

## We Have Come to Worship Him

Matthew 2: 1 - 12

There are at least five truths that Matthew wants us to see in this story about Christ and worship:

1. Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and should be honored as such.
2. Jesus is to be worshiped not just by Jews, but by all the nations of the world, as represented by the wise men from the east.
3. God wields the universe to make his Son known and worshiped. This is his great goal in all things - that his Son be known and worshiped.
4. Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him and brings out opposition for those who do.
5. Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.

1. Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and Should be Honored as Such.

Verse 2 announces clearly whom this story is really about: "*Where is the one 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. Somewhere alive in America today there are probably three or four children or young people under the age of 18 who are going to be President of the United States some day. But nobody really cares about this or sets out to find them or honor them.

But verse 4 makes clear what the magi really mean by *"King of the Jews."* Matthew writes, *"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."*

Herod had been called "king of the Jews" by the Senate in Rome for almost 40 years. But no one called him Messiah which is what the word Christ means.

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.

We don't know how the wise men got their information that there was such a king coming. But it's clear that Herod got the message:

These fellows are not searching for a mere, ordinary, human successor to me. They are searching for the final King, to end all kings. And, of course, unlike Anna and Simeon in Luke 2, this is the last thing Herod was looking for. He didn't even know the simple Scriptures about where the Messiah was to be born.

So he asks the scribes, and the one text that they focus on is       , *"And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

Now this doesn't sound super extraordinary either. The reason is that the only purpose for which the scribes quoted the text was to answer Herod's question: Where? And the answer is Bethlehem.

But what if Herod had asked them, "Who?"

They might have read on in Micah 5:

*"His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. . . And He will arise and shepherd His flock in 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 ends of the earth."*

So this king is not just coming into being in 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."*

This is the first truth, and this is why worship is on the Magi's minds!

Which leads us to the second truth in this text about the Messiah.

2. Jesus is to be Worshipped not just by Jews, but by all the Nations of the World, as Represented by the Wise Men from the East.

Notice that Matthew does not tell us about the shepherds coming to visit Jesus in the stable. His focus is immediately on foreigners coming from the east to worship Jesus.

Verse 1: *"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?'"*

So, Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus at the beginning and end of his Gospel as a universal Messiah for the nations, not just for Jews.

Here, the first worshipers are court magicians, astrologers or wise men not from Israel but from the East - perhaps from Babylon.

They were gentiles. Unclean. And at the end of Matthew 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 nations."*

This not only opened the door for us gentiles to rejoice in the Messiah, it's added proof that he was the Messiah, because one of the repeated prophecies was that the nations and kings would, in fact, come to him as the ruler of the world.

For example, \_\_\_\_\_, *"Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."*

So, Matthew adds proof to the messiahship of Jesus and shows that he is Messiah - a King, and Promise-Fulfiller - for all the nations, not just Israel. For us, not just Jews.

3. God Wields the Universe to Make his Son Known and Worshiped. This is His Great Goal in all Things - that His Son be Known and Worshiped.

Over and over again, the Bible baffles our curiosity about just how amazingly things happened:

How did this "star" get the magi from the east to Jerusalem?

It does not say that it led them or went before them. It only says they saw a star in the east (verse 2) and came to Jerusalem.

And how did that star go before them in the little five-mile walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as verse 9 says it did?

And how did a star stop "over the place where the Child was"?

The answer?

We do not know. There are numerous efforts to explain it in terms of conjunctions of planets or comets or supernovas or miraculous lights, but we just don't know.

And I want to caution you not to become preoccupied with developing theories that are only tentative in the end and have very little spiritual significance.

I risk a generalization to warn you:

People who are preoccupied with such things as how the star worked

and how the Red Sea split

and how the manna fell

and how Jonah survived the fish

and how the moon turns to blood are generally people who have a mentality for the marginal.

And sometimes we study these peripheral things at the risk of losing sight of the more important aspects of the gospel:

the holiness of God

the ugliness of sin

the helplessness of man

the death of Christ

justification by faith alone

the sanctifying work of the Spirit,

the glory of Christ's return and the final judgment.

