

COME WORSHIP HIM

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 when it rose and have come to worship him.’”

Everyone is on a life journey or pilgrimage of sorts. And everyone devotes their heart to someone or to something. But does it deserve your worship or give you lasting joy? People know that Christmas should make them happy because it is a time of great joy. But eating and gifting and being gifted don't really give them much joy. Many are rather depressed. But the problem isn't with Christmas. It's with the kind of journey we take in life, and where it's leading us. The truth is that if our life journey isn't leading us to Christ, we do not experience joy, not even at Christmas. The journey of the Magi is a quest to worship Jesus and to present Him with gifts. But there's so much more. We learn what the Magi purposed to seek in life, and what a true life journey is all about. We learn who is the only worthy recipient of our worship and how we can worship Him. We also learn how to experience overjoy. As we listen to their story, may the Spirit of God lead us to Christ.

First, Worship Begins With Seeking and Following the Truth of God. Read verses 1-2. **“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”** No one really knows who these Magi were or where they came from. But the word “Magi” has always been synonymous with the words “Wise men”. In ancient times, kings retained in their courts men with exceptional wisdom, knowledge and skill such as astronomers, magicians, diviners and priests who were known as “wise men” (Daniel 2) and who commanded great respect and honor. Matthew tells us that they were from the east. Most likely they were from ancient Persia or Babylonia and had travelled a long way to Jerusalem. Many dignitaries travelled in those days, especially to their favorite health spas and vacation spots. So, what made the Magi's journey so special? Matthew tells us that they were men with a unique purpose. They were following a star that led them

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here. They were searching for the Child, born to be King of the Jews. They had seen “His star when it rose and have come to worship Him”.

How did they know of the birth of the King to the Jews? They must have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures. Ever since the prophet Daniel served the royal courts of the Eastern kingdoms with unwavering faith in his God, men of great wisdom around him began to seek the truth. They studied the Jewish Scripture and learned that there is but one God, the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth. They learned that God is also their Creator whom they must seek and worship. When they paid particular attention to prophesy, they also found out that God had promised a King who would be the Savior Messiah for all peoples (Daniel 9:25-26). Especially a prophesy about a rising star captured their hearts: **“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel ... A ruler will come out of Jacob.”** (Numbers 24:17,19) For generations, they passed down their knowledge regarding the child who would be born King of the Jews. For generations the wise men of the east kept their eyes fixed on the skies for the Star that would announce the Savior’s birth. One day, a magnificent star appeared in the skies, and they knew that it was His Star— that the King of the Jews had been born.

When the wise men saw the brilliant Star, they really didn’t have to do anything. But remarkably, they set out on a journey to follow the star! They intuitively understood that the star was God’s own guiding light given to guide them to the place where the King of the Jews was born. But consider at what cost they were making this journey. These were men of eminence and wealth, privileged with all the comforts of life. They have family responsibilities and close ties. They didn’t know how long their journey would be! They only knew that road was treacherous, fraught with hardship and danger. The cost of taking such a journey would be great, the sacrifices enormous! Yet no cost was high enough for them, nor sacrifice big enough to make. They were ready to set out on a journey and follow the star at any cost.

Second, Jesus the Incarnate God is Alone Worthy of Worship. Why were they willing to pay such a high price to make the journey? Look at verse 2 again. **“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star where**

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it rose and have come to worship him.” They were willing to sacrifice everything in life to make this journey because they had a clear life purpose to fulfill. Their life purpose was to seek the Child King in order to worship him. To understand this better, we have to ask: Who then is this King of the Jews? Almost 700 years before his birth, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about him saying: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** (Isaiah 9:6). The child to be born is the Creator God, who promised to send the Savior to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21¹). This King then, was no ordinary king. This is God himself who has finally fulfilled his promise and has come to redeem his people (Luke 1:68²). The Magi were following the star because in essence they were seeking God. Now then, this is a life purpose quite worthy of devoting one’s life to— Seeking God! People make it their life purpose to seek wealth and success and accomplishment, while others seek comfort and happiness and love. How can such things give meaning nor purpose to our lives. They can’t! Yet the Magi, who had all that life could offer and more, sacrificed everything in seeking God. They were indeed wise men!

Why were they seeking God? Look at verse 2 again. **“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”** It was their heart’s desire to seek God and worship him. Why? Because we are all created by God to worship him, even if we do not acknowledge it. Every one of us worships something or another. Since the dawn of the human race, human beings have demonstrated the truth that when we do not worship God, we worship lesser things. The Magi must have been surrounded by the decadence and moral corruption of their own times. Their own people turned their hearts to worship all kinds of idols— money, sex in all its perversions, body worship, intoxicating agents, power, entertainment and sports. They thought they could find meaning and security and joy in worshipping such things. But the Magi knew better! They understood the sinfulness of the human heart and the futility of false worship. They understood that such things cannot provide real security nor meaning nor joy

¹ “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

² “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.”

