

Matthew 2:1–12

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Date: 18 December 2022

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[0 : 00] Next is Matthew 2. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet. And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child. For when you have found him, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

[1 : 22] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. Man, good morning.

If we can, can we thank again Sister Joan, Allison, Nelson and Sandy Schoon and our kids for doing such a wonderful job this morning?

[2 : 27] He did a fantastic job. Well, this morning, from Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 through 12, I take this title simply, A Word to the Wise.

A Word to the Wise. Our text today, as I'm sure you've now deduced from our scripture reading, recounts the story of the wise men who saw a star and by faith traveled all the way from the east to find the one born of the most consequential birth in human history.

Jesus Christ. Matthew is the only gospel to tell this brief story about these men, but its importance and relevance for us today should not be underestimated.

Now, I'm not saying relevance because of the pictures or the placement of nativity scenes you've seen depicting these men with gifts around a baby in a barn, which probably isn't accurate anyway, because the Bible says they found a child in a house, probably sometime well after his birth.

Nor is it about the songs, beautiful songs we sing about the three wise men on camels, which may not be accurate either, because the Bible never says how many wise men there actually were.

[4 : 11] No, I'm saying relevance because the characteristics of these men, these wise men, the characteristics we will discover in the text this morning are the same characteristics we all should look to have, model, emulate, possess today.

Now, the Bible is full of references about being wise and about walking in wisdom and what it means to do so. In fact, there's an entire book in the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs, that's dedicated to wisdom.

However, what's unique about our story this morning is that we get to examine an actual example model of what a wise man looks like, walks like, talks like, lives like.

We then look at how this word about the wise translates to a word to the wise for us today.

Now, let me be perfectly clear. When I refer in the present tense to wise men, I'm referring to all mankind.

[5 : 28] Men, women, boys, girls, young, old, rich, poor, educated or uneducated. All of us who need to learn from and follow this example.

We begin this morning by examining just these four attributes or characteristics of the wise men found in our text today. First, wise men read, believe, and follow God's word.

Secondly, wise men seek Jesus. Third, wise men worship Jesus. And lastly, wise men obey God. Now, let's briefly set the scene and provide some very important context for our story today. And it's beautifully laid out right here in verse one.

We first learn when this story takes place. It's after Jesus was born, perhaps several months later, in the days when Herod was the king.

[6 : 40] We then learn where this story takes place. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which was about five or six miles south of Jerusalem.

And yes, if you remember our series back in October, it's this same Bethlehem where Ruth met Boaz. And Boaz became her kinsman redeemer.

Don't you love the Bible? And it's also here that our kinsman redeemer is born. The wise men come from the east, probably at that time, the Parthian Empire or former Babylon somewhere in Persia. And they travel first to Jerusalem. The religious and political capital city of the Jews. Lastly, we learn who the main characters are in this story.

Of course, there's Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, our savior, king and lord. Then there's Herod the king. This would have been Herod the great.

[7 : 48] A ruthless and paranoid king appointed by Rome who maintained his position through terror. He was so suspicious of possible rivals that he even murdered members of his own family, including his wife and three of his own sons.

In fact, Augustus Caesar reportedly said it was better to be Herod's dog than Herod's son. Then, of course, we have the wise men being translated in the Greek magi who were educated, noble Gentile dignitaries.

Perhaps a Persian priestly group who studied the stars, interpreted dreams and apparently knew prophecy as well. This leads us to our first attribute or characteristic of the wise men.

They read, believed and followed God's word. Verses one and two. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and the Jays of Herod the king, the wise men came to Jerusalem saying, Where is he who is born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Now, to process all of this, we first have to ask the obvious question.

[9 : 15] How did the wise men know that this star signaled that a new king had been born in Judea, that they should hightail it and make their way to Jerusalem?

There had to be some knowledge, some roadmap that informed this movement. Well, though it is not specifically outlined here in our text, so we can't say for certain, but if you trace the history of the magi back through the Old Testament, you may find some clues.

It very well could have been some of their early exposure to some of their Jewish neighbors, or even possibly Daniel, the prophet, who was actually chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon after interpreting the king's dream back in Daniel chapter 2.

