

## Matthew 2:1-12.

## Still seeking & worshiping Jesus.

*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 in the east and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "'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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Is there an after-Christmas letdown in the air? The much-anticipated season that had you decorating, planning, and shopping is over. The holiday gatherings with family, friends, food and presents all past. A new year of resolutions and January bills are on the docket. What's left of Christmas?

There was no letdown for one group of people in the days following Christmas. Kids, can you name the group mentioned in Matthew ch.2? What are Magi?

*[Give time for answers: wise men, who brought the gifts of gold/ incense/ myrrh. ]*

For the Magi, Christmas night was the beginning of their adventure. How their mouths must have buzzed with conversation in those days following Christ's birth, as they followed the star and navigated the paths that brought them to **the** Child.

We aren't told how many Magi came. We aren't given any of their names. We don't even have on record the country from which their travel began - we simply know this group of men "came from the east" of Jerusalem.

But why travel so far? It wasn't an easy journey in those days. It would have taken months, with possibly a great deal of prep time. They had to leave lives behind ~ maybe even families and loved ones. They would have to navigate cultural and linguistic changes along the way. Why go to all that effort to visit a little child?

The Magi knew Jesus wasn't the physical, secular ruler of the Jewish people. If the Magi were *unhappy with their own country's politics and went* looking for a *different* place to find security and stability, they could have bowed down to King Herod. After all, he wielded authority in Israel on behalf of the world power of that day – the Roman government. (So that's not why they came.)

**The reason why they came?** The Magi's only direct quote recorded in the Bible emphasizes their singular focus. Kids, can you spot it: what did they say? (vs.2) *"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."* They came to **worship Jesus**. God brought them to search for the King who provides lasting security.

Which Old Testament passages did the Magi know? Could it have been the God-inspired writings of wise and faithful Daniel? Or, was it the writings of other prophets, preserved & shared by the pocket of faithful believers left in the East following the upheaval of domination and resettlement in Babylon? We don't know. This much is evident from their place on the New Testament page in front of us: the Magi's greatest treasure was not the gold & spices carried with them on their journey. Their greatest treasure was carried within them, stored securely in their hearts... Faith in God's promises, of a Savior, Christ, our Lord.

We would do well to imitate this group *about which so little is known*. **Wise men and women still seek Jesus.**

To those who had come from so far to worship Christ, Herod put up a good face. What did he say to the Magi? *"As soon as you find the child, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."* However, underneath the pretending, we see the more sinister feelings that festered within Herod. Herod saw the Christ as a threat. Herod's desire for power, and his fear of losing it, caused him not only to scorn God's Christmas gift, but to seek to destroy it. He heard the word "king." He thought, "Someone is out to take what is mine."

And in one sense, Jesus did come to take what is mine. And thank God it is true! We have a problem that only he can remove: our sin. *So God wrapped His perfect Son in the womb of a virgin and gifted His life to the world.*

We, like the Magi - and Herod for that matter too -, are presented with God's gift. We see upon God's gift to us the name Jesus - which means: "He saves." That tells us: He was born to save us from our sin.

Like Herod, we can scorn the gift. We can worship our might (athletic abilities) and make earthly strength or accomplishment (career) "king" in our lives. We can rely on our money and make materialism the "king" we serve. We can trust ourselves, or some other person or entity, to supply all our needs and security. Or, like the Magi, we can see past the temporary security and pride offered in all those. The Magi came to Jesus.

When we look at what these Magi did ~ and how they left everything and risked lives in a long journey just to worship the Christ Child ~ we're forced to see how often we've failed to make God such a priority...

Oh, we have made an effort to keep the first commandment, to worship God and to give him his rightful place in our lives. But how often has it turned out we allotted him our leftovers? How often has the time set aside for worship of God - not just on Sundays, but every day - been sucked up by other pursuits? And then we complain about the inconvenience of fitting in worship of Jesus in the midst of all we have to do!

(Or, we feel that way.) A gaze this direction after really taking to heart the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, leaves us seeing: the complete darkness of our sin.

Then ~ As stars shine brightest against the blackest, darkest sky, the light of Jesus shines brightly in stark contrast to our sin.

