouth. This was the way of communication in ancient times.

Why did the Magi come to see the king of the Jews? According to Paul's theology of salvation (Ro 8:20,21), the whole creation, both man and nature, was waiting for the coming of the Messiah--the one who saves them from their bondage. When we watch the world, generally people seem to be enslaved by many kinds of human desires. Some are slaves of physical desires. Some are slaves of emotional feelings. Some are slaves of money. Some are slaves of human achievement. They despaired so much that they look like prisoners behind iron bars, waiting for the day of emancipation from bondage. One young man really wanted to finish his Ph.D. He was so happy when he finished his Ph.D. Likewise, all human beings are waiting for the day of liberation from bondage of sins. In other words, all people are seeking "to see" the Messiah, who liberates them from their bondage. For example, the Magi looked so noble that they deserved all men's respect and praise. But in reality, they were no more than the descendants of Cain, who should have wandered with a sense of guilt and punishment, and with fear and anxiety throughout their lifetimes. They needed the baby Jesus who would save them from their sins. Without Jesus, they could not be liberated from the power of sins. As long as they were under the power of sin, they were not happy because of the poison of sin circulating in their bodies and souls. This is the reason men seek God earnestly. In ancient times, there were so many pilgrims. They called themselves "the truth-seekers," like Magi.

Why did the Magi want to come to Jesus? Verse 2b says that they came to worship him. Magi in kingly costumes with long and flowing beards came to worship the baby Jesus. They had everything--honor, wealth and great learning. Still they were on a pilgrimage to worship the baby Jesus. It seems unnecessary. But it is necessary to worship God. The word "worship" is defined as "great love or great admiration." Why do we have to love God? It is because God made man in the image of God. When we love God we become godly people. Godly people love God and love their family members and their neighbors as themselves. On the other hand, ungodly people hate God because of their sins. They hate others because of their selfishness. Ungodly people are mostly so proud that they do not honor God as God. They want to place themselves in the center of the universe. Most of all, ungodly people are all unpredictable. According to Bible chemistry, when we love God we become like God. When we don't love God we become like the devil. Matthew 22:37 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Whenever we hear this teaching it sounds too demanding. But this is a spiritual secret for the happiness of mankind.

When we study humanity, we come to know that man's basic problem is a love problem. Man always wants to love someone: a boyfriend or a girlfriend. But, in truth, all his love activities are mere expressions of a desire to love God, for God is our Everlasting Father (Isa 9:6). This is why the Wise Men from the east came to express their love for the baby Jesus, who came to this world as the Messiah of the world. What happens when we don't love God? When we don't love God, whether we want to or not, we become like the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5), who rejected God's counsel and became unconditionally rebellious, extremely fearful, and doubtful about everything. According to the Bible, to love

God or worship God is man's basic obligation.

Second, King Herod was a poor Bible student (3-5,7,8). King Herod called himself "Herod the Great." Under Roman rule, Herod's family held power for quite a long time (Mt 14:1; Ac 12:1,23). When Herod heard about the birth of Jesus, he was disturbed (3). Herod felt that his kingship was threatened. Immediately he determined to destroy the baby Jesus, assuming that the baby Jesus would become his political opponent. Herod summoned all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law to ask them where the Christ was to be born (4). The chief priests and teachers of the law gave him the correct information from the Old Testament prophecy (5). The prophecy of Micah was the prophecy concerning the birth of the Messiah, the spiritual King. Therefore, the king whom the Magi called, "the king of the Jews," had nothing to do with the political king. But Herod had no spiritual understanding.

Herod disguised himself as one of Jesus' worshipers and asked the Magi to tell him when they found the baby Jesus (8). But God gave the Magi wisdom to avoid Herod's conspiracy (12). When Herod learned that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he became furious. He gave orders to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old or under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi (16). Spiritual blindness is not a small matter. For example, Vladimir Lenin, in his spiritual blindness, taught Stalin to destroy their political opponents. Because of his bad influence, Stalin killed too many people. He made so many Russian women sorrowful endlessly because most of their husband candidates were killed and they had no hope to get married. Likewise, King Herod also caused people to grieve and be terrified due to his spiritual blindness. As new sprouts are attacked by noxious insects when they come up from the ground, so when the newborn baby Jesus appeared, he was attacked by the power of sin and Satan.

Third, "the shepherd of my people" (6). King Herod was a blindly selfish man. In order to maintain his power as king of Israel, he even destroyed innocent boy babies. Thus he caused the babies' parents to grieve all their lifetimes. But the baby Jesus, the king of the Jews, is different. First of all, the baby Jesus is not a political king; he is a spiritual king. He is the king of peace. He is the king of love. Look at verse 6. "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." This is a quotation of the prophet Micah.

In this verse the baby Jesus who came as King of the Jews is described in two ways. First, he came to rule. Second, he came to shepherd his people. Here the verb "rule" does not have any political meaning. Ruling is the same as shepherding. What does "shepherding" mean? Shepherding means caring for sheep. As we know well, sheep know how to graze on grass; other than that, they know nothing. Even if a shepherd teaches them 100 times how to get to the green pasture, they forget the next day how to get there. So the shepherd has to teach them again and again how to go to the green pasture. Sheep are all on the animal level because they are animals and because their desire is only grazing on grass. Even though they are cared for so much and for a long time, they never say, "Thank you," to their shepherds.

