

Wise Men Come to Jesus

Matthew 2:1–12

Matthew 1 to Matthew 2 > Jump forward about 2 years. Joseph and Mary and Jesus made a home in Bethlehem, 6 miles from Jerusalem.

magoi, "Magi" means "great (or powerful) ones" - from the distant East, probably Persia

"We Three Kings of Orient Are" – 3 GIFTS, not sure how many Travelers.

Herod (a title, not a name) – Not a Jew or a King – Idumean: Descendant of Esau – appointed "Herod/King" by Roman Senate, Vassal of Caesar

Magi arrival in Jerusalem caused a stir "King Herod was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him" (v. 3).

Rome protected Herod to the West > but he feared Attack from the East. He became increasingly paranoid in clinging to his throne. Herod had 10 wives, many children who fought for power. He executed several of his wives and children. Caesar Augustus said "**Rather be Herod's PIG than his SON!**"

"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" (v. 2).

"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor...the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty...I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!"
Numbers 24.15-19

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7.13,14

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Micah 5.2

Star? Comet? Astronomical phenomenon?

Johannes Kepler, the father of modern astronomy, explained it as the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in the year 7 B.C.

"star" - miraculous phenomenon // Shekinah glory accompanied the people of Israel in their desert wanderings, signifying God's presence with them

"stopped over the place where the child was" (v. 9)

The fact that so few details are given shows that Matthew was not interested in how many wise men there were, the length of their journey, or the star.

Matthew's Interest: Gentiles came to worship the Jewish Messiah and the significance of the gifts they bore.

Gold: The Metal of Kings

Gold: appropriate gift for Jesus Christ. Gold is the metal of kings.

Acknowledgment of his right to rule.

According to Seneca, the distinguished Roman orator and writer, it was the custom in Persia that no one could approach a king without a gift and that "gold, the king of metals," was the proper gift for "a king of men"

William Barclay

When a tomb is opened and is found to be filled with gold, it is usually proof that the deceased was a great person, most likely royalty.

Possibly their gift of gold provided the funds necessary for Joseph to take the young child and his mother to Egypt to escape Herod's attempt on Jesus' life - but that detail is not as important as the significance of the gift itself. Gold meant the wise men confessed his kingship.

Incense: The Worship of God

Incense was a significant and symbolic gift. It was used in the temple worship, mixed with oil to anoint the priests of Israel, blended into meal offerings, that were offered as thanksgiving and praise gifts to God.

Incense created "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" Philippians 4.18

Incense pointed to Christ as our great High Priest. His entire life was pleasing to his Father.

Jesus, to whom the incense was given was without sin.

"I always do what pleases him" John 8.29

"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" John 8.46

Who of us can say that?

"These gifts show the eternal royalty and holiness of Christ, announced from his earliest years. He had come forth from heaven to perform the work of redemption, and he was prepared in every way to do the Father's will so that he might fulfill every demand and obligation of the law. Thus, He alone is eligible to die for others on the cross; and by that cross alone redeem the world...He was the fit candidate for the cross, and we cling with surety to the work that was accomplished there at Calvary, since we know that our sin-bearer was himself without sin." Donald Grey Barnhouse

Myrrh: The Gift of Death

Myrrh, an important item of commerce in the ancient world, was used in embalming. An odd, perhaps offensive, gift for a newborn. Jesus came to suffer for our sin, and his suffering was symbolized by the Magi's gift of myrrh.

Myrrh was a crude anesthetic sometimes used to deaden pain. The soldiers offered the crucified Jesus "wine mixed with myrrh." He refused the offer (Mark 15.23). He was willing to bear all that the suffering and death entailed.

Nicodemus used 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare the dead body of Jesus.

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Isaiah 53.4-5

"Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one that was to die—these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the supreme Savior of men."

William Barclay

"May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him." Psalm 72.11

"Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

Isaiah 60:3

the city...the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and *the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it*

Revelation 21.22,23

Magi speak of him Not just Destined to Become King, but King from Birth

1. *They were wise enough to seek Jesus.*

God had informed them of the birth of the new Jewish king, though we do not know exactly how. They prepared a traveling caravan and made their way to the capital city of the Jews and they asked people where he was.

They did not ask Herod first, they do not meet him until halfway through the story. They asked so many people about Jesus their quest reached the monarch's ears.

Are you wise enough to seek Jesus? His birth has been announced well and widely. There is no mystery about it. Have you found him?

2. *They were wise enough to seek information.*

They were wise enough to learn from others, even though there was little information to be had either from the people or their leaders.

They were Magi, the intellectuals of their culture and country. Some in their position would have been hindered by pride, but not these wise men.

They seek information, standing meekly as genuine disciples when the chief priests and teachers of the law opened the Scriptures and read to them from Micah 5.2

They probably expected to find the Jews' king in Herod's palace, but the reigning king did not even know about his birth.

When the Scriptures were opened, they learned that Christ was to be born in nearby Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem - an insignificant town, but where the Scriptures had long ago indicated he would be born.

He was not in the palace, or the temple - not recognized as a king, priest, or scribe.

The Magi must have noticed that these teachers of the law were unspiritual and unworthy men, for they had so little interest in the birth of Israel's Messiah that they did not even accompany them to Bethlehem to investigate his arrival.

Their quest was so serious, their questions so earnest, that they were able to learn even from those who did not know where he was as well as from those, like the chief priests and teachers of the law, who knew but did not care. Above all, they were able to learn where Jesus was from the Bible.

Are you wise enough to find Jesus in the Bible?

"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming"

Romans 10.6-8

3. *They were wise enough to worship him when they found him.*

Some people seek even though they do not want to find the truth and embrace it. Some people love unbelief, and they use their accumulating knowledge as justification for it. "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" 2 Timothy 3.7

The wise men wanted to know about Jesus. They were not interested in this knowledge for its own sake. They knew when they found him that they would worship him and give him their gifts.

What can you do to find Jesus?

First, determine in advance that as soon as you find him you will worship him and give yourself to him, holding nothing back.

"Lord Jesus Christ, I do not yet know where you are or how I may find you. I have followed many false leads, some of which are in my own heart. I need help if I am to find you. God the Father must lead me to you. I admit that I do not even know what finding you may mean. But I do promise that if you reveal yourself to me, so that I discover you as my own personal God and Savior, I will be yours forever, and I will follow you wherever you lead me."

What if you have already found him?

Offer him your gifts, as the wise men did - your gold, incense, and myrrh.

"Lord Jesus Christ, I know that I am a sinner. I know that I should receive the consequence of my sin, which is to be barred from your holy presence forever. But I know that you took my sin, dying in my place. I believe that. I rejoice in that. Now I ask you to take me as your child forever. As a symbol, I now die to myself so I might live for you."

Incense - worship him as your Savior and Lord, offering up your life.

"Lord Jesus come and live in me. Do a good work in me so that the deeds produced in my life will become 'a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.'"

Bring your gold: acknowledge Jesus Christ's rightful rule in your life.

"King Jesus, I am your servant. Direct my life and make me strong to serve you and others for your sake. Help me to be careful to not return to my old ways. Make me wise to follow Your path, like the believing Magi, finding my way to your country by the true route."