

The God Who Gives a Sign

Matthew 2: 1-12

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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 Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

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are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd 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 search carefully 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 when it rose 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, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."

The story of the Magi, most of us know them as The Wise men, tells a powerful story about God's inclusive nature and His steadfast pursuit of all individuals, whether they are believers or not. Although these Magi were not members of the Jewish faith, they identified a celestial sign, a sign in the stars, an exceptional star in the East, which is the sign of a Great King's birth.

God, in His infinite mercy, granted them the opportunity to witness and react to this divine message. He led them on a path of faith in such a way that they may not have even realized what was happening. God leading them to Jesus, the promised Messiah. Most would say that this remarkable event demonstrates God's love and acceptance of all nations, cultures, and individuals. That He desires everyone to know Him as their Lord. It demonstrates His desire that everyone should come into, and be transformed by, His presence. The presence of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Again, this is a reminder that God's grace and mercy is not limited to a select few; rather, it is an invitation to all men, women, children and people who seek for and need the Savior in their hearts and lives. As we read and look at this passage today, I pray that our Lord will help us to explore the truth of His teaching, and He reminds us that God is not limited to our human understanding. May we, like the Magi, seek Him with open hearts today.

Reading this chapter, we find that Matthew actually tells us very little about Jesus' birth. Matthew is simply telling us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Simple and straight forward. We know that Bethlehem was the ancestral home of David, the great king of Israel, and founder of their royal dynasty; however, it was not a large or significant town. ***"Bethlehem was quite a little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem. In the olden days, it had been called Ephratah."*** (Ephratah) (Barclay)

One commentator states: ***"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,' at the very first, while as yet you hear nothing but infant cries, and can see nothing but infant weakness, his influence upon the world is manifest. 'When Jesus was born, there came wise men from the east,' and so on. There is infinite power even in an infant Savior."*** (Spurgeon)

Wise men from the East came: These travelers are called wise men, which in the ancient Greek is ***"magoi."*** Misconceptions and legends abound about these wise men. They were not kings, but wise men, which means they were ***astronomers***. There were not only three, but probably a great company. They seem to have come not on the birth night, but probably several months later. Guided by the astronomical phenomenon, which we spoke of earlier. They came to this area and expected to find answers, in the areas of Jerusalem. They expected that the leaders of Jerusalem, and people of this capital city of the Jews, would be even more interested than they were. They traveled a great distance to honor a King; yet there is a little irony in the fact that their great effort was to honor the King of the Jews.

So, let's look at this passage together...

First ~ Even the world knows of worship!

"¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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."

As we grow up in this world, we will begin to understand and see that ***everyone worships someone or something***. These Magi, what many called Kings, however were astronomers, said they came to worship this New King. My first thought, were they truly wanting to worship Him, or, were they simply wanting to see what or who this New King was? Was it political, or, was it personal? Maybe some of both?

During this time in the world, the Jews were despised, dishonored and mocked, because of their beliefs and customs. In truth, this still happens a lot today. The nation of Israel was captured, and many of them were carried off to be enslaved, even though they were ***"God Very Own"*** or ***"The Chosen."*** Thus, many nations looked down upon the Jews.

These three Kings came to worship Him, so they say, calls into question for me, ***"What are OUR motives for coming to God's House and saying we want to worship Him?"***

Are we intrigued by the **“Star”** in the sky so to speak, or, are we genuinely seeking to discover this **NEW BORN KING**? Have we actually seen the star in the East, and are we truly wondering who He is? Or, did they, and we, miss the real message because of the pressure that was placed upon them by the political leaders?

Illustration:

*It was in December of 1903, after many attempts, that the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, were successful in getting their **“flying machine”** off the ground and into the air at Kitty Hawk.*

*Thrilled over the accomplishment, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: **“We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas.”** Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, **“How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas.”** He totally missed the big news-for the first time in human history, man had flown!*

As we attend worship services today, supposedly coming to seek the Star that symbolizes a **New Born King**, do we see the real news? Each of us should answer that question for ourselves. We may know of worship, are we truly worshipping Him?

Second ~ A ruler who will shepherd

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 Messiah 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 shepherd my people Israel.”

I wonder if we realize that Jesus came to earth to offer forgiveness, and to watch over us, like a Shepherd? You see, a shepherd watches over his sheep so that he might lead them – to places where they can eat and grace, as well as to protect them. Back then, as today, there were many wolves who would come to destroy, or even kill the sheep, devouring them, and it is the love of the Shepherd which offers them strength and hope.

