Matthew 2:1-12  “Walking with the Wise Men”

Intro. Do you know what would have happened if it had been Three Wise Women instead of Three Wise Men?

1. They would have asked directions sooner and arrived on time.
2. Helped deliver the baby.
3. Cleaned the stable.
4. Made a casserole, and . . .
5. Brought practical gifts.

The coming of Jesus into the world is one of the greatest events of all time. Yet, His coming was announced only to a select few. Of course, Mary and Joseph received news that the Messiah was soon to be born through Mary. Angels announced the birth of Jesus to some shepherds. And somehow, about that same time, some men from the east knew that someone special had been born. They noticed an unusual star in the west, in the direction of Israel, and followed that star. At any rate, they did learn of the birth of the Messiah. What is interesting is that the rich and powerful of Israel did not receive first-hand the news of the Savior’s birth. A group of angels never appeared to them with the great news. Only some poor, humble Jews, as well as some foreigners, received news of the Savior’s birth. Perhaps that was a prophecy of the type people who would be most willing to believe in Jesus, the common people of Israel, and foreigners.

These “wise men” were actually magi. That is the transliteration of the Greek word (magos, pl. magoi). In Persia the magi were a priestly & scholarly caste, deeply interested in religion and the study of stars. They generally believed in the one true God, and they practiced a moral religion of right and wrong. They probably came from Persia, or they could have come from Babylon or India or some other eastern nation. These are the first-fruits of the Gentiles unto Christ. Isn’t it interesting that there were Gentiles both at the cradle and at the cross.

Now one lesson from this story is that God’s salvation is as broad as the world. From the very beginning, Jesus came to be “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). Aren’t you glad that the Christmas story has room for non-Jews like you and I? It is good news to know that God is willing to save you from your sin, no matter what your national heritage is.

Another lesson from this story is to follow the wise path of these wise men. Eph. 5:15 says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.” You have an important choice to make in life. You can live foolishly, or you can live wisely. Most people live rather foolish lives. They walk the path of self-destruction. But I want to challenge you to live wisely. These men, commonly known as the wise men, were indeed wise. And what we will learn about these “wise men” should challenge us to follow their example.

So consider with me first of all:

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1 Jesus Himself said in Mt. 11:25, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.” In Luke 4:25-27 Jesus told the Jews how that God’s blessings had, on occasion, bypassed the Jews, and gone out to foreigners.

2 Magos, the name given by the Babylonians (Chaldeans), Medes, Persians, and others, to the wise men, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augers, soothsayers, sorcerers etc. (Strong’s). Their presence in the biblical record is not a divine endorsement of astrology (Wiersbe).
I. IF YOU ARE WISE, YOU WILL SEARCH FOR THE SAVIOR

Beginning in the last of v.1 we read, “behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?’” If you are wise, you will seek Jesus Christ as well. How do you begin a search to discover Jesus for yourself? First:

A. Respond to What You Know - Even before they arrived in Jerusalem, they already believed that the King of the Jews had been born. Notice in v.2 they say, “Where is He who has been born (aorist) King of the Jews?” Not for a moment do the wise men express any doubt with reference to the fact as such of the recent birth of the One whom they call “the king of the Jews.”

How did they know about this? These men were star gazers, and they noticed an unusual star in the western sky toward Israel. But how did they know that there was any connection between the star and the Savior? Perhaps they were familiar with the prophecies of the birth of the Messiah, the King of Israel. After all, the Jews had scattered all over the world, carrying their Scriptures with them. There were Jews in Persia and Babylon. Perhaps the Queen of Sheba heard of the coming of the Messiah from Solomon, and that story had been passed down from generation to generation. Solomon knew of God’s promises to his father David, that the Messiah would be born from the line of David. Or Num. 24:17 could have been interpreted literally by them. It reads, “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” At any rate, their initial faith and devotion was commendable.

Now simply believing that Jesus is the King of the Jews is not enough to be saved. As James 2:19 indicates, even the demons believe that, but are not saved. But it was a start in their faith. That is how God works. He wants to take you step by step in advancing your faith. If you will just respond to what you do know, God will take you to the next level of spiritual understanding.

Over a hundred years ago Charles Spurgeon told of how they build a bridge over some part of Niagara Falls. The difficulty was to pass the first rope across the broad stream. It was accomplished by flying a kite, and allowing it to fall on the opposite bank. The kite carried across a piece of string, then to the string was tied a line, and to the line a rope, and to the rope a stronger rope, and by and by Niagara was spanned, and the bridge was finished. Even thus by degrees God works.

I am afraid that not many seek the Lord the way these men did. I believe that the Hebrews Scriptures probably had a role in leading these men to search for the Messiah of Israel. I believe you should begin your search by learning from the Scriptures. As a teenager I was walking down the path of fools. But I began to read the Bible, and that precious Word from God led me to Jesus, and to the wisdom of God.