It could have been any one of them who may have first introduced the magi to the Holy Scripture. And then, throughout the centuries, these wise men studied Hebrew Scriptures and therefore understood the timing of the Messiah's birth and the sign that would lead them to the place where he was born.

However it came about, the wise men read and understood the Scriptures well enough to believe that this child was the promised king of the Jews, the promised Messiah, and they should step out on faith and follow his star.

[10 : 47] What about you? What roadmap are you reading? What does your daily Bible scripture intake look like?

How do you know where to go if you're not in his word? How do you know what to do if you're not in his word? How do you know what he's saying if you're not in his word?

Okay, just one more question. Okay, you read his word, maybe you believe his word, but are you following his word? Does your life line up to his word?

Okay, I know that was actually two questions, but the question remains, are you following his word? In verses four and five or five and six of our text, after being asked by Herod where Jesus was to be born, the chief priests and scribes knew the Scripture and could quote it.

This was actually prophecy from Micah chapter five, verse two, prophecy fulfilled, but they didn't have the faith to follow the Scripture to the Messiah.

[12:15] They knew the truth or weren't moved by the truth. Look, I grew up in church.

My dad was a pastor and church was not optional for me. While some of you grew up playing Monopoly and hide and go seek, me and my friends were down in the basement playing church. Every time the church door opened, there I was. I was surrounded by Scripture. I heard Scripture. I read Scripture.

Memorized Bible verses as a child. And though I could quote Scripture, I mean, King James Version, hard English Scripture, I wasn't applying what I was reading.

It wasn't until the application of the revelation that my life was transformed. And so it will be with you.

[13:22] Read it. Study it. Believe it. Follow it. That's what wise men do. Following that, the wise men seek Jesus.

The wise men following God's word make this long journey to Jerusalem. Now, this seems logical because, again, Jerusalem was the capital city and the seat of government, and it would make sense to find the king there.

There was only one issue. These wise men weren't just looking for any king. They were looking for the king of kings.

They weren't looking for King Herod. They were looking for King Jesus. Where is he who is born king of the Jews?

Now, wait a minute. Maybe these fellas weren't so wise after all. You go to Jerusalem, the capital city, where Herod the king is, and declare that you're looking for the real king of the Jews.

[14:39] How crazy is that? It's like me going to the White House and asking to speak to the real president of the United States. No, not you, sir.

The real president of the United States. Herod had been appointed king by the Roman government. Well, that wasn't going to be good enough.

These wise men were looking for Jesus. Jesus who had not been appointed king. Jesus who had not campaigned or been elected king.

Jesus who didn't come as a prince to be next in line to be king. But Jesus born king. What are you looking for today?

And where are you looking? Are you looking for love in all the wrong places? In too many faces? I submit to you that what you're really looking for is Jesus.

[15:43] The love you need is in Jesus. The hope you need is in Jesus. The answer to all your questions are in Jesus. Jesus is the only one that can save, that can heal, that can set free.

Yes, Jesus is the answer for the world today. Above him, there's no other. Jesus is the way. C.S. Lewis says it this way.

Look for Christ and you will find him. And with him, everything else. This church should be our constant lifelong pursuit.

More of Jesus. Wise men seek Jesus. But wait, there's even more hope found right here.

The baby Jesus, born king, is already establishing his universal reign right at his birth. The fact that he would send his star to draw these Gentile, heathen, wise men to himself, that's hope for me and you.

[16:52] The fact that these Gentile, wise men would, by faith, travel all this way looking for the king of the Jews, even when the Jewish priests and scribes weren't, that's hope for me and you.

Why? Because it would indicate they knew Jesus was going to be their king too. He came for all mankind, which includes you and me today.

Joy to the world. The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Wise men read.

Follow God's word. Wise men seek Jesus. Wise men worship Jesus. So now, not only do the wise men come into Jerusalem and declare who they're looking for, king of the Jews, how they came to even be looking for him, they saw his star when it rose.

They make it clear what they're going to do as soon as they find him. They're going to worship.

Now, for additional context, we need to look briefly at this star.