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to life. Nor are they worthy of worship! So, the Magi devoted their lives to worshiping God alone. And God did for them what God does for anyone who genuinely seeks to worship him. God helped them! God opened their eyes to see the Star where it rose, and gave them wisdom to follow its guiding light to Christ, who alone is the worthy recipient of our worship.

Their long journey however, took a wrong turn near the city of Jerusalem. Maybe in their excitement, they stopped following God's guidance and began to reason things out according to human wisdom. They figured that a prince would be born in a palace. It was a terrible mistake! Look at verse 3. **“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”** King Herod heard the best news the world had ever heard. The long awaited Messiah had been born. God had finally come to redeem his people. Herod should rejoice and all Jerusalem with him! But that wasn't his reaction at all. Actually, the news deeply disturbed him. He was a wicked man who worshiped no one but himself, and killed anyone who stood in his way. His life purpose was to maintain his worldly power at any cost. With an ungodly life purpose like this, no wonder he was a miserable man, fearful and anxious, and suspicious of everything and everyone! Even news of the birth of a new born baby boy threatened and disturbed him. For those who's lives are centered around themselves, even the beautiful Christmas message threatens and disturbs them.

Herod could think of no one but himself and how to save his own throne, so he began thinking of a plan to eliminate the child King. He needed to find out where the Messiah was born. So, he called for a Bible study with the expert Bible teachers of the time. Read verses 4-6. **“When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘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 shepherd my people Israel.””** Herod ruled his people with cruelty and oppression. He crushed and used them mercilessly, as many rulers do. But Jesus was born to rule us with love and compassion. As a shepherd, **a bruised reed he**

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would not break, and a smoldering wick he would not snuff out (Matthew 12:20a³). This Shepherd loves the flock and **“lays down his life for the sheep”** (John 10:11). He was born to sacrifice his life so that we all might not perish in our sins but have life eternal. It was a heart moving Bible study about the redeeming love of God— even for someone like Herod. Herod never before cared much about Bible study. He had no room for God in his heart. But now he wanted to gain some information to use for his own advantage. He closed his heart to the truth, and only heard what he wanted to hear in the Bible study— that the child would be born in Bethlehem. The Bible experts’ ignorance of the Messiah’s birth shows us that their hearts were far from God; they studied the Bible only to receive recognition and self glory. On the other hand, the Magi studied the Scriptures with the right motive; to seek and to worship God.

Third, Joy Comes to Those Who Worship God. It’s unfortunate that the Magi lost sight of their heavenly guiding star for a time and found themselves in the palace of the ogre Herod. Look at verses 7-8. **“Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.’”** Herod wanted to know how old the child would now be. When the Magi had told him, he sent them to Bethlehem to search for him, pretending that he too wanted to worship him. It seems that he was a clever fake worshiper as well. No one suspected his murderous intentions (Matthew 2:13⁴). Not every act of worship is a true act of worship. Pretend worshipers like Herod may fool even the Magi, but no one can fool God.

People don’t really know what true worship is. Whatever purpose we choose to devote our lives to may well become the object of our worship. If our life purpose is to please ourselves and to serve our greed and to satisfy our own pleasures, then we are worshiping idols and are slaves to our sins. We may worship

³ “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” (Matthew 12:20a)

⁴ “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.”

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God on Sunday, but if the purpose for which we live our lives isn't Christ, it is as fake as Herod's fake worship. When people's lives are devoted to sex and money and sports and entertainment etc., that's what they worship! What then is true worship? It isn't devoting two hours on Sunday to have an uplifting church experience and then going home to enjoy my idols. True worship is finding my life purpose in God, throwing away my idols, and then devoting my whole heart and life to seeking God and worshiping him. So many people devote their lives to worship worthless things during their life journey. Some don't even know when their hearts are stolen by the things they crave and give in to. But we have to ask ourselves: what is really worth investing my life in; to pursue and to devote my heart to? The Magi knew what is worthy of their life investment. They had everything life could offer and more, but they were ready to sacrifice everything to worship Jesus, the Incarnate God.

I cannot imagine a worse experience than the one the Magi had at Herod's palace. For months they were guided by the hand of God through His Star in the heavens. Then all of a sudden, the lights went out and they were lost in the darkness of the world. The joy that had filled their hearts throughout their journey was now gone. By the time Herod dismissed them, the Magi felt dejected. But then something unexpected happened. Read verse 9-10. **“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”** Their guiding Star appeared again and went on ahead of them until they came to the place where the child was. This is remarkable! In spite of their mistake, God intervened and helped them. To the end, he guided them to the Christ Child! They were sincere worshipers. The Bible tells us that God is always seeking such worshipers (John 4:23⁵). And so, in spite of their failure, God helped them. He again continued to guide them by shining His Star in the heavens.

