

**“Magi”**  
**Matthew 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> “ ‘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.’ ”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12 ESV)

Last week I preached on “The Annunciation.” If you remember, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary, a nobody, by anyone’s standards—culturally, religiously, financially—and he tells her that she will become pregnant with the Christ.

She responds, by asking, “How?”

He tells her that the Holy Spirit will do all the work and encourages her by saying, “Nothing is impossible for God.”

She responds with utter and complete submission saying, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord...may it be unto me as you have said.”

Now, it is interesting that the only other people who were let in on “the secret” were the shepherds, who were bigger nobodies than Mary (refer to the passage we read in the Scripture reading), and these strange men called Magi. Although they weren’t nobodies, culturally or even financially, they were outsiders.

To put it another way, Jesus’ initial public offering (IPO) wouldn’t be for another 30 years, when the Baptist would announce, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Before then, you only got to invest if you had “inside information” and the only ones given this information were nobodies and outsiders—it gives us insight into God’s heart.

Normally, IPOs are only really offered to those who are already wealthy—the rest of us get to straggle in at a much higher price.

Imagine, if years ago, Jeff Bezos walked through downtown Seattle and started giving shares of Amazon to homeless folks or tourists—the establishment would have been upset to say the least. That’s what happened at the birth of Jesus.

That said, today we'll look at three things:

- I. The Wisdom of the Magi (1-2)
- II. The Foolishness of Herod (3-8)
- III. The Joy of Giving (9-12)

## I. The Wisdom of the Magi (1-2)

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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."

- A. Two questions come up immediately: Who were the Magi? How did they know to find out about the birth of Jesus?

- 1. Who were the Magi?

Although there is much that can be said, I'll try to give you a "Reader's Digest version."

- (a) By the seventh century BC, their religion was proclaimed to be the official religion of Babylon.

Much like Judaism—a monotheistic, sacrificial system, run by two groups of priests—Magi and Sophi.

In fact, these two groups of priests formed an upper and lower house that decided who should or shouldn't be "the king." In other words, they wielded so much power that a king could not rule unless he had their blessing. In other words, they were "king-makers."

- (b) In sixth century BC, things get interesting...

The brightest and the best are taken into captivity in Babylon—the most famous of whom was Daniel—the prophet. He and his friends are trained in all the learning of Babylon—one could even make the case that they are Magis in training.

Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar has strange dreams and he calls all the soothsayers and "magicians" to help interpret his dreams [word "magician" should probably be translated "magian."] and they can't do it!

The King decrees that all the wise men in Babylon are to be killed.

Daniel asks permission to give it a try.

He tells his friends to pray so that the King will not destroy them with the rest of the wise men.

He succeeds and is put in charge of all the wise men in Babylon (Daniel 2:46-49).

What do you imagine he taught them for decades? He taught them about the coming Messiah...at the end of Daniel, we see where he writes that in seventy "weeks" the Messiah prince would come...about 500 years.

- (c) Fast-forward 500 years...apparently there was some astrological phenomenon that made them believe that all that Daniel had said was coming to fruition.

They saw the rising of His star.  
They didn't have details so they did the logical thing and headed to where you would expect to find "the king," Jerusalem.

B. Two things we notice:

1. They are wise—they ask for directions.
2. They are willing to risk anything to find the Messiah.
  - (a) The Romans had recently taken over Jerusalem from the Parthians [new Babylon] and had placed their puppet—Herod—over it as "king."
  - (b) In other words, they could've been killed simply by coming in and asking about another "king."
  - (c) This causes big problems for Herod: not only does he risk either losing face and/or beginning another conflict, but there is a bigger problem. What if they are right?

Notice:

## II. The Foolishness of Herod (3-8)

A. Herod was troubled. Why?

1. Secular scholars say that he was *troubled* because the Magi were representatives of the Parthian Empire—they had been the ones booted out of Jerusalem by the Romans. They say that the Magi would come into Jerusalem and asked this question just to pick a fight on behalf of Phraatis IV—King of the Parthians.
2. Herod and the people (Jerusalem) were indeed troubled, but not by the threat of the Parthians, **but the threat of Jesus.**

We know this because of Herod's response—he gathers the scribes to ascertain where the Messiah would be born. His concern is the baby.

