

COME WORSHIP THE KING

Matthew 2:1-23

Key verse 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.’”

Merry Christmas! After introducing Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David and Abraham, our Savior, who is Immanuel, God with us, Matthew introduces us to Magi from the east who come to worship Jesus. They are so mysterious! Why did they come to worship Jesus, the king of the Jews? Why is Jesus alone the one worthy of worship? When we think about this Advent season, leading up to Christmas, worship is an important subject. In times such as we live in, with pressures within and without, there is a temptation to half-heartedly celebrate Christmas, while focusing on everything else. This should be a magical time of wonder and joy. As we study this passage today, let’s come and worship the king, that we too may be overjoyed this Christmas season.

Part I: The Worship of the Magi (1-12)

Verses 1-2 read, **“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.’”** Jesus’ coming, although heralded by dreams and the miracle of the divine conception, was completely eclipsed by the dark times of Herod’s reign. It seems no one in Judea knew about it. Magi are traditionally known as wise men. According to the Bible, how many were there? Where were they from? We don’t know details. We don’t know any of their names; but we do know they were from the east. Traditionally scholars have said they were from Persia or Assyria or Babylon, all dynasties of the east which were influenced by Jewish thought due to the exiles of Jews there. But the East is a big place. There is India, then China, even Korea, in the East, from which they may have come. Why did travel all this way?

They were looking for the one born king of the Jews. Surely they had their own king to worry about. And they certainly didn’t come for Herod; the phrase

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“his star” may give us some clues. It is likely that if these men were not God-worshipping descendants of Jewish exiles, they were at least aware of the writings and influence of the Jewish prophets, such as Daniel, and even the law of Moses. For example, the evidence of a star as a sign of Messiah appears in the book of Numbers. The Moabite king summoned the prophet Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel. Three times he attempted to do so, but God spoke only blessings through him. Balaam went on to speak a further four prophecies regarding the future. In the first of these he says the following: **“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. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth”** (Num 24:17). This king of the Jews was more to them than just another political ruler. To Matthew, this title for Jesus was rich with meaning, and would be the charge by which Jesus would be sentenced to death. In him they found hope, truth, a direction of life. It seems that, perhaps for generations, they had been looking for **“his star,”** every night. Their knowledge was limited; but one thing, this star, became their anchor. When it appeared, they knew he had been born.

It was now a moment of decision for them. If this was simply a matter of intellectual knowledge, they could have done a research paper, got published, and received accolades. If it was a matter of proving others wrong, they could point to the star. But instead, they did something truly radical. They decided, as a group, to prepare a journey, leaving their homes, traveling the long distance to Jerusalem, in order to find this king of the Jews. Think of what that entailed: they had to quit their jobs, leave their families, and put all other matters on hold. Perhaps one had just bought a field, and wanted to go see it. But, he put it aside – he had to find the king of the Jews! Perhaps another just got himself a new team of oxen, and wanted to try them out. But he put it aside – he had to find the king of the Jews! Perhaps another was engaged, and preparing his wedding. But he put it aside – he had to find the king of the Jews! Family engagements, funerals, career deadlines, health issues – whatever it was, they elected to put it all aside in order to spend time, money, and all their resources, risking their families and futures, in order to find this king. Following a star has to be done at night, for obvious reasons, so they risked their lives on the bandit-filled roads. It was something they all worked together to do, not individually, but collaborating as one unit.

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In our pragmatic culture, we understand people who take great risks and sacrifices in order to accomplish success. We even have slogans to support it, like, “No pain no gain.” We admire those who suffer and come out on top. Will Smith’s movie a few years ago, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” was one such story, where he had to sacrifice everything to maintain a business internship without pay, living with his son in homeless shelters, in order to get a break in our capitalistic world. Of course, he made it. But many do not. Was there a pragmatic motive in the men? Why did they come to do? Verse 2 says, **“We... have come to worship him.”**

What is worship? We typically associate it with feelings of intense adoration and love toward the object of worship. But the word literally means “to bow down and prostrate before another in reverence, respect, and honor.” More than communicating a feeling, it is the very act of worship that is emphasized. Worship comes from the saxon root “worth-ship.” As faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed, so the level and acts of worship we engage in are what truly reveal the value or “worthiness” of the object of our worship. These Magi were great people in their own right – doubtless people of wealth, influence and success. But to them, that made this journey all the more important – they were going to appear in person before the king of the Jews and pledge their fealty, commitment, and adoration to him. That was their goal, simply because to them Jesus was worth it. Is he worthy of our worship – our commitment, our devotion, our loyalty, our obedience? If so, what sacrifices and decisions are we making to worship him? What are we practically sacrificing and giving our lives for, and it is really worth it? The Magi’s example is powerful.