B. Acknowledge Your Need to Learn More - The Magi naturally travel straight to the capital of Jerusalem, expecting to find the new-born King there, or at least discover where He is. They freely admit that they do not know where to find Him, so they ask “Where is he...?”

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3 Sheba is a nation in southern Arabia. Isa 60:6 says, “The multitude of camels shall cover your land, …All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD.”
4 Furthermore, some Jews could have interpreted Daniel 9:25 to pin point the approximate time of the coming of the Messiah. The magi could have heard about this, and when this special star appeared, they inferred that it must be a sign of Messiah’s birth.
Those who are truly wise are willing to admit when they do not know. We need to maintain such a teachable spirit to grow in our faith and understanding. The “know-it-all” knows far less that he thinks he knows, and he is hard to teach. Jesus charged the Pharisees with blindness. And the reason for their blindness was due to their claim that they could see. You are not going to go to a doctor until you admit you are sick. You are not going to learn more until you confess your ignorance about what you need to know.

We especially need help in learning spiritual truth. I Cor. 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” You need help from the Spirit of God, and from Spirit-led teachers. Someone told me this back when I first started reading the Bible, and so I would pray for guidance and understanding before I would read from the Bible.

C. Search the Scriptures for Answers – When they arrived in Jerusalem they probably asked several people the question we find in v.2. The man on the street didn’t know. Naturally, they went to the current King of Israel, King Herod, looking for answers. He was not a king appointed by God, but by the Romans. He was not even of Jewish descent, though he was a descendent of Abraham. He didn’t know the answer to their question. Friend, you are not going to find the way of salvation, or the way of wisdom, by asking the politicians, or the secular scholars, or your non-Christian friends. How will you find the answer?

Notice that when Herod heard this news, he was interested in finding the answer to their question. He did not want any rivals for his throne. So he sent for the Scribes and priests to tell him where this king should be born (vv. 3-4). He is sufficiently acquainted with the Jewish religion to know that there were many predictions about the Messiah. Perhaps there is even a prophecy concerning the place of his birth. Indeed there was! The prophecy was clear in this regard. In Micah 5:2 the prophet said He would be born in Bethlehem. Many Jews knew this (John 7:42). Matthew cites this fulfilled prophecy to prove that Jesus Christ is the King.

So the lesson for us is the fact that in your search for God and for salvation and wisdom, you must search the Scriptures. In John 5:39 Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” So Herod called the magi secretly and passed on the news that the child would be born in Bethlehem. He acted as though he had an interest in worshipping the child, but he was deceiving them. In v.8 we see that the king sent them to Bethlehem as his private detectives to search for the child and report back to him.

What an interesting contrast we see between the wise men and the scholars of Israel. The wise men followed the star. Now they have a more sure word in the Scriptures, and they follow the directions of Scripture to Bethlehem. But as far as we know, the scribes did nothing. They had over 300 prophecies pointing to the coming of Christ, but it did them no good. They had a head knowledge but not a heart knowledge. They did not bother to travel even 5 miles to see if the Messiah had been born.

What good is a knowledge of the Bible, or even a belief in the Bible, if you do not follow the directions of the Bible? Perhaps their problem was over familiarity. Does not familiarity with the gospel produce much the same effect on many of us? We’ve heard it so much it no longer has an effect upon us.

Do you seek Jesus today? Coming to church is a step in the right direction. After all, you will not find the true meaning of Christmas in the department store. You will not find it when you have your child’s picture taken with Santa. Today, in this place, from the Word of God, you can learn more about the true meaning of Christmas. Will you join me in talking the next step? So we
have seen that if you are truly wise, you will search for the Savior. The second main point I see from our story is this:

II. IF YOU TRULY SEARCH, GOD WILL GIVE YOU MORE LIGHT

These men were greatly encouraged to come to Israel in search for the Jewish Messiah, for they had seen his star (v.2). Then they followed the Scriptures and went on their way to Bethlehem. And notice in v.9. Matthew says, “Behold”, or “Look. The star which they had seen in the East went before them!”

We can only conjecture concerning the nature of this star. Matthew does not explain to us anything about this star. Some believe that at about that time in history a conjunction of planets occurred. Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars were lined up to form a bright star. This conjunction occurs only once every 800 years. This second appearance of the star may have been something totally supernatural. The way the star seems to move in v.9, you would think so. Matthew says, “…the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.” The verb translated “went before” is in the imperfect tense, which describes past continual action. It actually seems to move and stop over Bethlehem. “Stood” is a change in tense (aorist), which implies completion of the action. So it even appears from Matthew’s description that the star was low enough in the sky to point out the very house in which they could find Jesus. Miraculous!

