

## WORSHIP THE KING!

## Matthew 2:1-12

It is your birthday. A party is thrown to celebrate. Family and friends come bearing gifts. Everything is carefully planned to make this a special occasion. It is a special occasion for everyone, with one notable exception! Your family and friends enjoy one another's company. But the guest of honor is ignored. They joyfully exchange gifts with one another. But no one brought you anything. While everyone seems to be having a good time, no one seems to care that it is your party!

This scenario takes place every Christmas. As people are caught up in the "Christmas spirit," Jesus Christ is left out of our celebrations. It has even become offensive to wish someone "Merry Christmas." "Happy Holidays" is now the politically correct greeting. As Santa Clause, Christmas trees, shopping sprees, family get-togethers, and football games consume our attention, we have lost sight of the real meaning of Christmas. What is the real meaning of Christmas? Christmas is a call to worship. **A.W. TOZER** wrote: "**Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died on the cross, and rose from the grave to make worshipers out of rebels.**"

The Gospel of Matthew proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah-King in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The validity of this claim is established in the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel. In **Matthew 1**, the fact that Jesus is the Messiah is affirmed by the nature of his birth. Jesus was born into the royal lineage of David, which is the point of the genealogy in **Matthew 1:1-17**. Moreover, Jesus is the Son of God. **Matthew 1:18-23** establishes the divine nature of Christ's birth by declaring the miracle of the virgin birth in fulfillment of prophecy. **Isaiah 7:14** says, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*" In **Matthew 2:1-12** we find the messianic credentials of Jesus affirmed by the response to his birth. In this narrative, Matthew reports the birth of Jesus was not just an important event in the history of Israel. It also captured the attention of the world. Even the stars above spotlighted the birth of this one whose life, death, and resurrection would change the world. I repeat: The proper response to the birth of Jesus is to worship him as King. ***Why should we worship Jesus as the King?***

---

**I. GOD IS CALLING YOU TO WORSHIP KING JESUS.**

This narrative is not about the birth of Jesus. It is about what happened after the birth of Jesus. We do not know how long after the birth of Jesus these events took place. But it was at least a year afterward. Verse 11 tells us that Mary is in a house, not a barn or inn. It also tells us that Jesus is not a child, not a baby in a manger. The only thing we know for sure about the timing of these events is that it was "***in the days of Herod the king.***"

Verse 1 says: "*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.*" Legend, tradition,

and hymnody tell us a lot about these wise men that cannot be verified. Scripture does not say it was three wise men. And it does not say they were kings. The term **“wise men”** translates a Greek term from which we get our English word “magic” or “magician,” which indicates these dignitaries were astronomers who were experts at reading the stars. More important than who the wise men were is where they were from – **the east**. These non-Jewish dignitaries traveled a great distance to meet Israel’s king. So impressive was this caravan of dignitaries that Herod gave them a royal audience, thinking they must have come to establish a peace treaty or alliance with him. He asked the purpose of their visit. They answered, *“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.”* God supernaturally drew these wise men from the east to Jerusalem to worship King Jesus. And God is calling you to worship King Jesus.

---

**A. GOD IS CALLING YOU TO ASK LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION.**

Verse 2 reports the wise men came to Jerusalem with a question: *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”* It was not wise for these wise men come before a king – who took the throne by force, who had the support of the Roman Empire, who earned a reputation for treachery – and ask, “Where is the real king?” Yet they were more determined to find the true king than they were afraid of this ruthless puppet king. They had to find Jesus. This ought to be the question that guides and governs your life: *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”*

**Luke 2** records the only biblical account of the boyhood of Jesus. Just twelve-years-old, Jesus accompanied his family to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. When the feast was over, the family headed home to Nazareth, assuming he was somewhere in the caravan. They traveled a whole day before they acknowledged Jesus was not with them. This is a sad parable of how many us live. We go about our journey, assuming Jesus is with us. But we have actually left him behind. Where is Jesus in your life today? Have you put your trust in him as your Savior and Lord? How are things between you and the Lord Jesus Christ?

