

# **“The Hospitality of the Child Under the Star”**

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## **(Matthew 2:1-12)**

Thus far, this holiday season, we have seen how Jesus was the promised Messiah from the line of Abraham and from the line of David.

We saw how God protected and preserved Him by sending an angel to appear to Joseph in a dream and convincing Joseph to stay with Mary.

Jesus was then born in Bethlehem and He was given the name, Jesus, which means “The Lord Saves.” Last week, Pastor Steve spoke to us about Searching and being lost...and how we need to view people as fellow travelers on this road of life who may occasionally lose their way, just like us...but Jesus is the only one who can help by saving and delivering us.

Today, we’re going to learn about the famous wise men passage. As we do so, I want to encourage you to try to forget all the Christmas songs and Christmas stories concerning the birth of Jesus and the visit of the wise men. I think you will find that the Bible speaks a bit differently on these matters.

On that note, let’s look at the Bible now and see what it says regarding the visit of the wise men.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

“1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born.

5 “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet:

6 And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah:

Because out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.”

Pray with me please...

God of all time, we praise and adore you for breaking into the darkness of this world with the glorious light of your presence. A light which made your love for the world visible in the babe born in Bethlehem—Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour. A light which guided those gift-bearing travellers from afar to find and worship the Christ-child.

A light which leads us to you, now revealed in Jesus Christ. We pray that you will accept our worship for it arises from hearts and minds in awe over the enormity of your gift to us of pure love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

How many of you have already caught some discrepancies from the popular Christmas version of the story?

Well, let's see what we can learn together.  
We're going to look at six aspects to this story.

Let's get to it.

First, . . .

I. The wise men and their question (vv. 1-2) - "1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."

First of all, we need to note something right out of the gate.

Which direction were the men coming from? (East)

In order to come with the East at your back, you have to be going which direction? (West)

So, the star was not in the east. We hear some songs which speak of a star in the East. Not so, the men were from the East.

The star was West of the men, so it would have been a star in the West. It's east of us in America, but not East of the wise men.

Now that we have that out of the way, let's talk about the wise men a bit.

We know that they were wise men, or magi. This term for magi is the same root word for where we get the word magic. We don't know everything about them, but we know they were from the East; perhaps Babylonia, Persia, some other nation, or a combination of nations.

We know that they probably studied the stars, as they show tremendous interest in this celestial happening.

There's also a chance that they were familiar with a prophecy, the prophecy out of the book of Numbers, as they were known to have reached into the Eastern parts of the region. Numbers 24:17 says,

"A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel."

This prophecy could have impacted them and caused them to look for this star.

At any rate, these men were interested in this star...because it pointed them to One who was born king of the Jews.

Let's also point out that there is no evidence that there were only three wise men.

In fact, most likely there were more than three.

These men likely didn't travel by themselves as they were probably important people.

We know later, that there were three gifts presented, but that doesn't mean there were only three wise men.

So...How many were there? We don't know.

We do know that they traveled very far to find out more about this child that was born as a king.

So, not knowing any better, they entered Jerusalem where they go to Herod and ask him to point them to Jesus. This is trouble for Herod.

That's our second aspect to the story . . .

## II. Herod's trouble...

Let's look at verses 3-6 once again.

**"3 When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born.**

**5 "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet:**

**6 And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."**

At this news of a baby, born king of the Jews, Herod is disturbed.

So...We ask, ... "Why is he disturbed? Why would he be troubled?"

Well, what we know about Herod is that although he was king, he was not even Jewish. He had purchased the right to be king from the Roman government.

He ruled with an iron fist. He was ruthless, powerful, and jealous. He even had some of his own family killed because he was paranoid that they may steal his power.

His temper gives a reason as to why Jerusalem was troubled with him. They didn't want to see what he would do if he got upset.

He knew that he was not the legitimate heir to the throne in Jerusalem. If this baby was the legitimate heir, there could be problems.

Herod inquires as to where the baby will be born. The chief priests and the scribes easily identify where the Messiah will be born. They immediately go to the prophecy from Micah 5:2 - "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."

"Bethlehem," they tell him. That's easy!

Note two things about this.

First, the scribes and the priests did not go to look for the Messiah themselves or even check out the situation.

Second, those who easily identified the Messiah's birth and the fulfillment of the prophecies would later reject their own Messiah and crucify Him. How messed up is that?

They were blind and didn't see what was right in front of their noses.

So...We need to ask God to help us not be blind as we live for Him. We must have eyes that are open to Him and to His ways!

Now, Herod knows where the Christ is to be born, so, he makes a request.

This is the next aspect of the story . . .

## III. Herod's request-

Let's look at verses 7 and 8.

**"7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."**

If we pay attention in verse 7 we will notice that this is the first hint that some time had passed since Jesus was born before the magi arrived. In the manger scenes, we often see the wise men are at the stable with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; but that's not accurate.

Some time had passed. Herod asked, when did you first see the star? It apparently wasn't there right then. The implication is that the wise men saw the star, came West, and then met with Herod.

Herod summoned them to make them think that he also wanted to worship the King of the Jews.

He said, "Go ahead and let me know what you find out so I can worship Him also."

However, we know that Herod had no intention of worshipping Jesus; He wanted to kill him.

Notice, how the power of evil would try to stop God's plan over and over and over again.

At the very beginning of Creation, the Serpent would try to break the union between man and God, and he would succeed. But, God wanted to bind that union back together and He pronounced that He would long ago, through the baby that would be born to the woman. Thousands of years later, this baby was born and the forces of evil were at work again, trying to stop God's plan.

