

Who do the Wise Men worship?

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Date: 07 January 2024

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[0 : 00] Today we're going to learn a little about the famous Wise Men passage.! As we do so, I want to encourage all of us here this morning to try and forget all the! Christmas songs and stories concerning the birth of Jesus and the visit of the Wise Men.

Now that's not going to be easy, I know, as we've all been bombarded with the commercial realities of the festive period. A period that seems to begin earlier and earlier each year.

I think we'll find that the Bible speaks a bit differently on these matters. Who is the Messiah and who do the Wise Men worship?

There are a number of truths that Matthew wants us to see in this story about Jesus and about worship. This morning I would like us to look at together five of those truths that this passage tells us.

The first and the most important is that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and should be honoured as such.

[1 : 12] Secondly, Jesus is to be worshipped not just by Jews, but by all nations of the world. And hence we have the Wise Men coming from the East.

Thirdly, that God's great goal is that his Son be known and that he be worshipped. Fourthly, is that Jesus is going to be troubling to people who don't want to worship him.

And also, unfortunately, there's going to ensue an opposition towards those who do want to worship him. And the last truth I want us to look at is that worshipping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.

Jesus is the Messiah, King of the Jews, and should be honoured as such. Verse 2 announces clearly whom this story is really about.

Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? It's about a newborn child destined to be King of the Jews. Now in itself, that would not be a very great thing.

[2 : 29] No big deal. Somewhere, alive in Britain today, there are probably three or four under the age of 18 who are going to be Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, perhaps.

Or maybe even Captain of the Scottish Rugby Team. Someday. But nobody really cares about this or is setting out on a journey to find them or honour them.

But for us, verse 4 makes clear that the Magi really mean by the King of the Jews. It says, And at this time, Herod had been called King of the Jews by the Senate in Rome for nearly 40 years.

But no one had called him Messiah. Messiah means the long-awaited, God-anointed ruler who would overcome all other rule and bring in the end of history and establish the kingdom of God and never die or lose his reign.

Now we don't know how the wise men got their information that there was such a king coming. But what is clear, that Herod got the message. These men, these strangers to his kingdom, are not searching for a mere mortal, an ordinary human, a successor to himself.

[4 : 03] They are searching for the final king, to end all kings. And of course, unlike Anna and Simone in Luke chapter 2, that is the last thing Herod was looking for.

He didn't, after all, even know the scriptures about where the Messiah was going to be born. So Herod asked the scribes. And the text that they focus on is Micah chapter 5, verses 2 to 6.

Now that doesn't sound that exciting or extraordinary either, to be honest, because the scribes were quoting that text to simply answer Herod's question.

Where? And the answer is Bethlehem. But what if Herod had asked them, who, rather than where? They might have then read in Micah chapter 5, His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

And he will arise and shepherd. His flock and the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God. And they will remain, because at that time, he will be great to the end of earth.

[5 : 32] This king is not just coming into being from the womb of his mother Mary. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

Or as John's gospel says, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. And this king would not be limited in his realm to Israel.

He will be great to the ends of the earth. That's the first truth that Matthew reveals to us. And this is why the wise men have worship on their minds.

And it leads us to the second truth in this text about the Messiah. Jesus is to be worshipped not just by Jews, but by all the nations of the world.

As represented by the wise men coming from the east. Now notice that Matthew does not tell us about the shepherds coming to visit Jesus in the stable.

[6 : 35] His focus is on foreigners coming from the east to worship Jesus. Verse 1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

Now Matthew's gospel portrays Jesus as a universal Messiah for the nations, not just for Jews.

Now here the first worshippers were, quote, magicians or astrologers.

Wise men, not from Israel, but from the east. Perhaps maybe from Babylon. But they were Gentiles and they were unclean. And at the end of Matthew's gospel, the last words of Jesus are, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. This not only opened the door for Gentiles to rejoice in the Messiah, But also added proof, if it was needed, that he was the Messiah.

Because one of the repeated prophecies was that nations and kings would, in fact, come to him as the ruler of the world. For example, in Isaiah chapter 60, Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising.

[8 : 03] So Matthew is adding proof to the Messiahship of Jesus and shows that he is the Messiah. A king and promise fulfiller for all the nations.

Not just Israel. For all of us. The third truth is that God's great goal is that his son be known and that he be worshipped.

Time and time again in the Bible, we're often baffled with just how certain events actually happened. How did this star get the Magi from the east to Jerusalem?

It doesn't say that it led them or that it went before them. It only says that they saw a star in the east. Verse 2. And came to Jerusalem.

And how did that star go before them in their journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem? As verse 9 says. How did a star stand over the place where the child was?