- (a) Herod is troubled by the prospect of Jesus for the same reason that many of us are—he is a threat to our sovereignty or control.

If it is true that Jesus, this baby, is the real king, then Herod is finished. He's no longer in control. He's left with only a few choices...

Try to avoid Him, try to do away with Him, or submit to Him...

If He really is the true King, avoiding Him is impossible because he will eventually assert Himself.

Killing Him is an option, but we know from hindsight, that you can kill Him, but you can't keep Him down.

If this is the case, the only option that makes sense is submission—you give up control.

- (i) This is one of the toughest things for us to do. Everything around us screams and tells us that you are autonomous, that what makes one successful is taking charge of your own destiny. Ask any of the self-help gurus; they make billions every year selling this concept. If any of their advice (taking charge of your own destiny) really worked, they would have taught themselves out of a job long ago.

If you aren't like Herod and troubled by the prospect of losing control, you're probably like "the people" and troubled by the prospect of losing that which controls you.

- (b) "All Jerusalem" had been in bondage so long that they had grown to accept what amounted to a dysfunctional lifestyle. In other words, they hated the Romans (and Herod), but at least they were relatively comfortable.

If this baby really was the Messiah, they would be put in a "damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't" situation.

- (i) To reject Him meant making themselves out to be God's enemies...
- (ii) Following Him meant, in all probability, conflict and losing what little bit of comfort they had.

Their options (since they couldn't avoid Him):

Reject Him or follow Him, hate Him or love Him.

This is the **problem with Jesus**: He says, "Love me or hate me, but don't tolerate me."

- (c) Many of us, when it comes to Jesus, feel "damned-if-I-do, damned-if-I-don't."

We have sins and struggles and life-situations, in which we've grown comfortable. To really follow Jesus would mean dealing with them and I know that prospect, whether you are a Christian or not, frankly, scares the hell out of you.

What is the remedy—if there is any? It is this...

### **III. The Joy of Giving (9-12)**

Herod told the Magi where to look and then lied...find Him that I, too, may worship him...

A. They "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Why?

- 1. They were really looking for Him—they were looking for Him who was born "King of kings and Lord of lords" and they found Him.

- (a) Jesus says over and over in the Gospels, "Seek me you shall find me..."

Certainly, they wouldn't have even known to look if God hadn't made the first move (like *The Matrix*). In other words, God initiated and they responded—that is the nature of worship.

Notice how they respond... (v.11)

B. They **submit** and they **give** Him that which is precious to them.

1. Submit.

- (a) Secular historians say that they were just paying homage as they would to any king...the language here doesn't allow that.

You see, if they were just paying homage to Him, they might have bowed or taken a knee, but the language here says, "they fell to the ground and worshiped." The actual Greek is even stronger...they fell with their faces into the ground (prostrate) which indicates worship.

2. Give.

- (a) Gold, frankincense, and myrrh—the most precious things they had to offer.

For us, worship should work the same way...we come here on Sunday and we give Him the things that are most precious to us.

For some of us, maybe most of us, that should work itself out financially (like the Magi) because our finances and our stuff, if we are honest, is ultimately that which is most important to us.

For all of us, worship should work itself out confessionally. In other words, we give to him our sins and our brokenness and our neediness.

Why? Because in giving Him that which is most precious to us, we tell Him that He is more important than these things. Does He need them? Of course not. On the other hand, it gives Him the same experience that I have every day when I come home from the office.

When I walk in the door, I hear three kids scream, "DADDY!" Then they usually come running out with arms full of "drawings." On a continuum with Picasso at one end and Rembrandt at the other, they are closer to Picasso—most of the time I don't even know what the drawings are. However, that's not the point, is it? The point is that because these three little girls are giving me that which is most precious to them, I feel like I'm the greatest father who ever lived, even though I'm not.

When we give our lives to Jesus, it makes Him feel like the greatest King Who ever lived—and He is. You think about that...