Verses 3-5a read, **“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 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.”** Herod knew they were looking for the Messiah from the Scriptures. While the news inspired the Magi, it disturbed paranoid Herod and the Jews. He held a Bible school on the Messiah to find out the information the Magi needed, particularly the “where.” Knowledge is power. With this info he manipulated the Magi. Verses 7-8 read, **“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**

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soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” His motive was to remove a political rival. When he came to know the truth about Jesus, he decided to kill him. The religious leaders knew the Bible better than anyone, and could quote the chapter and verse. But they didn't move their pinky toe towards Bethlehem to find the king of the Jews. They were satisfied with positions of influence and righteousness under the law, and had no desire to worship the king.

The problem was they didn't study the Bible to know the truth or to know Jesus, but for their own benefit. Why were the Magi right in risking all to worship Jesus? First is because he is God, and only God is worthy of worship. But the amazing thing is, Jesus didn't come to demand worship. In their Bible school they quoted from the prophet Micah, as verse 6 reads, **“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.”** When they read this, thinking of themselves first, Herod saw this king as a rival to be exterminated. The religious leaders saw this as a king to work with, like King David worked with the priesthood, to restore the glory of the kingdom of Israel through political power and might. But Jesus is not such a king, and his rule is not political.

What kind of a king is Jesus, and is he worthy of our worship? According to verse 6 Jesus came to be a shepherd. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). We need such a shepherd King, because before the power of sin, death and the devil we are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus came to shepherd his people. He defeats these enemies. He reconciles us to God through the forgiveness of our sins accomplished by laying down his life for us. Jesus did not come to demand or force us to worship him. Those who know their great need for such a shepherd offer this worship willingly and wholeheartedly, like the Magi.

If we are honest, many of us don't like the idea of a king. In pride we have a strong delusion that we know what is best. I was raised by God-fearing parents, and met Jesus personally at a young age. But after the church my parents attended fell apart I never learned how to obey and serve King Jesus. Instead, living under king Steve, I did as I pleased, and became enslaved by sins of pride and pleasure

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seeking. I was a rebellious person, unthankful and immoral. When I entered UIC as a freshman in 1995, I had a rude wake up call to realize that I wasn't the king of my life. The harsh reality of our existence, according to the Bible, is that if Jesus isn't ruling as our king, than we are slaves to Satan. Even though I wanted to turn my life around, I had no power to do so. I needed a Savior, I needed a Lord. Through two years of Bible study, I struggled to live by faith in the gospel. But it took a decision to obey Jesus as King to set me free. In 1997 I was asked to join the dancing team for the international conference. I heard Jesus' word at that conference from John 14:6. Jesus said: **"I am the way."** It meant that Jesus came to be my king and my Lord, not only a Savior. He came to blaze a path for me to follow obediently. I made a decision to do so. I've made many mistakes these past 20 years, but also many glorious experiences of his victory in my life, as I strive to be obedient to King Jesus. He is worthy of worship – my loyalty, commitment, trust and life-long obedience, not only for saving me from my sins, but for leading my life from glory to glory.

Thank God the story didn't end with paranoid and violent Herod or the apathetic religious leaders. Verses 9-10 reads, **"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."** Literally they **"rejoiced exceedingly with great joy"** (ESV, NASB, KJV). The star, the symbol of Jesus' presence to them, filled them with great joy and they embraced this joy. They were at the journey's end, and would be successful! Christmas time is the time of joy, but there is a deception. If our joy and happiness is tied to our situation, we are great danger. Statistically speaking, many people view the holidays with dread, are full of stress, sorrow, pain, frustration, and depression. There are many factors that contribute to this, such as unrealistic or unachievable expectations, financial pressures, excessive commitments, being away from family and friends, etc... Many struggle with seasonal affective disorder more acutely around the winter holidays. That is not the joy of Christmas. Rather, like the Magi here, the joy of Christmas comes in the practical pursuit and meeting of Jesus. Traditionally, Christians mark the 25 days of December as "Advent," a time for us to put aside other things and intentionally instill a desire and longing to celebrate the incarnation. This is an expectation that Jesus is always able to fill. Finding Jesus this Christmas, meeting him, is the source