Who then is this Star? Jesus tells us: **“I am ... the bright Morning Star.”** (Revelation 22:16) And the Apostle Peter tells us to pay attention to the Word of

⁵ “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

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God because it is the light shining in a dark place and can lead us to Jesus the Morning Star (2 Peter 1:19⁶). The Bible describes humanity like people living in darkness and in the land of the shadow of death (Matthew 4:16⁷). But for those who seek God, God never leaves us to wander in the darkness of this world. He has given us his Son Jesus, whose birth, whose life and ministry and teachings, whose death and resurrection, have been for us the brightest Star that has ever shone in human history. Jesus came to this world to be **“Immanuel— God with us”** (Matthew 1:23⁸). We were consumed by our filthy idols, dead in our sins, miserable and lonely, and worst of all, it seemed as if God was lost to us. But Jesus, **Immanuel— God with us—** with you and with me— came to shine God’s love and grace on our hearts. He takes you and me by the hand, and shows us the way back to our Father God. Jesus sacrificed his life to offer us forgiveness for a life lived in false worship and in devotion to sin. That’s why we must fix our Eyes on Jesus our **“Morning Star”** and follow the guiding light of his words, so that we might have a life purpose worthy to live for, and worship the One who alone is worthy of our devotion and worship. Only then can we have true joy in our hearts and lives.

The Magi were overjoyed because they had once again found their Guiding Star! The Magi’s joy had been so great. No treasure left behind, no sacrifice made, and no hardship endured could dampen the joy they felt along the way. But when they lost sight of the star, they also lost their joy. And that joy did not return until they again saw the star and began to follow it’s guidance. They were overjoyed because the Star’s guidance was crucial to their life’s journey. They were overjoyed because they had the assurance that they would finally see the Christ child and worship him.

It’s essential for us to know that whether we experience joy or misery in life, is very closely related to what purpose we choose to live our lives, and who or what we worship. The truth is that we can find joy only when we worship God.

⁶ “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

⁷ “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

⁸ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

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There are modern Magi today who have left everything in the world to follow God's Star. And they have found joy. Jason Brown, the former NFL center for the Rams found his blooming career of \$37 million dollar contract to be meaningless. He left it behind to follow God's Star rising in his heart, began farming and distributing his first fruits to those in need. His agent told him that he was making the biggest mistake of his life. But Jason said, "Love is the most wonderful currency you can give anyone." Another modern Magi, Dolores Hart was a rising movie star whose fame with Elvis Presley, the USA king of his time, made her the envy of so many. But she left behind her fame and king Elvis, to follow God's Star when it rose in her heart. She said, "I gave up the king for the Lord. God is the bigger King". These people found joy when they began their journey to worship God. There are many modern Magi here among us today who have left everything in life to follow the Star which rose in their hearts, and consequently found great joy. But sometimes because of family problems and the many distractions of life, some have now lost their joy. How can they restore their joy? May the Morning Star rise again in your hearts. And there are those who haven't yet found the Star. I tell you that whatever you have devoted your heart to apart from Christ, sooner or later will disappoint and grieve you. So I urge you to turn away from it, and come let's turn our hearts to Jesus today and worship him together. The Morning Star is still there, shining ever so brightly with the promise of joy.

When the star had led them to the Christ child, the Magi did something utterly unexpected. Read 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, frankincense and myrrh."** Amazing! Dignified men of honor and wealth entered a shabby house, beheld a child with his poor mother, bowed down their knees and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Even in these poor circumstances, humbly they recognized in him the King of the Jews—the Messiah—the Savior of all mankind and their Savior. So they bowed their knees and worshiped him.

The Magi also expressed worship by presenting him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Jesus may have looked poor and beggarly. But the Magi did not treat him like a beggar, giving him a few leftover coins as so many usually

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offer God at worship. They treated him like a King. Jesus was not only the Ruler Shepherd of Israel (6), he is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16⁹). When the Magi presented him with gifts, they honored him with an honor worthy of a glorious King— greater than all the rulers of the earth. At the same time, Jesus is God’s best gift for a sinful humanity. The Magi understood that we all deserve God’s condemnation and not his mercy, let alone to receive a gift as precious as God’s Own Son. What could they do to express their love and gratitude to a God who loved them so? They presented Jesus with most precious gifts. They gave him gifts of gold because he is King, frankincense because he is God, and myrrh because he is our Sacrifice for sin. But in essence they were offering him their most treasured possessions— their own hearts and lives. They held back nothing from him, but gave him their best gifts who gave all of us his best Gift. God’s love and guidance in the Magi’s lives didn’t stop here. God continued to guide them. Look at verse 12. **“And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”**

Matthew paints for us a perfect picture of who Jesus is. The Magi teach us why we worship him. Jesus is the Incarnate God who alone is worthy of our devotion and worship. They also teach us how to worship him. First, take a moment to examine your heart; see if there is anything occupying the throne of your heart that doesn’t belong there; that isn’t worthy of your heart’s devotion and worship. Let’s repent and make Jesus our life purpose and let our life journey reflect our worship in every area of our lives. What gift will you be giving Jesus this Christmas? Let’s offer him the best of what we have. And truly there is no gift as precious as our heart’s devotion and life commitment and service. Then come, let us worship him together and experience true joy. God bless you.

⁹ “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.”