

We Have Come to Worship Him
Matthew 2:1-12
Key Verse: 2:2

by James Cook

“...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.’”

In today’s passage, Magi from the East came to worship the baby Jesus. Among the gospel writers, only Matthew tells this story. Matthew’s gospel emphasizes that Jesus is the King sent by God, who is worthy to be worshiped by all people, great and small. This story inspires us that we are made to worship God, and that in worshiping God, we find true joy and meaning of life. Who were these mysterious Magi? And how did they come to worship the baby Jesus? Let’s find out through this study.

First, The Magi Worship Jesus (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...” Jesus was God who had come into the world, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. Jesus came to be with us and to save us from our sins. This was the greatest event in Israel’s history and in the history of the world. After his birth, Magi from the east came to see him.

Who were the Magi? We know them as the Wise Men in the Christmas story. They are commonly depicted as figures in manger scene decorations. History study tells us that the Magi came from ancient Persia or Babylon. Perhaps they could have been from India, but probably not as far east as China or North Korea. Yet in a way, they represent all nations as a preview of God’s world mission purpose. The Magi were scholars who believed scientific reason as well as spiritual revelation. They were advisers to kings and highly respected in society. They were astronomers and astrologers as well as philosophers and theologians. Many college students in our generation have the false impression that Christian faith is only for uneducated people, but these Magi show us that Christ is the king of scholarly and noble people as well. The Magi were like PhD scholars of their time.

Why did the Magi come to Jerusalem? Look at verse 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.’” The Magi were looking for the king of the Jews, known in Israel as the Messiah. We might be surprised that these men who lived in a culture far away from Israel knew about the coming Messiah. It is likely that the Magi knew of the Old Testament. Once the Israelites had been captives in the Babylonian Empire during the time of Daniel the prophet, and once they became a colony of the Persian Empire during the time of Queen Esther. It is likely that the Magi were familiar with Numbers 24:17a, a prophecy spoken centuries earlier which says, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” God showed the Magi a wonderful star in the sky. Since they were astronomers and astrologers, God used a method that they could understand in order to get their attention. The Magi were truth-seekers who not only wanted to know the truth but also wanted to follow the truth. When they discovered that the King of the Jews had been born, they set out on a long journey to find him. And upon finding him, they wanted to worship him.

The Bible says that worship belongs to God alone. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” These Magi wanted to worship God. So they left their homeland, saying goodbye to their lovely wives, making a long and dangerous journey, spending much money, to find the one who was worthy of their worship. The Bible says that God made man in his own image. So the desire to worship God compels us to thirst for God as a deer pants for streams of water. St. Augustine said that “God made man with an empty spot that only God can fill; man is a restless wanderer until he finds his rest in God.” If people

do not worship God, they worship created things and become wicked and depraved. So God said in the first of the Ten Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol...”(Ex 20:2-4). These days, people worship a boyfriend or a girlfriend, sports stars, technology, movies, and money to name a few. During the Christmas season, people wait twelve hours in line for bargain shopping. Postmodern philosophy leads people to create their own customized god, just as one creates a salad bar buffet; but it is not true. Levi the lonely tax collector worshiped money. He was miserable until he found Jesus, his true friend. After meeting Jesus, he changed his name to Matthew, the gospel writer who expressed the kingship of Jesus so well. The Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 worshiped men until she had 5 husbands and a boyfriend. Instead of joy and meaning, she found only heartbreak and misery. But when she met Jesus, she found joy and meaning like springs of living water in her soul. Once I wanted to give my whole heart to the study of Architecture. But later I became anxious, discovering that material things will not last in this temporary world. Ultimately, I found that worshiping Jesus could give me a lasting joy and a meaningful purpose as an environment-maker for the kingdom of God. The Magi were not satisfied with human nobility and scholarship. They followed their desire to worship God. Let’s seek to worship God like the Magi. Let’s also bring many modern Magi to the Christmas Worship Service.

Second, Jesus is a Shepherd King (3-8).

Look at verse 3. “When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” King Herod ruled Israel from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. He had 10 wives and many sons who competed with each other for political power. Once he killed his own sons when he feared a conspiracy. Ironically, he was known as Herod the Great. When Herod heard from the Magi that the king of the Jews had been born, he was disturbed. Herod thought that the baby Jesus would be a threat to his kingship, and he became paranoid. When Herod was disturbed, all Jerusalem was disturbed with him. Those who depend on political or social systems are disturbed when that system seems to be threatened.