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of joy that is uniquely ours. But, it won't happen accidentally, or by going with the materialistic flow of the season, centered around gifts, family, and personal pleasure. It requires the decision to worship the king and to act on it in an intentional and practical way, just like these Magi.

What did the Magi do? Verse 11 reads, **“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.”** Picture how humble Mary, Joseph and Jesus' living conditions must have been. Although Jesus was a toddler at the time, it seems Joseph didn't have enough money to move them out of Bethlehem. Yet these immaculately dressed Magi, people of noble bearing and high education, bowed down and worshiped him. They humbled themselves, confessing their need for this shepherd king, giving their fealty to him. Then they opened their treasures. This was clearly something they had prepared long beforehand, not a spur of the moment thing they pulled out of their pants pocket in an emotional response. They also worked together to prepare these gifts, as each gift complemented the others as a testimony of their faith in the Messiah's role as king (gold), priest (frankincense) and prophet (myrrh). Since they worshipped Jesus as a fellowship, their joy was magnified. They gave, and were blessed. Verse 12 reads, **“And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”** At first I thought they gave and received nothing. Did God owe them, since they sacrificed so much, and gave everything? Certainly not, as we know God has no debts to anyone. So what blessings did they receive? I see three: 1) They came to know their shepherd King, and in worshiping him found the one worthy of their adoration and purpose of life. 2) They experienced great joy. 3) A relationship with God that gave practical direction.

Along with nearly 2 million other people Amy was laid off as the company was shut down. It is easy to be anxious at this time, and chase after security. Instead, we are praying to seek Jesus, to celebrate advent and Christmas wholeheartedly, because Jesus is worthy. Practically this isn't easy, but it isn't supposed to be. I pray my whole family may be overjoyed, and worship Jesus practically. I pray that each of us this advent may make a decision to worship the king, and practically prepare our gift, our labor, our Christmas worship service for

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Jesus our King. Lord Jesus, please come and fill us with the reality of your true purpose as our shepherd king. Help us to humble ourselves, decide to worship you, and practically do something with great intention and foresight to seek you out and worship you, that we may be filled with joy this Christmas season. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

Part II: The escape to Egypt, and Jesus the Nazarene (13-23)

In this section Matthew records how Jesus was spared from Herod's evil plots and how God worked through Joseph to provide and protect Mary and Jesus. Verses 13-15a reads, **“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.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.”** Matthew highlights the danger which Jesus was in, as Herod was not one to be trifled with. Verse 16 reads, **“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.”** Two things stick out to me through this account. The first is the extent to which Jesus was exposed to real danger. When he took on flesh he subjected himself to all the limits, dangers and hardships that all human beings face. God didn't shelter him from it. And yet, Matthew points out that God knew ahead of time that this was coming, and wrote about it in the Old Testament prophets. That was why Joseph was so important. His obedience to God's word provided a way for Mary and baby Jesus to survive. Nothing escapes God's awareness. He knew of the evil of Herod, and worked it out. The Old Testament whispers the truth about Jesus. In fact, it is all about Jesus.

Verses 19-23 read, **“After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream,**

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he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.” Jesus experienced life as a foreigner in Egypt, and his family had to adapt. On the plus side, they were safe, and no one knew anything about them. It may have been tempting to stay. But God sent Jesus to be with his people. God leading them to Nazareth was not easy, as that was the hometown of Joseph and Mary (Lk 1:26-27). It was not easy to live in Nazareth, with the rumors about Jesus. Generally, Nazareth was a despised place (Jn 1:46). Yet this too was God’s intention, for Jesus to be known as a Nazarene: humiliating, and difficult. This is the humble character of our Messiah: to be God with us, he became the least, to serve all, and welcome us to God’s kingdom. This Savior and King is worthy of our worship.