

Worship the King
Matthew 2:1-12
Key Verse: 2:2

by Sarah Barry

"...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.'"

Several years ago I visited Cologne, Germany and went sightseeing. I was surprised to find that the bones of the Magi are enshrined as a relic in the Cologne Dom. Also on the official seal of the University of Cologne is a picture of the three Magi kneeling before the baby Jesus. Whoever designed the University seal understood that these Magi were truth-seekers. A university should be dedicated to seeking truth and to worshipping him who is the source of truth. Let's read 2:1,2. "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.'" Who is this king of the Jews whom the Magi came to worship? Isaiah tells us: "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....he will reign on David's throne..." (Isa 9:6,7) The Magi represent the Gentile world. Jesus is God's gift of love to the waiting world. God wants all the world to worship the king.

Part one, the Magi, truth-seekers (1,2)

The Magi were from the east, perhaps from Babylon or Persia. They were scholars who sought to find meaning, purpose and life direction in the stars. Even though they were great scholars, they were also fallen men in need of a Savior. They represent mankind in bondage, mankind seeking God. Men and women without God are in bondage to sin and meaninglessness. Rousseau said, "man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains," He thought that freedom is to live without restraint according to our natural desires and feelings. But it is living according to the sinful nature that forges the chains that enslave us. It is the truth that sets us free. These Magi realized that they must find truth. They must find God, worship him and give him their treasures. So they set out on a pilgrimage.

(i) How can we find the truth that sets us free?

When I studied chemistry, I was amazed by the intricate order and beauty of God's creation. I realized that all truth leads us closer to God, for the Creator God is the source of truth, of beauty and meaning. Dr. Francis Collins, head of the National Institutes of Science is the top scientist in America. He was raised an atheist by unbelieving parents. He studied chemistry, genetics and medicine and found that he could not deny the truth of the Creator God. He accepted the God of creation, the God of the Bible. One day he got on his knees and accepted Jesus as his Savior. He is still a truth seeker.

In the Bible we find the truth that leads us to God and to freedom. The Scriptures are about Jesus. He said, "The Scriptures testify about me." (Jn 5:39-40) Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He promised, "if you hold on to my word you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Only Jesus can break the chains of sin and set us free. Once Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you king of the Jews?" (Jn 18:33) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world." "... You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (Jn18:36,37) Jesus is the king who testifies to the truth. He invites all of us to come, listen to him and be set free.

(ii) God is seeking those who seek him

When we seek God to worship him, we find that God is seeking us. Once Jesus was traveling from Judea to Galilee. He sat down by a well. It was not an accident that he met a very thirsty woman there. She thought she could quench her thirst with human love. She married five times. Still she was thirsty. People try to quench their thirst for God in many ways. Some people try shopping; some surf the net; some try partying; some studying. Some try sports; others drugs. As this woman talked with Jesus she realized that as a human being created in God's image, only God could satisfy her. So she asked Jesus about worship. Jesus told her that God is seeking true worshipers who worship him in the Spirit and in truth. God was seeking her, so Jesus came to the well that day to find her. When the Magi had a

burning desire to worship the King who is God incarnate, God hung his star in the sky and showed them the way. The Magi were astrologers who studied the stars. God also made the Jewish Scriptures available to them, for Jews had lived in Babylon and Persia as exiles since 586 BC. In Numbers (24:17,19) God spoke about a star. He said, "... A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel...A ruler will come out of Jacob." It was not enough for them just to research the stars and the ancient documents. They left their homes and made a long and dangerous journey to find and worship the one worthy of worship. It was to find the meaning and purpose of life; It was to find the truth that is worth living for and worth dying for; It was to find freedom from the things that enslave people and keep them in bondage. So the Magi set out on a pilgrimage. When they sought the truth, God got out his celestial GPS. He himself hung the star of the King, the Messiah, in sky to lead them. The Magi looked up and saw it. By faith, they followed the star. They followed the star over streams and deserts and mountains and sought the Savior King with all their hearts. God promised, "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Dt 4:29) We find God because God is seeking us. There is a hymn I like. "I sought the Lord and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek me seeking him. It was not I who found, O Savior true; no, I was found by thee." In every person's deep heart is a longing to know truth and a longing to know God. Eccl 3:11 says "[God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end." We must seek him, the one worthy of our worship, and be found by him.

(iii) The journey; the destination

Life is a journey. if you enter the wrong destination in your GPS you will arrive at the wrong place. If one has no destination in his life's journey, he becomes like Cain, a restless wanderer. If our destination is God's eternal kingdom, our journey is a pilgrimage. Abraham's wandering life was a pilgrimage. He was looking for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith, he was on a pilgrim journey to the heavenly kingdom. (Heb 11, Ge 12) The Magi were seeking the one born king of the Jews, the Messiah, the one who saves us from our sins and sets us free. They were seeking the truth, seeking God. May God himself be the destination of our life journey. Part II, King Herod

(i) Where is the king?

