

We Have Come to Worship Him

Moses Lenthang

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 in the east and have come to worship him.’”

In this passage, some mysterious men called Magi saw a star in the east and traveled about 900 miles to Jerusalem to worship the baby Jesus. You may say “What’s the big deal with the Magi?” I want to share this with you this morning. The Magi story inspires countless people to realize that we are made to worship God. When we worship Jesus, we find in him joy, hope and the true meaning of life. Don’t you want to have a life that gives you meaning, joy and hope? I really do. This is why Jesus came. May God help us to learn from the Magi how to worship Jesus today and always.

First, Magi from the east came to 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...” The birth of Jesus is the greatest event in Israel’s history, and the history of mankind. The shepherd boys in the field were the first people to notice the birth of Jesus, and they celebrated the first historical Christmas. Then, the Magi came from the east to worship Jesus with Christmas gifts.

Who were the Magi? According to some historians the Magi were said to have come from Ancient Persia, which in modern day is Iran. Or Babylon which is in modern day Iraq. Some insist that one of them came from China, which I don’t believe. The phrase ‘from the east’ is the only information Matthew provides about the region from which they came. Some believed that about 50 Magi came to worship Jesus, but the account does not tell us how many they were. The three gifts led to the assumption that they were three as well. The Magi were also called ‘wise men.’ They were astronomers who studied the stars, practiced astrology, and studied divination and interpretation of dreams. They were scholars, who believed in spiritual revelation as well as scientific reason as a basis for truth. In short they were sincere people and truth seekers. They were advisers to kings and highly respected in society.

Why did they 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.” They came to Jerusalem seeking the king of the Jews. How did they come to know about Jesus, let alone that he was King of the Jews? Matthew shows us that through their studies of the stars, they understood the importance of one particular star in the sky. They knew that it signaled something special and began to research its meaning. Perhaps they knew Numbers 24:17a, which says, “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” The Magi realized that the star signaled the birth of the king of the Jews. They realized that this king of the Jews was not just another political king, but the Savior promised by God, who was to be worshiped. The Magi had mastered various fields of study. They were truth seekers who wanted not only to know the truth, but also to follow the truth. When they learned that the king of the Jews had been born, they made a long journey to Jerusalem to find him. Upon finding him, they wanted to worship him.

The Bible says that worship belongs to God alone (Mt 4:10). To worship God is to express intense love for God, which is exactly what the Magi wanted to do. They left their comfortable lives at home to make a long and dangerous journey to find the one they could worship.

God made man in his own image with a strong desire to worship God. The desire to worship God urges us to cry out for God, like a little child cries out for his mother. Psalm 42:1-2 says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” In his book “Surprised by Joy,” C.S. Lewis wrote an autobiography about the first thirty years of his life. Lewis’ mother died when he was a young boy. Before overcoming his grief, he was sent to boarding school in England where he was mercilessly bullied. Lewis had lost his childlike faith in God and he remained convinced intellectually that ‘mind’ alone was the answer to understanding reality. But at the age of 30, his heart told him something else. He acknowledged that such inconsolable longing, aching and yearning could not be answered with simple logic. Finally he realized that the very object for which he was longing that would satisfy him was nothing but the longing for God. After his conversion he wrote, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” (‘another world’ means eternity)

If people do not worship God, they worship created things. When people worship created things they become wicked and depraved (Ro 1:18-32). That is why God gave us the Ten Commandments. They begin with, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything...” (Ex

20:2-4). However, many people worship created things. Some worship a boyfriend or girlfriend, sport stars or rock stars, technology, human achievement, or money, hoping that those things would satisfy them. This is a sin against God. It damages God's image in us and leads to restlessness and ruin. Those who worship created things must repent. The Samaritan woman in John 4 worshiped men. She thought that the right man would make her happy forever. Instead, she found one disappointment after another until she was wounded and scratched beyond recovery. Jesus gently led her to repentance and introduced the true object of worship. Then she found healing, meaning of life, joy, and a bright hope, welling up to eternal life.

Unlike the Samaritan woman, the Magi followed their desire to worship God. They were willing to make a sacrifice to worship God. They were hungry and thirsty for God; nothing less would satisfy them. On the outside, they looked noble and dignified being well educated and highly honored. But things of the world could not satisfy them. Realizing this, they sought God with all their hearts and souls and strength. Last Sunday after our Christmas worship service, one of my daughters said to me, "Dad, I love the drama. I just don't want all this to end." I said to her, "Sweetheart, I know, but everything has to come to an end one day. But there is one thing that will not end: that is eternal life in Jesus." God has put in us a desire that nothing in this world would satisfy so we could turn our eyes to seek God and be satisfied in him. Let's seek God to worship Him, like the Magi.

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." Herod was the king of Israel from 37 to 4 B.C. He was supposed to be a shepherd king for Israel but history records that he was a ruthless and godless king. Once, when he was running short of money, he executed 45 of his wealthiest citizens and took their estates to run his kingdom. Anyone who was in opposition was executed. He executed his wife and three sons for fear of being overthrown from his kingdom. In fact, when he approached death, knowing that no one would mourn his death, he sent out a decree that one person from every family was to be killed when he died, so that there would be grieving and mourning when he died. Imagine, what went through his mind when the Magi showed up at his palace and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" Herod thought that the baby Jesus was a threat to his kingship, and wanted to kill this innocent little baby.