[18 : 10] The star is just as mysterious as the identity of the wise men. There have been those who've explained that this star, some natural phenomenon, arguing that it was a comet or meteor, and that's truly fascinating.

And there are people in this room who are much smarter than me that might be able to explain the scientific implications of all of this.

I don't know. But what I do know is that the God who spoke the world into existence, the God who said, let there be and there was, God, let there be and there's a lot of people in this world, and that's really important.

In a real sense, God moved heaven and earth to lead the wise men to worship him. And he's still drawing, still leading men to himself today.

Seeking people, John says, to worship him. Let me speak practically about worship.

[19 : 27] Everyone in here is a worshiper. Everyone in here bows to something. Everyone in here pays homage to something.

Your God is whatever you pay the most attention to. Some worship their work. Some worship money. Some worship things that money can buy.

Some worship pleasure. But everyone is a worshiper. It's inevitable. The question is not if you will worship. The question is who you will worship. Warren Wiersbe writes, God and Satan have this in common.

Each desires our worship. God wants us to worship him because he is worthy and he wants to graciously transform us. Satan wants our worship because he wants to destroy us.

And worship is the easiest way to achieve that diabolical purpose. Wise men worship. Now Herod hearing all of this, verse 3, is troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

[20 : 40] Herod is troubled because of two words. Born king. This was seen as an obvious threat to his throne.

All Jerusalem was troubled because they knew how off the hook crazy Herod was. And how he historically dealt with threats to his throne.

Quoting Charles Spurgeon here, a stir begins as soon as Christ is born. He has not spoken a word. He has not wrought a miracle. He has not proclaimed a single doctrine.

But when Jesus was born, while as yet you hear nothing but infant cries and can see nothing but infant weakness, still his influence upon the world is manifest.

And a threat perceived. So Herod meets secretly with the wise men, verses 7 and 8. Tells them to go to Bethlehem to find the child.

[21 : 43] Can you hear the wise men saying, yeah, that's why we're here in the first place. And bring back to him word when they found him so that he too could worship him.

Really? Just because you stand in the garage and make beep beep sounds doesn't make you a car. No more than saying you want to worship Jesus makes you a worshiper.

You can't worship Jesus with evil intent. Worship is a matter of the heart. Worship is a matter of relationship with the object of the worship.

Yes, you can even come to the house of worship. And not worship. One Sunday morning, many years ago, this is a true story.

I was directing the choir. And in the middle of the song, seemingly out of nowhere. Have you ever watched something happen and looked like it was happening in slow motion?

[22 : 51] Seemingly out of nowhere, I see this lady in the alto section. Haul off and slap this lady next to her.

Of course, that causes an equal and opposite reaction. And before you know it, there's a full-fledged fight going on in the choir stand in the middle of the service.

The rest of the choir is looking at me. I'm looking back at them. But what do you want me to do?

And we call for security to come and break them up.

Can you see me calling for Brother Keith to come and jump in the middle? I later find out that these two had some beef outside the church.

And the one lady came to church, positioned herself deliberately next to the other lady in the choir stand for the express purpose of attacking her.

[24 : 01] Her intention was not worship. Neither was Herod's.

The wise men go on their way, verse 9, and again encounter the star, which has now come to rest over the place where Jesus was. Verse 10 is a parenthetical statement about the worship response

from the wise men.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. To say they rejoiced would have been sufficient.

To say they rejoiced with great joy would have certainly been enough for us to get the point. But Matthew tells us they rejoiced exceedingly. They were over the top with it, with great joy.

They don't enter the house where Jesus is until verse 11. But already they're excited and rejoicing about the very prospect of seeing Jesus face to face.

[25 : 08] Brothers and sisters, we too now have a reason to rejoice. Right now. Because what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. Oh, what joy. One writer says it this way.

Joy is the flag that hangs on the heart of the believer to declare the king is in residence. And soon, one day, we shall see him face to face.

Don't let anything hinder your praise. Don't let anything steal your joy. They go into the house, see the child, and they fall down and worship him.