**When the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, went to China in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, he brought along samples of religious art to illustrate the Christian story for people who had never heard it. The Chinese readily adopted portraits of the Virgin Mary holding her child. But when he produced paintings of the crucifixion and tried to explain that the God-child grew up to be executed, they reacted with revulsion and horror. They preferred the Virgin and insisted on worshiping her rather than the crucified God. Christmas does not give us the option of worship the baby Jesus and rejecting the crucified Savior. The destiny of our lives is based on our trust in the death of the risen Savior. Where is he in your life today?**

---

**B. GOD IS CALLING YOU TO PURSUE LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT MISSION.**

Verse 2 reports the wise men came to Jerusalem with a question and a reason why they asked it: *"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?"* The nature of this **star** is just as mysterious as the identity of the wise men. Many try to explain away this star as some natural phenomenon, arguing that it was a comet or meteor. But it was a star the Lord appointed to guide the Magi to Jesus. I cannot explain the scientific implications of it. But I do believe **Genesis 1:1** is true: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* The God who spoke the world into existence can surely create a star to guide the wise men to Jerusalem. In a real sense, God moved heaven and earth to lead the wise men to worship him.

Every person is a worshiper. Your God is whatever you pay the most attention to. Some worship their work. Some worship money. Some worship the things money can buy. Some worship family. Some worship pleasure. But everyone is a worshiper. It's inevitable. The issue is not if you will worship. It is who or what you will worship. In his book *Real Worship*, WARREN WIERSEBEE writes: **"God and Satan have this in common: Each desires our worship. God wants us to worship Him because He is worthy and He graciously wants to transform us. Satan wants our worship because he wants to destroy us, and worship is the easiest way to achieve that diabolical purpose."** Who do you worship? God is calling you to pursue life's most important mission.

---

## II. WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT RESISTS THE WORSHIP OF KING JESUS.

Verses 1-2 tell us how some wise men responded to the birth of Jesus. But verses 3-8 tell us how some foolish men responded to the birth of Jesus.

### A. MANY PEOPLE ARE THREATENED BY JESUS.

Verse 3 says: *"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."* In 40 B.C., the Roman senate voted to appoint Herod as "King of Israel" on their behalf. Herod was enthroned by military force and reigned until his death in 4. A.D. He was Rome's puppet ruler of ancient Palestine. But he was a treacherous ruler who held on to his power at any cost. He even killed his wife, sons, and brothers, so that there would be no threat to his authority. Augustus Caesar reportedly said it was better to be Herod's dog than to be Herod's son.

How do you think Herod responded when the wise men asked to meet the newborn king? Verse 3 says he was **"troubled."** And all of Jerusalem was troubled with him. One troubled man troubled the whole city. Herod was troubled by two words: **"born king."** Jesus was not elected king. Jesus was not appointed king. Jesus did not become king by force. Jesus was born king. **Isaiah 9:6-7** says: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* This is a threat to the powers-that-be. The spirit of Herod is not dead. The world is threatened by the name of Jesus. But we must not be ashamed to worship

Jesus boldly, publicly, and defiantly. **Philippians 2:9-11** says: *“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

---

#### **B. MANY PEOPLE ARE INDIFFERENT TOWARD JESUS.**

Verses 3-4 report: *“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem, with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”* In response to the inquiry of the wise men, Herod organized a national convention of religious scholars. He wanted to know where the Christ was to be born. Verses 5-6 record the scholars’ response: *“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.’”* This is a reference to **Micah 5:2**, which it directly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. And this is why you can trust the message of the Bible. Skeptics claim Jesus manipulated the events of his life to line up with prophesy. But how do you explain him orchestrating his place of birth, which was prophesied seven hundred years before he was born? The statistics of probability make it clear that only Jesus can be qualified to claim he is the Messiah.

The chief priests and scribes knew where Messiah-King was to be born. But when the wise men from the east set out to find the child, the representatives of the religious establishment did not go with them. They knew the truth. But they were not moved by it. This reminds us that mere Bible knowledge does not produce salvation. You can know a great deal about the Bible and still be lost. Spiritual indifference is a clear sign you are walking in a false presumption of salvation. Beware if you can hear or read or know the word of God and it does not move you to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In **Matthew 7:21-23**, Jesus declares, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

---

### **III. WORSHIP KING JESUS NO MATTER WHAT THE WORLD MAY DO.**

The wise men searched for Jesus to worship him. Herod was threatened by Jesus and plotted against him. The religious establishment ignored Jesus and went about business as usual. These ancient responses to Jesus have not changed. And they confront us with an important matter today. What is your response to the name, person, authority, work, and message of the Lord Jesus Christ?

#### **A. WORSHIP JESUS JOYFULLY.**

Verse 9 says: *"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."* The star led the wise men from the east to Jerusalem. Then it seems the star disappeared. But after the wise men met Herod, the star reappeared and led them directly to Jesus.

