

## Matthew 2:1-12 – “Wise Men Still Seek Him”

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We’re looking at this theme this Christmas season of “Wise Men Still Seek Him”. Last Sunday we looked at Simeon and how this man wisely waited patiently for the promise of God to be revealed. And he in his old age got to be one of the earlier worshippers of Jesus Christ. He accepted this little baby as the One who would be the deliverer of the world, the One that would carry out salvation for all humanity.

Today we’re going to look at some other early worshippers of Jesus. We’re going to look at the Wise Men which is where the saying, ‘Wise men still seek Him’, comes from.

There’s a lot of people who think themselves to be wise.

- It was Christmas and the judge was in a very giving mood as he had to question a defendant, "What are you charged with?"  
"Doing my Christmas shopping early," replied the defendant.  
"That's no offense," said the judge. "How early were you doing this shopping?"  
"Before the store opened," he replied.

A lot of people may think themselves to be wise, but what truly makes a person wise? We’re going to be confronted with 3 different groups of people today in this account. And one group is seen as wise based on how they responded to Jesus.

**2:1-2 - *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”***

Now we don’t know a whole lot about these wise men. What made them wise? The term associated with them is *magi* (Gk=*magos*), which we get our word magician from.

These guys weren’t magicians in the sense of pulling bunnies out of a top hat type magicians.

- “The historian Herodotus mentions “magi” as a priestly caste of Media, or Persia, and, as the religion in Persia at the time was Zoroastrianism, Herodotus’ magi were probably Zoroastrian priests. Herodotus, together with Plutarch and Strabo, suggests that magi were partly responsible for

ritual and cultic life (supervising sacrifices and prayers) and partly responsible as royal advisers to the courts of the East.”<sup>1</sup>

- These were the people that Nebuchadnezzar consulted for help interpreting his dreams (**Daniel 2:2**, *"Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king."*).

So astrology was an important practice as they saw the movement of the stars as potential signs of future events.

And that's made quite clear in the fact that these wise men have seen a star which was unusual. It stood out. They know this star is revealing something. Notice, they don't say we have seen **a** star, but we have seen **His** star.

Why did they associate a star with a person?

- **Numbers 24:17**, *"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult."*
- An odd verse but one that was tied to the Messiah. Remember Daniel was in Babylon and was among the ranks of the magi. Perhaps news of this coming Messiah had been passed down with these Scriptures. And now these wise men are thinking this is it. This star got these wise men moving. Their response was a wise one indeed.

They are traveling a long way just so they can have an opportunity to worship this one born King of the Jews.

Aren't you glad that you don't have to travel a long way just to worship Jesus? The very incarnation of Christ was all about God dwelling with us – Immanuel.

**2:3-6 - *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'* "**

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<sup>1</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Wise Men. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 2153–2154). Baker Book House.

Herod calls for all the chief priests and the specialists of the law (scribes) who were familiar with what the Old Testament said about the coming Messiah. They share an amazing prophetic verse written some 700 years before Jesus was born. It foretells the very place He would be born.

- Now Bethlehem seems like a very significant place to us today because we look back on what took place there. But when this was written, Bethlehem held no distinction of honor. It was rather an unimpressive place to come from.

**2:7-11 - *Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” <sup>9</sup> When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup> And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.***

### **Three Gifts:**

These gifts all so wonderfully point to the 3 offices of Jesus and share a prophetic picture for us.

These three offices of Jesus are King, Priest, and Prophet.

**Gold:** This of course speaks of Jesus’ Kingship. Gold was very much associated with kings especially in this day and even in our day. In archeology when a tomb is discovered and found to be filled with gold it’s typically an indication that this was an important person and most likely royalty.

Kings are known for their gold crowns and golden scepters. And here now is gold being presented to Jesus – a gift worthy of a king.

And that’s very significant. These wise men didn’t question things when they saw a baby. They didn’t hold back and wonder if they should hold on to the gold until they know Jesus would rise to power.

- You see, we can often times become a little preoccupied with the idea of baby in a manger this time of year to where we get a little distracted or miss out on the truth of who He really is.
- I love the song, “What Child Is This?” and especially the line: *“This, this is Christ, the King...”*
- How we must not forget Who Jesus really is. Not who He would become, but Who He’s always been.
- **Isaiah 9:6–7**, *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”*

**Frankincense:** This is really just speaking of incense to be frank. This was associated with Priests, one of the 3-fold offices of Jesus. This frankincense speaks of worship and prayer throughout the Bible. The priests would bring incense into the tabernacle and temple, and it would be a sweet-smelling savour offered up to the Lord – just as our worship and prayer is before the Lord.

- David wrote in **Psalms 141:2**, *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”*
- In Revelation 5:8 the four living creatures and twenty-four elders have bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints.