The Magi came to Jerusalem. They had looked into the sky and seen "his" star when it rose. It was bright and beautiful and they could follow it, traveling mostly at night. In the course of the journey, they lost sight of the star. But they kept going in the direction of Jerusalem. They guessed that the king of the Jews must be born in the place where kings live, in Jerusalem. So their steps turned in that direction. They reached Jerusalem and they were lost. Even though the star was out of sight, by faith, the Magi kept the course. They came to Jerusalem. They began to ask questions. "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." They assumed that everyone in Jerusalem would be rejoicing in the birth of the Messiah King. But they were wrong. When King Herod heard about a new born king he was greatly disturbed. This upset all Jerusalem. The people knew that King Herod was paranoid. He could be unbelievably cruel and heartless. He didn't mind even killing his own sons to protect his throne. He didn't care about God or truth. He was a liar and a murderer like Satan. The Magi risked everything to find and worship the King who is the Way and the Truth and the Life.(Jn14:6)

(ii) King Herod's Bible study

In order to find the King of the Jews Herod called together the Bible teachers of the nation and told them to find out from prophecy where the new born baby could be found. They found in the prophet Micah, "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." So the new born Messiah king would be born in Bethlehem. Again Herod lied. He pretended to be a worshiper of the Messiah and asked the Magi to go to Bethlehem, find the baby and come and tell him (8). But God gave the Magi wisdom to avoid Herod's plot (12). God warned them in a dream to leave quietly without telling Herod anything. Herod had missed the point of Micah's prophecy.

Part III One worthy of worship

(i) Shepherd King

Look at verse 6 again. "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." The Bible prophecy from Micah not only told Herod where Jesus would be born; it also told about the nature of Jesus' kingship. Micah remembered King David, the shepherd king who ruled Israel with justice and mercy. King Herod was not a shepherd. He was selfish and cruel. He would have the boy babies in Bethlehem killed in his effort to destroy the Messiah King. The baby grew up to be a man. But Jesus was not a political king; he said, "my kingdom is not of this world." Jesus looked at the crowds who came to him. They were harassed by evil rulers, and by sin. They were sick and lost, like sheep without a shepherd. He had compassion on them. He healed them and fed them and taught them about the kingdom of God. He taught us that God loves us. God sent his Son to live with us and die for us. Jesus said (John 10:11), "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." We need the good shepherd. Our shepherd Jesus laid down his life on the cross so that you and I might be set free from the power of sin and death.

(ii) Overjoyed to see the star

The Magi were very glad to get out of Herod's palace. This journey had taken a long time. They had given up jobs and families; had used much money and had traveled a dangerous road. They had lost the star. It is easy for us to get lost on the journey. Sometimes because of the distractions of the world, we lose sight of the star. If we lose sight of the star, we begin to depend on our own calculations and ideas. It's hard to get back on the right road.

Back in the late 1940's Billy Graham and Chuck Templeton were close friends and successful evangelists in the Youth for Christ ministry. In 1947 they were both invited to a conference in the Forest Home Conference Grounds. At that time Chuck was having some doubts about the Bible. He looked away from Jesus and looked at the suffering and evil in the world, and doubted God's love. He decided to enroll in Princeton Seminary and seek for answers and he challenged Billy to do the same. He warned Billy that it was 'intellectual suicide' to not question the Bible and to go on preaching God's Word as authoritative. Billy Graham wrote about this incident. "I got my Bible and went out in the moonlight, and I came to a stump. I placed my Bible on the stump and knelt down and said, 'Oh, God, I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck ...is raising, but I accept this book by faith as the Word of God.'" Billy Graham kept his eyes on Jesus and did not lose his direction in life's journey. Chuck Templeton lost the star. For a while, he kept on preaching, but later he left the Church, renounced his faith and died of Alzheimer's, wishing that he could believe in Jesus. God gave us the Bible to lead us on our pilgrim journey. The Bible is about Jesus. All of our Bible study should lead us to Jesus.

The Magi were confused. They were going to Bethlehem, but they didn't trust Herod's direction. Then, they looked up and there was the star. They were overjoyed. God was still with them, leading them to the Savior King. The Bible tells us that the star is a symbol of Jesus himself. Peter says, "We 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." (2 Peter 1:19) In Revelation 22:16b Jesus says, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The bright Morning Star rises in the darkest time of night, just before the dawn. This star, shining brightly in the Jerusalem sky led them to the house where the child was. Jesus himself is our joy. There are many things that give us joy. We rejoice to be with people we love; we rejoice when we overcome some difficult trial. We rejoice in the achievements of ourselves or of our children. But the Bible tells us to rejoice always. Paul rejoiced in prison. He rejoiced in the hard times as well as in the good times. He said, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, 'Rejoice.' After Jesus was conceived, his mother Mary said, "my soul rejoices in God my Savior." Jesus is the source of joy. His coming tells us that God loves us. He forgives us. He is with us always. May Jesus, the bright Morning Star rise in our hearts to give us joy.

(iii) They bowed down and worshiped him

The Magi had everything--honor, wealth and great learning. Still, they needed to worship Jesus the Messiah. 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." Worship is coming to Jesus; it is acknowledging him as our God and king; it is giving him our treasures and ourselves. God wants the world to worship his Son."Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."(Php 2:9-11)

The Magi worshiped him. One definition of the word "worship" is "great love." Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." To worship God is to love God. We bow before him and acknowledge his Sovereignty. Jesus the Messiah is Lord. We must trust his absolute love. God created the world in love. Sin came in when mankind doubted God's love and disobeyed him. God kept on loving sinful mankind. He so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to be our Savior. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

The Magi represent the Gentile world coming to worship the true God. They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. To worship is to give him our treasure. Traditionally, the gifts of the Magi, have a prophetic meaning. They point to Jesus as King, Priest and Savior. The Magi gave their most treasured possessions. They were an expression of love and worship. The Magi were deeply satisfied in their souls when they poured out their treasures, holding nothing back. They gave him their hearts. They worshiped the Messiah, the king of their hearts and quietly returned home.

As the Magi came to worship the King Jesus, we have also come here to worship him. Let us receive him into our hearts. Let us acknowledge him as Lord and King Let us worship him. Let us show our love by our obedience. Let us give him ourselves. Let us leave this place overflowing with joy. Read together verse 2: "...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."