Look at verse 4. “When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.” Herod knew that Bible study would reveal information about the birth of the Christ. So he held an emergency Bible conference with the religious leaders. His motive was not to worship Jesus, but to eliminate Jesus. Herod was a very poor Bible student. Worse, he was like the devil who is a liar and a murderer. The religious leaders were also poor Bible students. The Christ would be born in Bethlehem, only six miles away from them. But they made no effort to go there. What a contrast there is between the careless religious leaders and the truth-seeking Magi!

In spite of the evil motive of Herod and the religious leaders, the word of God shone brightly in the darkness. Look at verses 5-6. “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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.”” God’s word revealed that the king of the Jews would be a shepherd of his people. The bad image of many kings in history makes modern people reject the idea of a king. A shepherd king is different. A shepherd king is the perfect king, the kind of ruler we long for.

Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, was known as the City of David. Foreshadowing Jesus, David had been a shepherd king. The Bible says that David had a heart after God’s own heart. As a shepherd king, David protected his people physically and spiritually. As a shepherd king, David ruled them according to God’s righteousness. But David’s earthly kingdom could not last forever.

Jesus is the good shepherd. He is the true and eternal shepherd king. Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." To save us from our sins, Jesus died on the cross. Jesus took our shame and eternal punishment and bore it in our places. Jesus rescued us from the power of sin, and brings us under his rule where there is peace and love. Those who receive Jesus' saving grace are brought from death to life. Jesus' coming as the shepherd king is the best news in the world.

After King Herod got the information that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, he called the Magi secretly to find out the time the star had appeared. He said that he too wanted to go and worship him. But his real plan was to know the age of the child so he could make his assassination attempt on the baby Jesus. What a contrast there is between murderous King Herod and shepherd King Jesus! King Herod seemed to outsmart the Magi. However, God was in control. God helped the Magi to find the Christ, but warned them in a dream to avoid Herod and go back to their country by another route. God, the good shepherd, protected the baby Jesus and the Magi. Sometimes we feel outwitted when evil people of the world make us afraid. But we must believe that when we follow the truth with a pure heart, God will take care of us.

Third, Jesus is our true joy and treasure. (9-12)

Look at verses 9-10. "After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." The Magi might have been discouraged when they lost sight of the star, not to mention Herod's terrible impression. After following their scientific reasoning and intellectual curiosity about the star, they got stuck. But the Word of God was a "lamp for their feet and a light for their path." By faith in the Word of God, they were directed to Bethlehem. On the way there, the Magi saw the star again and it led them to the house where the Christ child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed. They had finally found the purpose of their journey, and it was worth all the difficulty in getting there. True joy comes to those who seek Jesus with all their hearts. 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." It is not easy to make a decision of faith and persevere through trials. But in the end, Jesus gives us overflowing joy. It is the joy of eternal life. Many missionaries have left everything to follow Jesus. Their lives are full of sufferings and trials. But they are the most blessed and happy people. Missionary Vladimir Point left behind a big comfortable house in Ukraine in order to go to Turkey as a missionary. He suffers materially and socially as a Christian in a Muslim country. But his joy is evident to all. Let us seek the Lord with all our hearts until we find him and have true joy in him!

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." Despite Jesus' appearance as an ordinary child in an ordinary house, the Magi knew that he was God whom they must worship. The Magi were noble and dignified people who lived in the courts of kings. But they knew before God they were sinners who needed forgiveness. They knew that Jesus is the "King of kings and Lord of lords." They declared their loyalty to Jesus by bowing as his royal subjects. They finally found the one worthy of their worship. Revelation 5:12 says, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" In addition to their words and gestures of adoration, the Magi also offered precious treasures to the baby Jesus. When one prepares a gift for a loved one, they carefully choose just the perfect gift that reveals the loved one's character, interests, and personality. A husband makes a careful choice when he selects a gift for his wife because it is an expression of her character. The Magi prepared gifts which revealed who Jesus is, and what purpose he came to fulfill. Gold was the gift for a king. Silver or bronze would not do. When we come to God, we must bring our very best. Incense was the gift for a priest. It represented Jesus' high priestly role in bringing sinful people to the holy God. Myrrh was a spice for one who dies. Death by martyrdom was common to the Old Testament prophets. But Jesus was to die on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the world. In spite of

being foreigners to Israel, these Magi could meet Jesus and find true joy when they sought him and worshiped him and gave him their treasures. At this Christmas let us offer our message, drama, dance, music, testimonies, invitations, and prayers whole-heartedly as treasured gifts for the baby Jesus.

Today we learned from the Magi that we are made to worship God. When we seek God and worship him, we can experience true joy and have eternal life. Most of all, Jesus is our shepherd king, worthy of all our worship.