

THE WISE MEN WORSHIPPED JESUS THE SHEPHERD KING

Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse 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."

So far from Matthew chapter 1, we learned Jesus Christ was born as the son of David, the son of Abraham. We learned that our God is faithful. He keeps his promise. And Jesus who fulfilled God's promises 2000 years ago also promised that he would come again in his great glory. From last week's passage, we learned that Jesus is also merciful. When we are helpless in our sins, he didn't leave us alone to suffer, but came to save us. Matthew called Jesus Immanuel, God with us. What a good news we have in Jesus!! Our God is faithful and merciful. We just need to welcome and worship him.

I have a question to ask: Have you ever gotten lost? Nowadays with GPSs, smartphones, and Google maps, we can arrive at our destination fairly easily without getting lost. Thanks to these amazing technologies. How about your life journey? Do you have a destination in your life journey? If you are a believer like me, coming to and worshiping Jesus might be the ultimate goal of our life journey as the wise men did in this passage. Then in our journey, what do you rely on as your guide? In today's passage the wise men traveled to worship the baby Jesus following the Scriptures, a star, and even a dream. I pray that we may come to know Jesus the shepherd king. I pray that we may worship Jesus like the wise men. I pray that we may have great joy that comes from Jesus.

Look at verses 1 and 2. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Now it was after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king. "Behold". The author Matthew wants us to pay attention to the wise men from the east. We do not know much about them, where they came from or how they heard about Jesus. What did they say? "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

From their words, we learn a few things. First, they believed that Jesus is the king of the Jews. The king of the Jews is the title for the Jewish Messiah who would come to fulfill God's promises throughout history. It was also the title used on the cross when Jesus died. Jesus indeed came and died as the king of the Jews. The wise men from the east must have believed that the king of the Jews is not just a savior for the Jews, but the savior for every nation, people, and language.

It is a mystery how they saw and recognized Jesus' star. But they did and when they did so, they left everything and came to worship him. The wise men probably came from Babylon, 900 miles East from Jerusalem. It could take several months to travel only by following the star. More than

that there is a danger of robbers and thieves, and a risk of getting lost. Their worship of the king of the Jews could cost them money, time, and even their lives. However despite all these obstacles, when they saw the star of Jesus, they left everything to worship him. They followed the star to Judea, but they didn't know the exact location. Maybe they assumed that the king would be born at the palace. So they went to Herod the king and asked, "Where is he who has been born the king of the Jews?"

Look at verse 3. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; Herod was disturbed and agitated at the news of the king of the Jews. It was told that Herod killed even his sons to secure his throne. How much more he wanted to get rid of any possible future threat. And knowing Herod, all Jerusalem became alert and troubled. They didn't know what this power-crazy king would do next. And this troubled them greatly. It's sad to see that there was no room in their hearts to welcome Jesus. Immanuel God came to be with us to save us. Do you have room in your hearts to welcome him? Or are you too preoccupied by your own problems? May God give us faith to welcome and worship him at this Christmas season.

Herod wanted to find out right away where the king of the Jews was. Look at verses 5-6. and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "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."

The chief priests and Bible scholars found the answer from the Scriptures. The king of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, and he will shepherd his people Israel. What does it mean that Jesus would shepherd his people? Last year I happened to give a message on Jesus, the good shepherd. Jesus said in John 10:11. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Sheep are very needy animals. They cannot protect themselves. They cannot even run fast because of short legs and a fat body. When a predator comes to attack them, they become easy victims.

We are like sheep without a shepherd. We are vulnerable and helpless because our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. And his weapon is the power of sin and death. No one is immune from the devil's attack, whether young or old, rich or poor, well-educated or not. But Jesus the good shepherd didn't leave us to perish. Instead he bore our sins and took our punishment upon himself. He suffered and died on the cross on our behalf. On the cross he defended us from the devil's attack and laid down his life for us, his sheep. Because Jesus defends and fights for them, his sheep are safe and secure no matter what happens in this world. This is why St. Paul proclaimed in Romans 8:37-39. "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Praise Jesus our good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep!

Jesus also said in John 10:14-15. "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." Jesus is our good shepherd. He knows each of us far better than we know ourselves. We just need to turn to him and trust him with all our hearts. Whenever I turn to him and trust him, I come to know him more and more, his forgiveness and mercy upon a sinner like me; his faithfulness despite my unfaithfulness; and the power and truth in his word which drives away all my darkness. Praise Jesus our good shepherd who knows us and leads us to know him!

Dr. James Hong has been fighting against cancer since April last year when he was diagnosed with lung cancer. Through surgery, 2/3 of his lung on one-side were cut-off, but the cancer spread to his spine and brain. He went through multiple rounds of chemo-therapy and radiation-therapy for the last one and a half years. Due to great pain, he couldn't sleep at night. He also lost weight and appetite. But surprisingly during this time he was the most faithful person to attend our men's Bible study on Wednesday night. He puts his trust in Jesus' word and his goodness despite of his circumstances. His faithfulness encouraged us a lot. I pray that our good shepherd Jesus reveals his glory through his life.

So going back to the passage, what did Herod do when he found out where Jesus had been born? Look at verses 7-8. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 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."