This reminds us of the wonderful work Jesus would do as our High Priest. A priest’s role was to go before God on behalf of the people and to go to the people on behalf of God. Jesus has become our perfect High Priest. We have access to God through Jesus Christ. Our prayers are heard, our worship is received. We have an amazing privilege given to us in Jesus and this frankincense reminds us of it.

- **Hebrews 4:14–16**, *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

**Myrrh:** This speaks of Jesus as Prophet. A Prophet was one that spoke on behalf of God and ministered to people the message of God. This was a time when people were desperate to hear the heart of God. The voice of a prophet had been silent for hundreds of years and it's now at the birth of Jesus that God communicates something wonderful. We heard it from the angels to the shepherds:

- **Luke 2:10–11**, *"Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

The angel spoke to Joseph saying:

- **Matthew 1:21**, *"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*
- Now these announcements were huge news, but how they got received was a matter of interpretation. Many were expecting a Jewish Saviour that would be specific for Israel. This Saviour was the Promised Messiah that the Old Testament prophesied of and many believed He would lead Israel to independence, throwing off the yoke of Roman rule.

And this is where the myrrh paints a very different but prophetic picture. Myrrh was a burial spice used for embalming. As much as the other gifts point to Jesus' kingship and life, this gift of myrrh points to His sacrificial death. This would have been a shock to many who were waiting for a Saviour to, well, save them, But to think of a Saviour that couldn't even save Himself?

But this is exactly what God wanted to communicate. The world was plagued because of sin. The human race was in dire need of saving. Our sin had left us cut off from God with no hope in this world. And the wages or cost of that sin was death! But to spare you from that death Jesus came to this world, was clothed in humanity, and lived a righteous life that we were unable to. Jesus came to this world with one important mission in mind – to go to the cross where He would lay His life down as a sacrifice and there appease the wrath of God for our sin. Through this incredible act we were provided with forgiveness, reconciliation and justification. That's what Christmas is really all about. We celebrate Jesus' willingness to give up the blessing of heaven and come to this world as one of us, but we would be remiss if we just left it there.

His coming to this world was always to lead to the cross and our salvation. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). This gift of myrrh reminds us what Jesus would accomplish for you and me.

Now in the book of Isaiah we see an interesting prophecy that is spoken about Christ's second coming. **Isaiah 60:6**, *"The multitude of camels shall cover your land, The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord."*

- The same gifts are given, except for one, the myrrh. Why? As myrrh speaks of death and His sacrifice, that work will have been completed. He comes again to reign forever. He came the first time as our sacrifice, but He will come the second time as our ruling King!

In Revelation, one of the 7 churches addressed in Chapters 2-3 is the church of Smyrna. The name Smyrna means **myrrh**. Smyrna in Christian literature was synonymous with suffering. Yet look at how Jesus identified Himself to that church: *the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life* (Rev 2:8). Jesus indeed would suffer, He would be crushed, but His death would result in life! He rose again and secured everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

### **3 Responses:**

But what do you believe today? How have you responded to Jesus?

Our account today reveals three reactions or responses to Jesus:

#### **1. Herod**

Herod was threatened by Jesus. He saw himself as the king and to hear of another royal figure coming into the picture would disrupt his rule. He was upset and ready to do what he needed to keep control.

- This is how a lot of people respond to Jesus. They don't want anything to disrupt the control they feel they have in their life. They want to rule and not let another in. Maybe that's you today?

#### **2. The Scribes**

They were indifferent to Jesus. They knew that Scripture foretold a coming Messiah, and when they see that there's something stirring, they're uninterested. They don't travel the short distance to see if perhaps there is someone born in Bethlehem that may just be the Saviour.

- Perhaps that's you today. You're just going about your life not really giving much thought to Jesus as though you don't really need Him. You're not threatened by Him like Herod, but like the Scribes you're apathetic. And in that apathy you're missing out on what Jesus ultimately has for you.

### 3. The Wise Men

They sought after Jesus and were blessed. The wise men because of their faith, got to experience the fulfillment of Scripture and the arrival of the Messiah. And there's a greater blessing that awaits us as we seek Christ on the other side of the cross. Because as the gifts pointed out for us, He's come to be our King, the one that leads us to the Father and into everlasting life. All this was accomplished by His death and resurrection. He came to give His life for you sacrificially. He came to pay the penalty for your sins and provide the forgiveness and cleansing we all needed. All so you may gain the gift of eternal life!

- **John 3:16**, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*
- This doesn't happen by you earning your way in. There's nothing you can do to receive this but to surrender to Jesus and give your life to Him.

**2:12 - *Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.***

These guys left avoiding Herod. That was a wise thing to do. But might I say that as they left ***another way*** that it was more than just directional. I believe they left as different men than they were when they came.

- Such is the case when we seek the Lord and come to worship Him. Don't let anything hinder you or stop you. There is great wisdom in giving our all to Him. His star is still shining, the path is still open. Turn to Him today!
- **Jeremiah 29:13**, *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*