

Retold, Wiseman

Message Outline

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] 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."

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."

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.

Soul Food Day 1

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

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Who Are these Wise Men Anyway?

They've got a song. They've got a bumper sticker. Who are they? The wise men.

The wise men may be among the least understood characters in the first Christmas drama. There's always three. They're always dressed like royalty with flowing robes and glistening crowns. They look like poster children for the United Nations: one Asian, one African, one Middle Easterner. They're always there in the manger delivering their gifts. We even have names for them. Ironically, the Bible doesn't provide any of that information. Christmas carols and cartoons paint an image of the magi that modern Christians just can't seem to shake.

Yet, the magi are too important to simply pull from our nativity sets and throw away. If you insist on putting up your heirloom nativity set, just place the magi a few feet away and pretend they're on their way to Bethlehem. That way you can be sentimental and biblical.

More importantly, though, we have to acknowledge that the Bible does give considerable attention to the magi even if it doesn't give us all the biographical details that we desire. Thus, we must ask why are they there. Why did Matthew spill so much ink on these guys? What are we to learn from them? In short, the magi teach us something the doxological purpose of the first advent. These Gentile astrologers sought a real King and show us how to worship the Christ of Christmas.

They worshiped Him with the right attitude. These men were looking for the King. They expected to find Him. When they lost sight of the star for a brief period of time, they did not give up and go home. They kept going believing that something special had taken place. When they saw the star again, "they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy" (Matt 2:10).

Are you expecting to encounter the living Christ this Christmas?

They worshiped Him with the right altitude. I realize that sounds preacherly, but that's what they did. When the magi arrived in Bethlehem and found the Child that they had been seeking for years, they fell on their faces and they worshiped. They didn't stand there and gawk. They didn't work the room pressing flesh and kissing babies. They weren't worried about appearances. The text says the "fell down" and they "worshiped him." (v. 11a)

How are you planning on spending your Christmas?

They worshiped Him with the right gratitude. The worship of the magi did not end with their falling prostrate before the young Child. Their worship continued as they presented their gifts. They brought riches not pitances. They brought their best not their leftovers. They brought gifts befitting a King. (v. 11b)

What are you offering Jesus this Christmas?

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus.

Adapted from: <https://www.crosswalk.com/who-is-jesus/birth-of-jesus-christ/what-made-the-wise-men-so-wise-11597271.html>

Soul Food Day 2

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] 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.”

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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Another Way

We We’ve all heard the story, so much so that a few of us could probably quote the verses. So why talk about the wise men when Christmas has come and gone?

Even though their visit with the Christ Child is traditionally taught as a part of the Christmas Story, Bible scholars believe that these men from the east may not have seen Jesus until as late as two years after His birth. In other words, their visit doesn’t have to be associated just with Christmas. In addition, while we often concentrate on the gifts these men brought to honor Jesus, we often overlook what else we can learn from their visit—lessons that we can take with us into 2020.

It’s true that each of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus symbolized something special about His birth. Gold symbolized the fact that He was (and still is) the King of Kings. The gift of frankincense, a type of incense often burned at altars, emphasized His deity. Myrrh, which was often used in embalming, pointed to His death of the Cross.

The importance of, and meaning behind, these gifts cannot be ignored. But the account of the wise men’s visit brought other important scriptural principles that can serve us every day of the year. For example, notice in the story that the wise men came looking for God. Interesting, isn’t it? Most of us today rarely “go looking” for God. Instead, many of us sit around and wait for God to find us.

Most Christians think there were three wise men, but the Bible doesn’t tell us how many there were. We probably draw that conclusion since they presented Jesus with three gifts. Did you notice that they were also nameless? Rather than seek credit for traveling from afar and honoring the child who would one day call Himself the Son of God, these men apparently chose to remain anonymous. Sort of sounds like something I once read that Jesus said: **“Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a**

trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.” (Matthew 6:2)

Finally, the Bible tells us that these men “departed into their own country another way.” If you read the story again, it’s easy to see why. They were supposed to let Herod know where he could find Jesus. They knew what Herod wanted and they knew that their failure to honor his request would mean death for them.