Know this, church: evil will not prevail! God will prevail!

So, Herod says to search carefully for the baby and let me know all about it. The wise men set off again, and lo and behold, the star reappears.

This is the fourth aspect of the story . . .

IV. The star's guidance -

Look at verses 9 and 10 again.

"9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy."

The star guides them again.

Now, a note about the star. Some have sought to explain the star by pointing to certain natural celestial happenings at the time, using dates and charts and such. Something natural could have been used by God. However, let's not forget that there are miracles happening left and right all over the place during this account.

This would have been some crazy super weird star! To be sure, whatever it was it certainly caught the attention of the wise men. In fact, the word translated star here could also refer to a comet, supernova, or some other celestial abnormality. Some commentators even suggest that it could have been something like the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites in the wilderness (you know, the one described in Exodus 13 ).

We do know that it seemed to disappear and reappear and it seemed to move around in order to guide them.

But, we must remember that God was at work! The Magi were overwhelmed with joy. But why? Not merely because the star was cool, although I'm sure it was. However, they had joy because it was leading them to the Messiah.

When we come to Jesus we should have joy! Shouldn't we? We should take joy in taking others to Jesus as well!

He changes the world! He's better than a magic star, or comet, or pillar of fire, or whatever that was.

He's the object of joy! The star led them right to where Jesus was and as a result, they worshipped Him.

That's the next aspect . . .

V. The wise men's worship-

Verse 11 says,

**“11 Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

**Ok, here is the second hint that some time had passed: they are not in the stable any longer. They are now in a house.**

**Sorry to burst your Christmas card bubbles. The family is now in a house.**

**I suppose that it’s possible that this was a house very close to the stable, but the indication is that time had passed. Some scholars say that by the time the wise men arrive as much as two years could have passed since Jesus was born. Indeed, it would have taken quite some time for them to see the star, travel, visit Herod, travel some more, and come to the house. We don’t know for sure how long it took, but we’re sure it wasn’t the same night that Jesus was born.**

**The wise men, upon seeing Jesus, fell to their knees and worshipped Him.**

**Something was different about this baby. He was worthy of worship. In their worship, they presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Some have suggested that these three gifts signified the life and death of Jesus. We have no indication of that from Scripture, and I typically avoid looking into the Bible for secret codes.**

**These gifts were normal gifts to present to royalty, and the wise men did so. These gifts would have also proved helpful to the family as they were going to continue to journey. After they are done worshipping Jesus, they depart and begin their journey home.**

**That’s our final aspect of the story . . .**

**VI. The wise men’s return -  
Look at verse 12.**

**“12 And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.”**

**At some point, the wise men were warned in a dream. God intervened again. Jesus would be protected by God, from Herod. Herod would not have victory. Satan would not have victory.**

**The wise men would go back home after they accomplished what they had set out to do,... to worship the King.  
So.....**

**The wise men went to find this child under the star and to worship Him. This child under the star would grow up to become the man on the cross, then the Savior risen from the grave, then Lord up in heaven, then one day the King returning to claim His people. God was at work all along, to save His people. That takes us to our bottom line.**

**The Bottom Line is:**

**God’s providence is seen in the wise men’s encounter with Jesus.  
Allow me to repeat that..  
God’s providence is seen in the wise men’s encounter with Jesus.**

**God’s providence refers to God working out His plan in creation.  
Matthew wants us to see God at work.**

**Prophecies are fulfilled. Miracles happen. God is at work!**

**He is providentially guiding these events in order to bring salvation to the world. As the name Jesus tells us, “The Lord saves.”**

**Challenge yourself this week:**

1. Ask yourself, "What would have happened if one thing went wrong with the wise men's encounter with Jesus?"

Do you see why it's so important that God had His hand in this? All of this matters!

2. Ask yourself, "What kind of encounter have I had with Jesus?"

Have you sought to destroy the case of Christ as Herod did?

Have you hardened your heart to what God is doing as the scribes and priests did?

Or...

Have you worshipped as the wise men did?

The wise men worshipped this child. God protected Him. God worked everything out so that He could rescue you and me. His plan would not fail then and it will not fail today. He is still working out His plan which includes the saving of sinners. We have a privilege to be a part of that plan. First of all, we can be saved ourselves. Just as the star led the wise men to Jesus, ... God, by His Holy Spirit, is leading you to Jesus. Indeed, even through the words of the Bible this morning God is leading you to Jesus...to Respond in worship as they did.

Second of all, we can bring others to Him to experience the salvation that only He offers. We must realize that God is calling people to Himself. And...Sometimes it's not those that we expect. Just as the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, but the pagan wise men worshipped Him. So, share with everyone! Men and women! Every ethnicity! Every religion! Every economic make-up! Share the love of Jesus!

Please join me as we close in Prayer...

It's always been about the light with you, hasn't it, Jesus?

Magi, braving distance and desert to find you,

Bewildered shepherds, compelled by an angel's invitation, and allowed light to be their guide,  
And still the light that calls us to you; the light of beauty that whispers its truth in surprising ways and places;

the light of compassion that kneels, and washes road-soiled, life-battered feet;

the light of joy that glows even in the darkness of grief and suffering;

the light that seeks to shine within us, and through us into the dark corners of our world.

It's always been about the light with you, Jesus; and it's always about the light for us.

Please lead us, now and always, out of darkness and into your marvelous light.

Amen.