As a people, we are constantly on guard to protect and/or rule over our domain in life. So much so, that we often don’t realize what we are doing. We protect our homes, our jobs, our children, and even our own value as a person, because in this world it out to devour us. Unfortunately, we tend to do this all by ourselves. On our own strength and ability. After all, who else will watch over us? Could it be, The Shepherd?

This story today, reminds us that we have a Shepherd, who was sent from God, to watch over our lives every day. Not only our lives, but the lives of those we love and care for. However, Herod was on guard, because of fear that someone might take his throne and power. Maybe even kill him and his family. So, **“What are we fearful of?”** When the king was fearful, so was everyone else. When we are fearful, so are those who live with us and trust in us.

Interesting isn't it, that the King asked the Chief Priest and the Teachers of the Law if they knew what was happening.? **And, they did!** Maybe, many more people actually know what is going on, than they let on? I believe that the people were more afraid of what the King would do, then the message of the Messiah. The truth is, that the people around us can cause us to become apprehensive, causing us to stop following Christ, more so, than we allow Christ to lead in our lives.

We are told here that God is sending Jesus to save and shepherd us. To watch over our lives, as a loving Father and guide, protecting and providing as He pours His love upon us. That He came to the **"least among the rulers of Judah,"** to love them. We do not need to be afraid.

Illustration: H.V. Morton shares this story:

"Early one morning I saw an extraordinary sight not far from Bethlehem. Two shepherds had evidently spent the night with their flocks in a cave. The sheep were all mixed together and the time had come for the shepherds to go in different directions.

So, one of the shepherds stood some distance from the sheep and began to call. First one, then another, then four or five animals ran towards him; and so on, until he had counted his whole flock" Then, that Shepherd left with His sheep as the rest of the sheep followed the other Shepherd.

What the Magi were discovering, was the same thing, in that as Jesus becomes our Shepherd, even at a young age, people were drawn to him, and they began to know His voice, and he theirs. Not only a ruler of His nation, but as a shepherd who loves, care and guide his flock. I believe we all need a shepherd to guide us!

Third ~Guidance to a heart's desire

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 search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

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God directed their paths, just as He guided us to the exact place where Jesus was born. Within each of our hearts, is an innate desire to find and know, something or someone, who can fill the void within us. Before we know Him, before we find Him, we simply don't understand what it happening. Yet, once we find Him, and He us, all of life is changed.

The Wise Men were called to Herod, secretly, so that the King could find as much information as he could. **Why secretively?** The, Wise Men, didn't really know all that much, but I am certain they told him what he wanted to hear, as much as they could. Then, they left to find out more. The king told them, **"Go find this child and come back and tell me what's up? "**

The journey starts. The star guides them, apparently appearing and disappearing at times. First guiding them to Jerusalem, and then after that, directly to the spot. Our God, our Great and Mighty Creator, guides them directly to the location where Jesus was born. Notice what it says, **“¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”** This was naturally a super phenomenon. They couldn’t explain it, but it excited them.

They finally see Jesus, the baby (***most likely a young child – 6-8 months old***) and Mary, and they were in awe. So, they knelt and began to worship this baby. Why did they kneel? Why did they worship? I can just see them opening their pouches and handing them the gifts.

So, where does this lead us today?

Like the Magi, are we so overcome with what is taking place that we just have to bow down and worship? ***I hope so***, yet, I fear that this event has become so routine, so common, that many are simply following a religious habit or practice.

What will it take for us to discover that same **“Awe”** that they felt at that moment? It says that they **“Fell Down”** and worshiped Him. Falling to their knees in respect of who He is.

Maybe we need to start our search again? Maybe we need to open our hearts and willingness to discover who this Messiah is? He is ready to guide us, if we will let Him? But something is missing, what is it? What causes us to separate ourselves from Him and resist His leading in our lives today?

- Work overload
- Family obligations
- Financial pressures
- Physical issues

What is it, that keeps us from falling down when we are in His presence?

The worldly men of that time, who were highly esteemed fell before Him, so why don’t we?

Can we stop for just one moment, bow our heads and talk with Him today? Right now?

Prayer List:

Lord, reveal to us what is separating us from you...

Lord, guide us, lead us to your side...

Father, open our hearts and minds to your will...

Help us to see the NEW BORN BABY as if it is the first time once again...