[9 : 11] The answer is, we don't know. There have been many attempts to explain it all. In terms of conjunctions of planets, of comets, of supernovas.

But still, we just don't know. And I want to say that we need to be careful. And not become too preoccupied with such theories. Because for a star, they're only at best going to be tentative.

But also, they really have very little spiritual significance. But what is plain concerning this star is that it's doing something that it cannot do on its own.

It's guiding the Magi to the Son of God to worship him. There's only one person in biblical thinking that can be behind that. Behind that intentionality of the stars.

God himself. God himself. God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him. And he's doing it by exerting global, even universal, influence and power to get it done.

[10 : 24] Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire. So that the census comes to the exact time to get a virgin to Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy with her delivery.

Matthew shows God influencing the stars in the sky to get the foreign Magi to Bethlehem. So that they can worship him. This is God's will for everybody.

He did it then. And he's still doing it now. His aim is that all the nations worship his son, Jesus. This is God's will for everybody.

In your office, at work, in our neighborhoods, in our homes. As John chapter 4 says, Such the Father seeks to worship him.

At the beginning of Matthew, we have a come and see message. But by the end, the message is, Go and tell. The wise men came and saw.

[11 : 30] We are to go and tell. The purpose of God is the ingathering of the nations to worship his son. The magnifying of Christ in the worship of all nations.

Our next truth is that Jesus is going to be troubling to people who do not want to worship him. And also, unfortunately, there will ensue opposition for those who do.

In Matthew's story, there are two kinds of people who don't want to worship Jesus. The Messiah. The first kind are the people who simply do nothing about Jesus.

He's a non-entity in their lives. This group is represented by the chief priests and the scribes. The people whom Herod had gathered in verse 4. Yet once they had told Herod where the child was to be born, then that was that.

They just carried on their business as usual. Do you not agree that the sheer inactivity and the deafening silence from these religious leaders is quite staggering in view of the magnitude of what was unfolding before them?

[12 : 48] Why not go with the Magi? Herod and all Jerusalem, it seems, were troubled by what was happening. And yet, they didn't seem interested.

They don't want to worship the new God. Now, the second kind of people who don't want to worship Jesus are the kind who are deeply threatened by him.

That is Herod in this story. He's more than afraid. So much so that he would scheme and lie and even commit mass murder just to get rid of Jesus.

Now, today, these two kind of opposition will come against Christ and his worshippers. Indifference and hostility. Are we ourselves often in one of these groups?

Let this be the time when we all reconsider the Messiah and ponder what it is to worship him. Let me close then with the fifth truth in this story.

[13 : 57] That worshipping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts. There are four pieces of this definition of worship and all are grounded in the text.

First, we see the wise men ascribing authority to Christ by calling him King of the Jews in verse 2. Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?

Second, we see the wise men ascribing dignity to him by falling down before him in verse 11. After coming into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell to the ground and worshipped him.

The falling to the ground is what you do to say to someone else, you are high and I am low. You have great dignity and I am lowly by comparison.

And third, we see the joy in these aspirations of authority and dignity in verse 10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

[15 : 09] Now that's a real humdinger of a way to saying that they were rejoicing. It would have been something to say they rejoiced. More to say they rejoiced with joy.

More still to say they rejoiced with great joy. And even more again, to say they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And what was all this joy about?

They were on their way to the Messiah. You can't help but get the impression, which was the intended impression, that true worship is not just about ascribing authority and dignity to Christ, but it's about doing this joyfully.

Doing it because you've come to see something about Christ that is so desirable that being near him to ascribe that authority and dignity to him, personally, is overwhelming.

The fourth part of that definition of worship here is that we do our ascribing with sacrificial gifts. Worshipping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with these sacrificial gifts.

[16 : 30] Now we know that God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything. These gifts were not given by way of assistance or meeting some need.

It would be a dishonour for a foreign visitor to come with some sort of royal care package. And neither of these gifts meant to be bribes.

So what then do we mean? How are these gifts worship? The gifts are intensifiers of the desire for Christ himself.

In much the same way that fasting is. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying, the joy that I pursue, verse 10, is not the hope of getting rich with things from you.

I've not come to you for your things, but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things in the hope of enjoying you more, not these things.

[17:40] By giving to you what you don't need and what I might enjoy, what we're saying is, you are my treasure, not these things.

I think that's what it means to worship God with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And so may God take the truth of this text and waken us today a desire for Christ himself.

May we say from heart, Lord Jesus, you are the Messiah, the King of Israel. All the nations will come and bow before you. God wields the power to see that you are worshipped.

Therefore, whatever opposition we may all find, we joyfully ascribe authority and dignity to you and bring gifts to say that you alone, Christ, can satisfy our hearts.

Let us pray.