Unthankful people are the most ugly people because they are heartless. So all men have a basic obligation to thank God (Ro 1:21). The Bible teaches us to thank God always. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Our Lord Jesus Christ came to the world to shepherd unthankful sinners. Therefore, to know God is to know how to thank God for his grace. Sheep are also so weak that they need constant protection from brutal animals. Our King Jesus came to this world to shepherd his people. Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." We need a good shepherd. Jesus is our shepherd. Even King David needed a shepherd. God was his shepherd. David said in Psalm 23:1-3, "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. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Fourth, the Magi were overjoyed (9-10). Let's come back to the story of the Magi. The Magi's long pilgrimage finally ended when the star stopped over the place where the child was (9). What happened when the Magi found the baby Jesus? Verse 10 says, "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." They were overjoyed because at last they were able to find the place where the baby Jesus was.

When we review Genesis we can understand clearly why the Magi were overjoyed. No matter who they may be, before finding the baby Jesus, all men are nothing but fallen men with sinsick blood. They are nothing but restless wanderers with a sense of guilt and punishment (Ge 4). The Magi were not an exception. But instead of continuing their habitual and animal lives, the Magi began to seek God. Finally they met God in the baby Jesus, and were overjoyed. Their joy gave them the meaning of life. Their joy came when they saw the baby Jesus who came to this world to save men from their sins. Their joy came when they saw the Messiah--the Savior of the world.

As we know well, there are two kinds of pilgrimages in our lives: One is our daily routine; the other is seeking God. 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." The Magi were overjoyed because their spiritual pilgrimage was successful.

Fifth, the Magi worshiped him (11,12). 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." Their gifts tell us figuratively of Jesus' Messiahship. Gold is the gift for a king; incense is the gift for a priest; myrrh is the gift for one who dies. Jesus is the King and Priest and Prophet.

The visit of the Magi is recorded only in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew, the former tax collector, who only knew how to get, who had no idea how to give, must have been greatly moved by the story of the Magi. The Magi knew how to give their most precious gifts to the most precious One. There are so many people who are wandering aimlessly with what they have. But these Magi did not wander. They sought God diligently

with all their hearts and with all their souls and with all their strength. Finally they saw God in the baby Jesus and gave everything they had.

These days history seems to be going nowhere and life seems to have no purpose. Everything seems to be relative. Most people have no value systems. They have no moral standards. It is a tragedy that most people reject spiritual realities. Those who are possessed by many demons go to psychologists or psychiatrists and pay a lot of money for healing, not knowing that it was not a mental problem, but a moral problem. This happens when they don't seek God. We must learn how to seek God like the Magi. The Magi came a long distance, bowed and worshiped the baby Jesus, presented their gifts, and returned. Their worship was very pure. They worshiped the king--and that was all. This scene looks like a very special event. But it is not special at all: It is a basic duty for all human beings.

Even if to worship God is a man's basic duty to God, still a curious question remains in our hearts about the Magi's seemingly stupid act of worship. Such wise and kingly men came to the baby Jesus after crossing raging rivers and climbing up and down the high mountains, fixing their eyes on the star. When they came to the place where Jesus was, they worshiped the baby Jesus and each gave the baby Jesus everything they had and just went back. It seems that they lost everything. It seems nonsense. But that is not true. When they came to Jesus, for the first time the Rising Sun shone in their hearts brightly (Lk 1:78). When they saw the baby Jesus they received eternal life (Jn 3:16). When they saw the baby Jesus they saw the kingdom of God (Jn 14:2).

Sixth, the escape to Egypt (13-23). Look at verse 13. "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'" To get up in the middle of the night must have been harder for Joseph than to work all day in the carpentry shop. In order to escape to Egypt, Joseph had to carry the nursing mother and the newborn baby to avoid Herod's plot of murdering all the baby boys two years old or under. In order to escape, Joseph had to obey the angel's message. According to the instructions, Joseph had to get up in the middle of the night and carry the nursing mother and newborn baby in the wagon and cross rivers and mountains. God used the New Testament Joseph preciously in protecting the baby Jesus and his mother Mary. Before marriage Joseph received obedience training thoroughly and passed with perfect scores. May God give us the same kind of training.

Herod's slaughter was horrible. But Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15, which says, "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning...." Jeremiah pictured in his prophecy the people of Jerusalem being led away into exile. Matthew relates this event with the most tragic event in history; Herod's slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem.

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead" (19,20). How did Joseph respond? Look at verse 21. "So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel." At that

time, Joseph was a right-hand man of God. Joseph received unbearable hardships; he had to carry a nursing mother and a baby boy who was too young to travel, and run away to a foreign country. But Joseph obeyed God again.

In this passage we learn that the Magi came to the baby Jesus and worshiped him, and they were overjoyed. Jesus is our source of joy because he is the way and the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). The Magi's pilgrimage was to seek the baby Jesus who is truth to all mankind.