What did Herod do? 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.” The religious leaders quoted the prophecy of the prophet Micah.

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.”’” The king of the Jews would be a shepherd of his people.

When Jesus came to be with his people, they were wretched. He was rejected, mistreated and people called him Beelzebub. But Jesus did not see them as wretched; rather, his heart went out to them. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. For example, once a woman was caught in adultery. According to Jewish law, they tried to stone her to death. When Jesus was interrogated to take a stand regarding the woman’s fate, Jesus said, “Any of you who is without sin, throw the first stone.” They all walked away, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left. Then Jesus asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” I cannot imagine her pain when she was condemned to be stoned. At the same time I’m not quite sure how to measure her joy after Jesus had set her free from the condemnation of her sins.

There was once a man who was a trouble maker in town. So he was chained. But he broke the chains and hid in the tombs. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. No one understood how hurt and crushed he was. Today, such a man would have been put in prison. But our good shepherd Jesus helped him. He drove out the evil spirits in him and when restored he went home to his family and began to tell how much Jesus had done for him (Mk 5).

We also cannot forget the story of Levi the tax collector. He was a man so damaged by greed and selfishness that no one wanted to be around him. But our good shepherd Jesus invited him for Bible study. Jesus bore with all his weaknesses and transgressions until he was changed into Saint Matthew.

Whenever I think about the good shepherd Jesus, I cannot forget the story of the two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus. After the death of Jesus, their joy and hope in being disciples of Jesus was crushed into millions of pieces that could never be fixed. The good shepherd Jesus visited them, walked and talked with them and taught them the Bible from Genesis to Malachi until the word of

God was burning in their hearts and rekindled their hope and vision. Because of this renewed hope and vision, they were alive again and gave up everything to follow Jesus. It is the best news to everybody that Jesus came to be the shepherd of his people.

After hearing the good news of the birth of Jesus, King Herod should have fallen to his knees in repentance. The birth of Jesus was good news for him too. But he was not really paying attention. The only information that he received was that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Then, he called the Magi secretly to find out the time the star had appeared. It was to carry out his plot to kill Jesus. King Herod was clever and seemed to outwit the Magi. However, God was in control. God warned the Magi in their dream to avoid Herod and return to their country by another route. God protected the Magi and the baby Jesus. Sometimes evil people of the world make us fearful. We feel that we must become more clever, but this is the devil's temptation. When we follow the truth with a pure trusting heart, God will protect us.

Third, the Magi bowed down and worshiped Jesus (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." This joy is not the joy of accomplishing goals or winning the turkey bowl (football tournament). This joy comes from meeting God personally.

True joy comes to those who seek Jesus and find him. To seek and follow Jesus requires a decision of faith, and perseverance. It was not easy for the Magi to follow the star. It was not convenient for them to get to the place where Jesus was. It is the same today. It is not going to be easy to follow the truth. But in the end, it will be worth it all. If you are casual followers of Jesus, I am telling you right now, you will never really find him. 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." Around the world, we can see so many missionaries who have left everything to follow Jesus. Their lives are full of sufferings and trials. However, they are most blessed and most happy, because they experienced God personally. On the other hand, people who are self-seeking and spend most of their time in the pursuit of their future career and security complain a lot, have no joy or meaning of life and die in regret.

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.” In this verse, we learn what true worship is from the Magi. Notice that the Magi did not bow down and worship Mary as many people do today. But the end of verse 11 says, “...they bowed down and worshiped him.” Though the Magi were highly honored and dignified, they bowed before the baby Jesus, showing that Christ was everything and their human glory was nothing.

After they bowed down and worshiped him, they opened their treasures and gave him gold, incense and myrrh. The three gifts would seem unsuitable for a human child. We would expect to give clothes and toys. But they carefully selected these gifts to convey the meaning of who the baby Jesus was. Gold is a gift fit for a king. Jesus was the King of kings. Incense was used by priests to worship God. Jesus was the Son of God, and the mediator between God and man. Myrrh is a fragrant perfume that was used to anoint the dead—to embalm and preserve them. Jesus was the Sacrificial Lamb. But there is more to worship than gold, incense, or myrrh. The Magi had to sacrifice their own comfort to find the King and worship him. Worship always involves sacrifice. In Romans 12:1 Paul says “...I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” True worship requires sacrifice. The greatest gift—the greatest sacrifice—you can give to God is yourself.

Today we learn that we are made to worship God. The Magi were no exception. They were wise men because they were truth seekers and they followed the truth. They worshiped the one that is worthy of worship and they were changed forever. It is all because of Jesus. How about you? For those whose lives are changed, I praise God for your life of faith. But for those who are looking for a change in life, I want to challenge you to step out in faith and seek God with all your heart and mind as the Magi did. God promises us that we will find him. You will not regret it. Down the road you will realize it was the best decision you ever made in your life. The Magi encourage us to be truth seekers. Let us be truth seekers. Jesus is the one who is worthy of our worship. I pray that each one of us may find one key verse for 2011. May the word of God be like a guiding star to guide us in this New Year.