But I’d like to also think that their lives, just like our lives, were changed after they met Jesus. The truth is we all go back “another way” after we’ve found the life-changing, life-saving power of Jesus Christ!

They brought gifts with them to honor the birth of the greatest man who ever lived, and the only God who still does. Who could blame them for going back another way?

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus.

Adapted from: <http://www.devotions.com/2003/01/wise-men-went-back-another-way.html>

Soul Food Day 3

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi¹ 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.”

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.”

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 Living Word

The Bible is a book of knowledge but it is also a living word. This means that the Bible not only enriches our minds, but it also penetrates our hearts (see Hebrews 4:12). Sometimes when we focus so much on what the Bible says we sometimes miss what God is trying to say to us right now. That is why sometimes

we just need to carve our space, often in silence, to mediate on scripture. That is what we will do today: mediate and rest in scripture. We will be there to guide you. Read the scripture slowly and then sit in still silence for one-minute resting in God. We will give you questions you can ask to God, however, allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart what he wants in this time. Let's pray, *Father God guide us we seek You in your word.*

Read Matthew 2:1-12

How is the reaction to different between Herod and the Wiseman?

Sit and listen in silence for 1 minute

Read Matthew 2:1-12

What is your reaction to Jesus? He is here. Be honest with him.

Sit and listen in silence for 1 minute

Read Matthew 2:1-12

The wise men left and went 'another way'. What way is Jesus calling you to go?

Sit and listen in silence for 1 minute

Pray to God

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Soul Food Day 4

Scripture

Matthew 2:12 (NIV)

¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

"The Journey of the Magi"

'A cold coming we had of it,

Just the worst time of the year

For a journey, and such a long journey:

The ways deep and the weather sharp,

The very dead of winter.'

And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,

Lying down in the melting snow.

There were times we regretted

The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,

And the silken girls bringing sherbet.

Then the camel men cursing and grumbling

and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,

And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,

And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly

And the villages dirty and charging high prices:

A hard time we had of it.

*At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.
Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.
All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.*

T. S. Eliot, from [Collected Poems, 1909-1962](#) .

The Journey of the Magi

The story of the Magi leaves very much open to our imagination. We don't know, for instance, what happens to the magi after they leave. We don't even know, truth be told, if they become "Christians" or whether that term would have had any meaning for them.

All this and more Matthew leaves for us to fill in. One of the more famous attempts to "fill in the blanks" comes in the form of T. S. Eliot's poem "The Journey of the Magi," composed not long after Eliot converted to Christianity and joined the Church of England. The first five lines of his poem are actually borrowed from a seventeenth-century sermon by Lancelot Andrewes. Eliot picks up Andrewes' first-person narrative and continues a recounting of the journey of the magi from the perspective of one of them, now an old man.

Alienation and estrangement were common themes to Eliot, perhaps the foremost of the "modernist" poets in England. Here he shares perhaps a bit of his own discomfort and lonely recognition that whatever else he may have gained from his conversion – whatever faith or hope or consolation he may have attained – he also lost a place in the world that had created him and he had helped create. Being born anew, he had also died. So it is for each of us. Citizens of heaven, we are also citizens of this world and perhaps feel at times caught between the two.

Or do we? I wonder, at times, if I have not become too comfortable with my life in this world, too invested in advancing in it, too enmeshed in its values, to appreciate both the loss and the gain to which Christianity beckons us. As Bonhoeffer once said, "When Christ bids men and women to follow, he bids them to die."

Hard to do. But, then again, maybe it's not a "doing" after all. Maybe, like this old magician, we are simply confronted with a new reality that calls the old one into question, replacing the status quo with which we had grown comfortable with a new reality that simultaneously demands and offers more than we can imagine. If so, is it birth or death we witness, birth or death that we are invited into?