The first recorded Gentile worshipers of Jesus. Jesus deserved their worship and he deserves ours. And they didn't come empty-handed.

[26 : 14] The Bible says, then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. Now, I'm not going to walk through the fact or fiction of the historical significance of these gifts because, frankly, Matthew doesn't specifically tell us.

Scholars tell us, however, that gold was a medal of royalty only fit for a king and that frankincense was used in the temple to offer sacrifice. And myrrh primarily was used as a part of the embalming process.

But whatever the significance, we know that these gifts were very expensive. There was a steep price paid for them.

There's a whole message right there. This was not like my mother. My mother was the queen of gifting.

You could come to our house unannounced. She would find out it was your birthday. Slip into a back room and reemerge with a fully wrapped, card included, birthday present that you thought was just for you.

[27 : 33] When in reality, she took something that was already there at the house and somehow packaged it to make it look like worship, Lord Jesus.

When in reality, it was left over, warmed over, reused something. She had cards on the ready that she would create to make it look like it was just for you.

As bad as that would be, imagine if you will, it is your birthday and a party is thrown to celebrate you. Family and friends come bearing gifts.

Everything is carefully planned to make this a special occasion. Your family and friends are enjoying one another's company, but you are being ignored at your own party.

In fact, they're joyfully exchanging gifts with one another. But no one brought you anything.

[28 : 40] While everyone seems to be having a good time, no one seems to care that it's your birthday and it's your party. Unfortunately, this scenario takes place every Christmas.

As people are caught up in the Christmas spirit, Jesus Christ somehow gets left out of the celebration. Listen, Christmas, if nothing else, is a call to worship.

But Pastor Joe, you say, I don't have gold, frankincense, and myrrh like the wise men to offer. I would answer that by simply defining worship. My friend Jack Hayford would say, worship is responding to all God is with all that you are.

That's what you have to offer. You. He wants all of you. Your heart, your mind, your dreams, your fears, even your sins.

If you're in this room today and you haven't already, this would be a great day to give your life to Christ.

[29 : 55] I would be excited. Pastor Helm, Pastor Meeks, many others that are in this room, be excited to walk you through that decision after service today. Paul tells us in Romans to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Wise men worship Jesus. Then just as Joseph was warned in a dream not to divorce Mary from our text from last week, the wise men are warned in a dream not to return back to Herod.

Verse 12. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. This other way was inevitably out of the way.

The simplest way home was probably just to make a U-turn and go back the way you came. But they obeyed God. There is a natural response, a natural outflow of true worship.

It is radical obedience. Worship is not measured by what you do in worship. It's measured by what you do after worship.

[31 : 20] Next week, you'll hear more about how critical this obedience may have been for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. But know that obedience to God means to do what he says regardless of the circumstances.

And it might come with a cost. Herod might be calling you back. But obey God. Everyone else around you might be doing something different.

But obey God. The path you're on right now may make no sense to you at all. But obey God. They may call you crazy and a sellout.

But obey God. But obey God.

Wise men obey God. The wise men search for Jesus to worship him. Herod was threatened by Jesus and plotted against him.

[32 : 31] The religious establishment ignored Jesus and went about their business as usual. These ancient responses to Jesus have not changed.

These same contrasts play themselves out in the very gospel itself. Contrast between those who will receive Jesus with joy and those who work to destroy him.

But they also challenge us with another important question. What is your response to the name, to the authority, to the work, to the message of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Hear this word to the wise. Those who read his word and follow it know to look for Jesus.

Those who look for Jesus will see him. Those who see him will worship him. And those who worship him will obey him.

[33 : 37] As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold. As with joy they hailed its light leading onward beaming bright.

So now gracious Lord may we even more be led to thee. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for who you are. Father, not just king of the Jews, but king of all mankind. We worship you this season.

We remember that you are the reason for the season. May we be led by your Holy Spirit ever closer to you.

To know more of you, to learn more of you. To worship you more clearly and more dearly. We thank you for this example of what wisdom looks like.

[34 : 44] May we follow this example. May we be led even closer to you. And remember that it's about you, our Savior, Lord, and King.

In your son's name we pray. Amen. Amen.