Do you believe in miracles? I believe in God, and so I have no problem believing in miracles. The conception of Jesus was a miracle, and I believe the star could have been a miracle as well.

Now there are two main points I want to make concerning the reappearance of the star.

A. The Role of the Star – What role did the star play in the Christmas story? It is what God used, among other things, to initiate their search. But the star also gave them more light and direction, to lead them to the very place they could find the newborn King. The role of the star was to lead them to Christ.

Friend, when you follow the light that God gives you, He will give you more light, sometimes in miraculous ways. He may use a copy of the Bible that you pick up and read. The Gideons give testimony of how many people have picked up one of their Bibles in a hotel room, read from it, and ultimately found Jesus. God may use a special song. He may use an ordinance like the Lord’s Supper or baptism to be a witness to lead you to Christ. He may use the testimony of a godly witness. After all, we are to be the light of the world (Mt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15b). We are to point people to Christ. God may allow some trouble into your life, which leads you to seek Christ. Or he will work in your life through divine providence.

Wayne Williams shared his testimony with the deacons Thursday night. He told of a time when he was serving on a river boat in Vietnam. A shipmate stayed up all night and was too tired to pilot the vessel, so he asked Wayne to switch places. On the way back that day the ship took enemy fire, and his shipmate died in the very place Wayne would have been. That certainly got Wayne’s attention. So God has different ways to lead you to the point that you will seek Him, and draw near to Him. But for these men, it was a star that led them to Christ.

Is God working in your life to lead you to His Son this Christmas season? Will you respond to what God is doing? Well returning to our text, we see not only the role of the star, but also:

5 See Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 211-212.
B. The Response to the Star – They did respond. They did not ignore its significance. When God brings some star into your life to lead you to Himself, you need to respond to it. Suppose they had seen His star and had not set out to find Him and worship Him. They would have been more guilty than others. You should not ignore what God is doing to bring you to Himself.

Notice what God will do for you when you respond to the light He gives you. V.10 says, “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.” Their cup of joy was running over. They rejoiced when the realized how God was leading them to find the Savior. How they must have rejoiced with anticipation of seeing the One born King of the Jews! An amazing discovery fulfilled!

If you will respond to God, and follow where His light leads, you will also experience great joy. There is nothing more exciting than seeing God work in our lives. There is nothing more exciting than discovering new truths.

So we have seen that if you are truly wise, you will search for the Savior. And if you truly search, God will give you more light. There is nothing more exciting than discovering new truths.

III. IF YOU RESPOND TO THE LIGHT, GOD WILL LEAD YOU TO THE SAVIOR

The wise men did not say, “We have seen the star; that is enough.” Furthermore, they were not satisfied with getting to Jerusalem. Even getting to Bethlehem was not enough. They realized that they must see Jesus. That reminds me of a little story in John 12 where some Gentiles came to Philip saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” So they kept going until the came to the very house where the baby Jesus was. And in v.11a we read, “And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother….” What a great day for them. They sought Christ, and found Him. No one who truly seeks the Lord will fail to be found by Him. Jesus Himself said later, “Seek, and you shall find...” (Lk. 11:9).

So their search ended with Jesus. Oh friend, Jesus is the true focus of this story. Matthew purposely leaves out many of the details concerning the magi. He does not go into detail concerning the nature of the star. The point of the story is to discover what this story tells us about Jesus. Matthew’s gospel was written to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews. This story points to that same truth. He fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. The special star confirmed that a special child had been born. Jesus was the real star of the story. Even Gentiles acknowledged Jesus as King at his birth. So let us not give too much attention to the wise men, or to the star. The story culminates the wise men finding the Savior, and in the worship of Jesus.

What does all this mean to us? Sometimes people fall short of coming to Jesus. They will come to church but fail to come to Christ. They may read from the Bible, but fall short of coming to know the Author of the Bible. Or they will take the Lord’s Supper, but never believe in Christ, whose body and blood are remembered through the Supper. Outward form and ceremony is not what saves. You must come to Jesus!

Now when your search leads you to Jesus, the wise men teach us to do 3 things:

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6 Notice that they came to a house. There were no wise men at the stable where Jesus was born. The magi actually arrived weeks or even months after Jesus was born.

7 “Young child” is from paidion, the diminutive form of pais, meaning anything from an infant to a child under 12.
A. Wonder & Discover Who Jesus Is (Note: some of this material coincides with the detailed gifts under pt. C. Merge?) - I can only imagine what it must have been like when they walked into the house. All Matthew say in v.11 is, “they saw the young Child with Mary His mother.” Perhaps at first they were silent with wonder. Perhaps He was a very beautiful child. At any rate, they must have fixed their gaze upon him with adoration. Even so, I would encourage you to fix your attention upon Jesus this Christmas season.