Verse 10 is a parenthetical statement of the response of the wise men to finding Jesus: *"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."* There is no record that meeting Herod the king brought joy to the wise men. But when they found Jesus, ***they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy***. These wise men were overjoyed to find Jesus. They did not enter the house where the child was until verse 11. But they rejoiced in finding the child before they were in the presence of Jesus. Their joy was not passive, reserved, or nonchalant. Finding Jesus made these men shout! They did not rejoice in their power, position, or possessions. They rejoiced in finding Jesus. And this spiritually intoxicated joy is a rebuke to those who claim to know, love, and trust Jesus, but get excited about everything but Jesus. For some, Christ is a time of loss, pain, guilt, regret, or sorrow, not joy. But we must not allow anything to rob of us our joy over the child. Joy is the flag that hangs on the heart of the believer to declare the King is in residence. **Psalm 100:1-2** says: *"Make a joyful noise to be Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness!"*

---

## **B. WORSHIP JESUS REVERENTLY.**

There are three ways to view the Christmas season. You can view Christmas cynically, as if it is about nothing more than spending and making money. Or you can view Christmas graciously, wishing others the best over the holidays and into the new year. You do not have to be spiritual to view Christmas cynically or graciously. There are professing Christians who view Christmas this way. Only the true worshiper can view Christmas reverently. Only those who worship God in spirit and in truth can see that Christmas is about the one born king of the Jews. This is how the wise men viewed the birth of Jesus.

Verse 11 says, *"And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him."* Note that Matthew reports the wise men saw the child first, then Mary his mother. Joseph is not mentioned at all. This is because the wise men did not come to honor a royal family. They came to worship the king. When they saw Jesus, they fell down before him and prostrated themselves in worship. Many of us cannot worship if we are not comfortable. The music and preaching must be right. The temperature must be the way we like it. The sound must be adjusted to our personal volume level. The right people must be sitting near us. Our list of inconsequential preferences must be fulfilled before we can worship. But this is the direct opposite of biblical worship. In scripture, the whole idea was to get out of your comfort zone that you might truly worship. You cannot seek his face and save your face at the same time. It must be all about the Lord Jesus Christ!

---

### C. WORSHIP JESUS SACRIFICIALLY.

Verse 11 says: *"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."* The wise men offered Jesus their reverent adoration and their valuable possessions. Worship and giving go together. In **Exodus 34:20**, God warns the children of Israel: *"And none shall appear before me empty-handed."* The wise men came to Jesus bearing gifts. We do not know if it was three wise men. It may have been a caravan of hundreds. But scripture tells us they brought three gifts: **gold** and **frankincense** and **myrrh**.

The first gift was **gold**. Gold was the metal of royalty. It was the only gift worthy of kings. The wise men gave gold to honor the child as king. The significance of the second gift is not so obvious. **Frankincense** was presented to priests to offer to God in sacrificial worship. The burning frankincense symbolized the offering of worship going up as a sweet aroma to God. The wise men gave frankincense to acknowledge the child as a priest. Jesus was born to be the King of the Jews and our great high priest. The gift of **myrrh** is even more mysterious. Myrrh was primarily used to embalm dead bodies. What a strange gift to give a little child! The wise men gave myrrh to foretell the child as Savior. Jesus was born to die. Christmas has no meaning without Good Friday. The child was worn to be our king, lived to be our priest, but died to be our Savior.

**The church father, Jerome, dreamed that Jesus visited him. In the dream, he collected all his money and offered it to Jesus. The Lord said, "I do not want your money. So Jerome rounded up all his possessions and tried to give them to Jesus. The Lord said, "I do not want your possessions." Then Jerome asked, "What can I give you? What do you want? Jesus simply replied, "Give me your sin. That's what I came for; I came to take away your sin. Give me your sin."**

---

### D. WORSHIP JESUS OBEDIENTLY

The story of the wise men ends in verse 12: *"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."* Herod commanded the wise men to inform him when they found the child that he may come and worship him. But Herod had no intention of worshiping the child. He planned to assassinate the child. **Matthew 2:16** says: *"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men."* The wise men did not know Herod's evil intentions. But the Lord warned them. Note the joy of verse 10 is followed by warning in verse 12. As Joseph was warned in a dream not to divorce Mary, the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. And they obeyed the warning. Worship is not measured by what you do in worship.

Worship is measured by what you do after worship. True worship always leads to radical obedience.

In obedience to the divine warning, the wise men returned to their own country by another way. The simplest way home was to make a U-turn and retrace the way they came. But they heeded the Lord's warning to go home another way. This other way was inevitably out of the way. Yet their worship of the king would not permit them to go home the way they had come. This is the way it always is. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* This is true of Christian conversion. But it is also true of Christian worship. **RICHARD FOSTER** is right: **"If worship does not change us, it has not been worship."** When you worship the king, you ought to go home another way.