Praise God that he has brought us to see the Christ, our Savior. Believers in Jesus need not remain disturbed or unsettled inside. We know our sin. We realize our need for a Savior. When we trust the reason Christ Jesus came ~ to save us from our sins ~ we are comforted: he is our forgiveness & peace with God.

“Thank you, Lord, for your gift!”

Ah. The typical gifts of Christmas are so different. The toys & clothes, electronics & tools. They are all unwrapped. They are scattered on the bedroom floors of children, folded & placed in closets, conveniently organized in garages, stowed in entertainment centers or carrying cases. Some gifts are already broken, others are whole but have lost their luster, and some are already used up. What’s left of Christmas? Thank you, Lord, for your gift!

Let’s join up with the Magi again (at vs.9), & see this gift up close through their eyes.

The Magi’s joy and excitement jump off the page. There’s a word that sometimes gets lost in translation. Sometimes it is shown by adding an exclamation mark. In our way of saying things, we might exclaim: “Wow! Look at that!” Would you help me out, so that we can hear it in vs.9? When I throw up my arms, say: “Wow! Look at that!” Ok? *“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and – **wow! Look at that!** - the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.”*

*Wow is right!* This star acted like no other. Amazing! But follow on in the account and you notice: the Magi aren’t left gazing up at the star. The excitement is all about where the star has led them.

Jesus was long out of the manger by the time the Magi arrived. We’re still in Bethlehem, but Joseph and Mary had found a home to stay in. So the Magi were led to a house.

No details are recorded about the house. No notes are made about the conversation exchanged between the Magi and Jesus’ parents. No news is given of the length of their apparently short stay. Instead, Matthew focuses our attention on the same place that the eyes of the Magi were fastened – on Jesus.

Note: they didn’t stop and say (in disappointment), “This is the King we’ve been waiting for? Wait a minute. Where are all the people? Where’s the line to worship the Savior of the world? Where are the personnel guarding such an important infant? Where are the servants waiting on the whims of the world’s prince? [spoken with a tone of letdown] It’s all so ordinary.” No!

Instead: *“They were overjoyed.”* Now that translation doesn’t - in my book at least - do justice to their arrival in vs.10. Listen to this! Matthew records, *“they rejoiced!”* Then he immediately adds: *“a joy!”* Hold on... he isn’t finished yet. By the time he fills out the record, I read it off the Greek page like this: *“they rejoiced a joy so massive (mega-sized), it was to the extreme!”*

Why? God had brought them to the Christ child. Their joy spills right up to their entrance into His presence. **“And they worshiped him.”** See the defining characteristic of the Magi right there: all their seeking culminated in this moment, this activity.

Today we join them. Our purpose in life is to worship our Lord!

Your extreme joy can spill out in countless ways. It is expressed wherever time and energy is directed to worshiping Christ. We have the opportunity to worship at Jesus’ feet in many ways – holding daily devotions in the home, joining in group study of God’s Word here at church, taking time to hear God speak to us as we read our Bibles for daily strength and encouragement. I know... Some of us encounter obstacles of travel, time and health in order to worship. Making the time and effort to worship our King might mean leaving behind some other activity, or rescheduling – all in order to give this defining characteristic the first-place in our lives.

In fact, in this very Bible account, God draws our attention to the importance & blessing of time with him, devoted to searching of his Word. See how God had revealed ahead of time the place of Jesus’ birth: “Bethlehem.” His Word was fulfilled. See also in that word from the OT prophet Micah a comfort extended to you as you go about life. Do you see it in v 6? Jesus is our “Shepherd.” And with his shepherding-rule over the universe for our good, we are cared for – we don’t need to fear! Wow!

Pouring over the pages and passages of Scripture... with a mixture of marvel and joy, questions & discovery, spotting a newfound example of God’s past love or promise of his future love... the Lord blesses us with wisdom, strength, comfort, guidance.

Christmas on the calendar has passed for another year. Our God has not let us down. Our God, with his gift, has surpassed all human expectations! And the defining characteristic of hearts filled with God’s good news remains. The sight of Jesus fills our hearts with joy and peace, and moves our mouths and hands to praise and serve him. By God’s grace, He has led us – and may he lead us forward in this new year – in daily worship of Jesus our Savior. Amen