No doubt they wondered as they saw the child, “Who is this child? What has He come to do?” They had already determined that He was the King of the Jews. They probably knew the Messianic implications of that title. But we know more than they could have known. In fact, in the providence of God, their gifts seem to confirm who Jesus really is.

1. Gold Shows He Came to Reign Over Us - Gold was often associated with royalty. A gift fit for a king! Chapter 1 of Matthew proves that Jesus was of royal line. From this gift we see that Jesus came to Rule us. Jesus has come to rule us as Lord. The men acknowledged that He is Lord of all, and not just of the Jews. But my question to you is, Is He Lord of your life? Do you say to Jesus, “Lord, I will obey you, and follow you all the days of my life.” Have you obeyed Him in regard to baptism? Are you living a life that is consistent with Christian morality? Some day He is coming again as King of kings and Lord of lords.

2. Frankincense Shows He Came to Represent Us - This was mentioned in connection with the meal offerings in Leviticus (2:1, 2, 15, 16). It was used for incense in the service of God. It was more exclusively used by Israel for God. So it was a gift fit for a priest, and a gift fit for God. From this gift we see that Jesus came to represent us as Priest. He had to become one of us in order to be our priest. Isn’t it a wonder that God would enter into union with man and come to this world as an infant? Heb. 2:17 says, “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

3. Myrrh Shows He Came to Redeem Us - This was used as a perfume. Ps. 45:8 says of God’s king, “All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia.” It was also used to prepare bodies for burial (Jn. 19:39, 40). The wise men did not know it, but Jesus was born to die. From this gift we see that Jesus indeed came to redeem us. So our faith sees Him go from the manger to the cross. He came to die for our sins, that we might be forgiven and have eternal life! Oh, what fitting gifts indeed!

Do you know Him as He truly is? Have you accepted Jesus as your King, your Priest, and your Redeemer? Have you believed in Him? If you have, you will follow the next example of the wise men. You will:

B. Worship Him – In v.11b Matthew goes on to say that they “fell down and worshiped Him.” The word “worship” (proskuneo) literally means to fall prostrate before someone, and give homage and honor to that person. In Scripture, such homage is to be given only to God. Yet, how appropriate, for the Christ-child was God come in human flesh! He is the Messiah, the King. We today should worship Him, not only for Who He is, but also for what He has done. He died for us. If He has saved you, forgiven you, given you His Holy Spirit, and changed your life, you certainly should worship Him. Oh, let us worship Him this Christmas season!

C. Give Gifts to Him – In the last of v.11 we read, “And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” When you come to know the

8 It was even used with wine as an anesthetic for pain (Mk. 15:23).
Lord, and as you love Him, and give yourself to Him, you will also give gifts to Him. That is a part of true worship. Giving gifts is also an expression of love.

Notice that their gifts were valuable, expensive gifts. This is indicated by the word treasures⁹, and because you know how valuable gold is, and frankincense & myrrh were expensive spices as well. You say, “Sure they were valuable. They were Kings.” Well, I hate to disappoint you, but that is an unfounded tradition. There is no evidence that these men were kings. They were not poor, but they were not rich kings either. Their gifts were valuable. They gave the choicest products of their land, and so they gave their best to Jesus. By the way, these expensive gifts were needed, for soon they would be needed to finance the family's hasty flight to Egypt! Furthermore, they not only gave treasures, but think of how much time they gave up on such a long journey. Travel was slow in those days. They had to take time to ask for directions.

What are you willing to give to Jesus this Christmas season? Can you think of Christ, and His love for you, and not do so? How substantial are your gifts to the Lord? For a child a substantial gift could be a dollar. In comparison, what would be a substantial gift for you? What will you give to our Lottie Moon Offering? Will you be giving your best and most valuable gift to Him? Or you can also give to Jesus by helping someone in need. Jesus said in Mt. 25:40, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” Do you give your time to the Lord? Too many will not even give an hour or two to go to church. And if they do, they fret when the service goes past 12 o’clock! Do you give your time to serve the great King, our Lord Jesus Christ?

Conclusion: What has God been doing recently to lead you to Jesus? A little boy was walking down the street with his father during World War II. He noticed that there were blue stars in many windows, but every now and then there would be a gold star in a window, which meant that someone had given a son to die for this country. It was in the early evening, and as they came to a vacant lot, the evening star was just appearing above the horizon. The little fellow said to his dad, “Look Dad! God gave His Son!” Yes, God gave His Son, and the star speaks of that.

Yes, God has His ways of letting us know that He loves us, and that He sent Jesus to be our Savior. Will you respond, and come to Jesus? He is Savior and Lord.


⁹ Plural of thesaurus, the place in which good and precious things are collected and laid up; a treasure box or receptacle.