

## “Visit of the Magi” (Matthew 2:1–12)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (12/15/2019)

### Introduction

1. Five truths God wants us to see in this text:
  - a. Jesus is the Messiah promised, the King of the Jews.
  - b. Jesus is to be worshiped by all nations as demonstrated by the magi’s seeking Him.
  - c. God directs the universe to make His Son known and worshiped.
  - d. Jesus is very troubling to those who will not recognize, own, or worship Him.
  - e. Worshiping Jesus is joyfully acknowledging the dignity and authority of Christ (Messiah) as evidenced by the gifts given Him.
2. Mistakes and myths imbedded in the legend of the three wise men
  - a. The burial site of Balthasar, Casper, and Melchoir is the great Cathedral of Cologne on the Rhine River in eastern Germany. This impressive Gothic church, the largest cathedral in Germany, was built between 1248 and 1880. The purpose of this structure was to house a golden shrine to venerate the remains of the wise men brought from Italy in 1164.
  - b. The magi are called “kings” as per the Christmas hymn, “We Three Kings.”
    - 1) This error is due to a misinterpretation of Isaiah 60:3 and Revelation 21:24, which regard His *second*, not His first coming.
    - 2) The number of magi is not recorded but assumed because of three gifts given to the infant king.
    - 3) All false tradition that blurs the Scripture comes from human error and satanic corruption to obscure the truth.

### I. The Request

1. Who were these “wise men”?
  - a. Matthew rather cryptically introduces them in the birth narrative to explain the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem and the flight of Joseph to Egypt.
  - b. These foreigners were *magi* (Greek, *majos*), magicians or astrologers (Acts 8:9; 13:6, 8), an ancient order of Babylonian priests.
  - c. Matthew proved that Jesus was the expected Messiah (1:17) but showing that Gentiles had more interest in His coming than did the Jews.
2. Where did the magi get their information about the King of the Jews?
  - a. Scripture reveals there have always been Gentiles who knew of the God of Abraham because, as with Abraham, God revealed Himself to them. Some examples would be Melchizedek of Canaan, Job of Arabia, and the prophet Balaam of Moab. Although Balaam was a false prophet, he nevertheless uttered a remarkable prophecy about the coming of a “*star out of Jacob*” (Numbers 24:17).
  - b. The coming of Messiah at that time was a universal expectation as witnessed by philosophers and historians, notably Philo and Josephus.
  - c. The *diaspora* (dispersion) put Jews in nearly every city in the east, bringing synagogue services and the public reading of Scripture.
  - d. It is possible that these magi’s hearts were opened, and God revealed to them about Messiah’s coming in the same way that He spoke to Abraham.
  - e. The best explanation of the expectation of these eastern magi is due most likely to Daniel’s godly influence (Daniel 2:48). Daniel’s last-minute revelation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream saved the wise men of Babylon from destruction (Daniel 2:12, 24). No doubt, these wise men held Daniel in high esteem, following him and diligently studying his prophetic revelations of the coming Messiah (Daniel 7:13, 14).
3. However informed, the wise men traveled to Jerusalem because they saw His star in the east.

- a. Although we prefer to link the magi to Daniel, nothing specific is found in Daniel or other biblical texts about Messiah's coming being heralded by a particular star.
- b. Therefore, we must leave it to God and stand in awe of His preparation of these noble agents to honor Christ's coming in this way.

## II. The Response

1. God sent these servants to Jerusalem to "stir the pot."
  - a. The news greatly agitated King Herod and all Jerusalem with him. Instead of receiving the news with joy and expectation, the power brokers expressed indifference to outright hostility. Two things upset the capital: (1) the new king's importance, and (2) the fact that Jerusalem's leaders were left out of the loop.
  - b. Herod was hostile, realizing the immediate threat to his position. He "secretly" called for the magi to inquire as to when the star appeared and then sent them to seek out the child so that he might also worship Him. He was a "fox," as Jesus called Him, whose only desire was to destroy this rival king.
2. Jerusalem, "*city of the great King*" (Psalm 48:2), demonstrated great indifference.
  - a. The chief priests and scribes knew the prophecies. No doubt, they, too, sensed the threat to their coveted positions as demonstrated in their sub-sequent interactions with Jesus. Though they were not ignorant of the Messianic revelations in the OT, they were selective in their information to the magi (compare Matthew 2:6 with Micah 5:2).
  - b. When they learned their long-expected Messiah was here, they did not pursue this information and would not travel five miles to seek Him out.

## III. The Reception

1. The wise men heard the word of the scribes and acted on the charge of Herod, leaving immediately for Bethlehem.
  - a. The star appeared again, and when they saw it, they "*rejoiced exceedingly with great joy*" (v. 10).
  - b. The star guided them to the house where Jesus rested in the manger.
  - c. They immediately recognized the King as per Daniel 2:44, and they fell down and worshiped Him, humbling themselves before the High One.
2. They presented their sacrificial gifts.
  - a. These gifts were not intended to meet needs but to show the great dignity and the supreme honor due the Christ child. It would dishonor royalty to give "care packages."
  - b. They gave gold to honor His royalty, frankincense to recognize His deity, and myrrh to distinguish His humanity. Origen in *Contra Celsum* wrote, "Gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God."

## What to Take Away

1. Each of us must ask, with whom do we most closely identify? The seeking magi, earnest to greet the King, rejoicing in God's guidance, and humbly bowing to His majesty, or the knowledgeable but indifferent priests and scribes, unwilling to put forth effort to seek out the One who had been their long-awaited expectation?
2. What are we willing to give to the King? John Piper wrote, "The gifts are intensifiers of desire for Christ Himself." "The joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from You. I have not come to You for Your things but for Yourself. This desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things in hope of enjoying You more. I surrender the things I enjoy and treasure to say that You are my real joy and treasure. You are Messiah, and all nations will come and bow before You. May I ascribe authority and dignity to You and bring my gifts to show that You alone satisfy my heart."