As Jesus says, whoever wants to save his or her life must lose it for His sake.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Adapted from: <https://www.davidlose.net/2013/01/journey-of-the-magi/>

Soul Food Day 5

Scripture

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Messiah For the Outsiders

Present among the figurines in the nativity crèches found everywhere at Christmastime are usually three regal men bearing gifts. As we know, these kings are supposed to represent the wise men.

Unfortunately, this depiction of the wise men takes liberties with the text. Matthew never tells us how many wise men come to see the Messiah. The tradition of three wise men probably comes from the three different gifts mentioned in [Matthew 2:11](#). Moreover, the first gospel does not say the magi are kings. This idea goes back to the church father Tertullian (around 200 a.d.) and is likely due to his reading of passages like [Psalm 68:31](#) and [Isaiah 49:7](#)...

We think of these *magoi* as astrologers because they are observing stars (v. 2), and astrology was considered a learned occupation. However, from the perspective of the Jewish people, *magoi* look to the stars for answers that legitimately come only from God.

The word *magoi* is also found in Acts 8:9-24 and 13:6-11, where it is translated magician or sorcerer. From the perspective of the Jewish people, *magoi* work magic using demonic powers. They are far from the kingdom of God, which makes these *magoi* especially useful for Matthew's purposes as he shows how the Messiah brings salvation even to Gentiles—even to Gentiles who might be magicians or sorcerers.

As a side note, astrology and horoscopes are still popular. The fact that Matthew treats these *magoi* kindly does not mean that astrology or horoscopes are legitimate. They constitute an alternate religious system—incompatible with Christian faith, because they ascribe too much significance to the movement of stars. God is in control—not stars. God's use of a star to guide these *magoi* to Jesus was a one-time thing. God's primary means of revelation are prophets, scriptures, sacraments, and Son—not stars.

Most significantly, the wise men are Gentiles. Matthew's Gospel is very Jewish, but he introduces these Gentile worshipers at the beginning, preparing us for Jesus' last words to his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (28:19—the Greek word translated "nations" is *ethne*, which also means "Gentiles"). We are struck by the contrast between these Gentiles, who follow the star to Jesus, and the chief priests and scribes, who know the scriptures but who do nothing to seek out the Messiah, whom they have determined to be only five miles (eight km.) away in Bethlehem (v. 5). God's people ignore the Messiah, while pagans eagerly seek him out.

Matthew will treat favorably a Gentile Roman centurion (8:5-13) and a Gentile Canaanite woman (15:21-28). He also includes women, including women of questionable repute (Rahab), in Jesus' genealogy. He makes it clear that the barriers that separate people from each other do not separate them from God's love. As the writer of Ephesians will later say, "he...has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14). That work began at the nativity. Epiphany challenges us to consider who we might consider to be unworthy (welfare mothers, kids with baggy pants, smokers, Muslims, etc.) and how we, the church, might reach out to them in Christian love...

The wise men and their mission are highly significant. God promised Israel that their restoration and redemption after exile would be accompanied by an influx of Gentile nations into the covenant community ([Isa. 11:10](#)).

Though motivated partly by superstition, the wise men are the first Gentiles to seek out Jesus, and they serve to demonstrate that God fulfills all His promises.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus.

Adapted from: <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/matthew-21-12/>;
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/wise-men-rejoice/>

houseChurch Material

Have different readers share the verse from 2 or more translations Reflect between each reading

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Application

1. What did you hear during the reading? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged from the reading?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
4. Share any of the above discoveries with your houseChurch. Ask each other, “What is your nugget?”

Discussion Questions

1. King Herod was terrified when he heard this news. He was a very paranoid ruler who had killed many people (including his sons and wife) to maintain his power. Why do you think he was terrified? How do you think he felt about a new “king” in the neighborhood?
2. The Wise Men worship Jesus by giving him gifts. It is said that Gold was the precious of all metals suitable for royalty, frankincense was used as incense during the worship ceremonies of the Jews and myrrh was used as an embalming technique after someone had passed way. What do these gifts reveal about Jesus and his ministry?

3. In what ways do you think life changed for the Wise Men as they returned home? In what ways did your life change when you encountered Jesus?

Now talk to Jesus