These central themes of the Gospel are so crucially important that for most people, we cannot afford to be sidetracked with every new article, podcast or book that seeks to explain these physical phenomena as interesting as they may be.

What is plain concerning this matter of the star is that it is doing something that it cannot do on its own: it is guiding magi to the Son of God to worship him.

There is only one Person that can be behind this intentionality in the stars: God himself.

So, the lesson is plain: God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him. And he is doing it by exerting universal - influence and power to get it done.

Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire so that the census comes at 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 foreign magi to Bethlehem so that they can worship him.

This is God's design. He did it then. He's still doing it now.

His aim is that the nations - all the nations ( Matthew 24:14 ) - worship his Son. This is God's will for everybody in your office at work, and in your neighborhood and in your home. As Isaiah 60:1 says, *"Such the Father seeks to worship him."*

At the beginning of Matthew, we still have a "come-see" pattern. But at the end, we see that the pattern is "go-tell".

The magi came and saw.

We are to go and tell.

But what is not different is that the purpose of God is the ingathering of the nations to worship his Son.

The magnification of Christ is God's purpose for all nations - the reason the world exists.

4. Jesus is Troubling to People Who do not Want to Worship Him and He Brings out Opposition for those Who do.

This is probably not a main point in the mind of Matthew, but it is inescapable as the story goes on.

In this story there are two kinds of people who do not want to worship Jesus, the Messiah:

The first kind is the people who simply do nothing about Jesus. He is a nonentity in their lives. This group is represented by the chief priests and scribes. Verse 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."*

Well, they told him, and that was that: back to business as usual. The sheer silence and inactivity of the leaders is overwhelming in view of the magnitude of what was happening.

And notice, verse 3 says, *"When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him."*

In other words, the rumor was going around that someone thought the Messiah was born.

The inactivity on the part of chief priests is staggering - why not go with the Magi? They are not interested. They do not want to worship the true God.

The second kind of people who do not want to worship Jesus is the kind who is deeply threatened by him. This is Herod in this story. He's really afraid. So much so that he schemes and lies and then commits mass murder just to get rid of Jesus.

So today, these two types of opposition will come against Christ and his worshipers: Indifference and hostility.

Are you in one of those groups?

Let this Christmas be the time when you reconsider the Messiah and ponder what it means to worship him.

So let me close with this - the fifth truth in this story:

What is worship in this text?

5. Worshiping Jesus Means Joyfully Ascribing Authority and Dignity to Christ with Sacrificial Gifts.

There are four pieces to this definition of worship, and all four are found in this text:

First, I see the magi 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, I see the magi 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 worshiped Him."*

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.

Third, I see joy in these declarations of authority and dignity in verse 10: *"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."*

The new American Standard says, *"And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."*

In my way of thinking, this is much more than being overjoyed. This is the type of joy that cannot be contained.

It's one thing to say the Magi were overjoyed. It's another thing to say they were overwhelmed with joy, but to say they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." I can't imagine what that must have been like.

The closest thing I can come up with might be witnessing the birth of my children.

And what was all this joy about? - they were on their way to the Messiah. They were almost there.

I cannot avoid the conclusion that true worship is not just ascribing authority and dignity to Christ; it is doing this joyfully.

It is doing it because you have come to see something about Christ that is so desirable that being near him to ascribe authority and dignity to him personally is overwhelmingly compelling.

And the fourth part of the definition of worship here has to do with what we do as we ascribe God with dignity and authority. Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.

Now we all know that God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything ( [1 Peter 4:11](#)). So, the gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need-meeting.

It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care-packages.

Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. [Deuteronomy 10:17](#) says that God takes no bribe.

Well, what then do they mean? How are they worship?

Those gifts were symbols of their desire for Christ himself.

When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying ...

"The joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from you. I have not come to you for your things, but for yourself

—

And this desire I now demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things.

By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, '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 in us a desire for Christ himself. May we say from the heart ...

"Lord Jesus you are the Messiah, the King of Israel.

All nations will come and bow down before you.

God rules the world to see that you are worshiped. Therefore, whatever opposition I may find, I joyfully ascribe authority and dignity to you and bring my gifts to you to say that you alone can satisfy my heart, not these things." Amen.