Herod found out when the star had appeared to the wise men, in order to know how old Jesus was. He didn't have any intention but to kill Jesus according to verse 16. But as a politician, he hid his true motive and tried to trick the wise men. Look at verses 9-10. 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Even though these wise men left their homes, jobs, families, and everything to come and worship Jesus, on the way they got lost. They lost the star and didn't know where to go. But in their helplessness, God was with them. From the Scriptures, they learned that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. The Scripture led them to Jesus. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." On our journey to Jesus, we can get lost. And unfortunately, this happens a lot of times. However, when we lose our way to Jesus, don't worry. We just need to turn to his word which will lead us to Him.

More than that, God also sent them the star to guide them to Jesus. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. When they saw the star, they knew that God was still leading them. When they saw the star, they knew that the star would lead them to Jesus. When they saw the star, all their worries and doubt disappeared. Instead God's peace and joy filled their hearts. Revelation 2:26-28 read. "To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to

pieces like pottery—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star.” (NIV) Sometimes night seems long without a ray of light. We want to complain and despair. However, we do not need to despair or give up no matter what because Jesus promises the morning star after the dark night to those who follow him to the end. And those who see the star of Jesus will rejoice exceedingly with great joy.

Here we learn that Jesus is the source of our joy. When we see Jesus, all our burdens and fears and darkness melt away. That’s why St. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice.”

I pray that we may taste this great joy by seeing and hearing Jesus even during this Christmas season. Look at verse 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.

Here the word ‘worship’ is in Greek, ‘proskuneo’. It literally means ‘kiss toward’. To worship, we must be ready “to fall down/prostrate ourselves to adore on our knees.” Worship is to exalt Jesus as he is and to humble ourselves as we are. Before the baby Jesus, the wise men humbly fell and bowed down and adored him. Only Jesus, our wonderful savior, Immanuel God with us, and our good shepherd king, deserves all our worship.

The wise men then opened their treasures and offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. They say that these are gifts for a king, priest, and prophet. Giving is the act of faith and obedience to God. Deuteronomy 16:16b-17 read, “They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you.” Giving is also the expression of gratitude and thanksgiving. Giving is the act of love for God and for God’s people. May we experience God’s blessing all the more as we offer our gifts to Jesus.

Look at verse 12. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Here the wise men were led through a dream. Herod tried to trick them, but our God is in control. God is our shield and very great reward. (Gen 15:1) We are safe in him. And the wise men returned to their own country by another way.

In this passage the wise men came to worship Jesus. Their story amazed Matthew the gospel writer. People seek money, fame, and pleasure just like Matthew who worshiped money as a former tax-collector. But these wise men left all these to worship Jesus. From the world’s perspective, these wise men were crazy and stupid. But these people were not ruled by fear, but rather by faith and courage. They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy because of Jesus. They experienced the living God again and again who led them step by step through the Scriptures, through the star, and even through a dream. They encountered Jesus, the savior of the world, Immanuel God with us and worshiped him. One American missionary once said, “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior during my college year in Korea. God gave me Genesis 12:2 as his vision for me. "I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." When I was a 2nd year engineering graduate student, I received an offer of scholarship with a monthly stipend and guaranteed job after my Ph.D. study from a major semiconductor company. It was a no brainer to take that offer. But that meant that I had to commit the next ten years of my life to the company and my hope for going out as a missionary some day would fly away. I didn't tell anyone about this and quietly turned down the offer. As a result, I had to pay my graduate school tuition that semester. Shortly after that, unexpectedly I was introduced to my wife from Chicago. I was fearful and afraid about the unknown future. But when I met her at the airport, all my fear and worries melted away because she was like an angel of God. I quit my Ph.D. study, got married and came to the US.

By the grace of God, for the last 25 years, I have been a Bible teacher at Northwestern campus. Like the wise men in this passage, I lost my way many times. I suffered anxiety attacks, insomnia, many failures, rejections, doubts, guilt, fear and shame. However, my good shepherd Jesus faithfully led me so far. Jesus guided me through his living word from the Scriptures. The word of God drove out fear and doubt whenever I turned to him. Jesus forgave my sins again and again and made me free from guilt and shame. Jesus provided for me and my family so faithfully so far. By God's grace, all my children went to Northwestern University and are learning to live by faith on their own.

Recently I had several health issues: ankle injury, wrist injury and high blood pressure. My blood pressure went up and down uncontrollably, one day to 179 and the next day to 117. I was frustrated and lost peace. I realized that I could die at any moment. Out of helplessness I turned to Jesus. I confessed to him that my life belongs to him. And instead of worrying about my problem which I cannot control, I decided to trust God who has everything under his control. As I resumed my daily Bible reading, Jesus spoke to me through Psalms 119:165 "Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble." Wow! What a promise!! God's word gave me great peace in the midst of many troubles.

In conclusion, we learned that Jesus is our good shepherd king who gave his life for us. And we are called to worship him. We should not be led by fear. Instead we must be led by the Scriptures and by the Holy Spirit. As we follow God's guidance to worship Jesus, we can experience great joy and peace that comes from him. May God help us to worship Jesus through our life and rejoice in him.