

LEARNING FROM THE MAGI

- Where do we find the Magi in Scripture?
- Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 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.

I love the story of the magi.

There was a time when the magi lived far away from Jesus...As the crow flies about 500 to [750 miles](#) but armies and caravans traveled 900 to [1500 miles](#) along valleys and rivers from Persia to Jerusalem. They were given a special star to capture their attention and to guide them. They followed the star, and it changed everything. An intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people.

I love the picture that the story of the magi paints in my imagination: A special star shining bright. A stable illuminated by that star. A young woman kneeling by a manger, a new mother’s love radiating from her face. A man standing beside her, gentle and strong. A baby lying in the manger, a few pieces of straw grasped in his tiny fist. A sheep here. A cow there. And three exotic gentlemen bowing before the baby, their faces filled with awe, their hands outstretched with gifts too beautiful and too rich for a stable.

I must admit my imagination is affected as much by modern nativity scenes and Christmas pageants as Matthew’s gospel account. The magi didn’t arrive Christmas Day like the shepherds did, they arrived several days or weeks or months later. They didn’t find Jesus in the stable

where he was born, they found him in a house that presumably became home to Joseph and Mary after the stable and before the flight to Egypt. And we don't know if there were three magi. There were at least two. Maybe there were six. Three gifts, yes. Three magi, maybe.

Still, I love the picture. And at least some of it matches Matthew's account. There was a star. And there were exotic gentlemen bowing before Jesus, awe in their faces and magnificent gifts in their hands.

There was a time when the magi lived far away from Jesus, so far that they knew nothing about him. They had heard of the God of Abraham, perhaps from Daniel, we don't know for sure, but they had no particular relationship with him. They didn't live in Judea. They lived in Persia, or Arabia maybe. They weren't Jews. They were Gentiles. In other words, the magi didn't grow up in the church. They never prayed with their parents before bedtime—at least not to this God. They never went to Sunday school. They never memorized any Bible verses. Chances are they didn't know Genesis from Job.

What an amazing thing—to be gifted with a special star to capture their attention and to guide them.

They followed the star, and it changed everything. The day came when these men found themselves in an intimate relationship with Jesus. They bowed before him and offered him their very best. They knew he was king. They honored him as their king. They went home another way. That is to say, they traveled a different route on the map. I think it's safe to say that they traveled a different route in their lives too. An intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people.

There's something to learn from this story of the magi. Something about special stars that capture our attention and guide us. Something about following those stars. Something about bowing before Jesus and offering him our very best. Something about honoring him as our king. Something about traveling a different route after that, because an intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people.

There's something to learn from this story for people that didn't grow up in church. Who don't know much of anything about Jesus. Who have heard of the God of Abraham, but don't have any particular relationship with him. Who never prayed with their parents before bedtime. Who never went to Sunday school. Who never memorized any Bible verses. Who don't know Genesis from Job.

And there's something to learn from this story for people who do know Jesus and who have walked with him for a lifetime, and for everybody in between.

There isn't a single one of us who doesn't still have some distance between how we live and perfect relationship with Jesus. If we're honest with ourselves, most of us have experienced times when we stray from the path on which Jesus has been leading us and we need a little help to follow in his footsteps again. If we're honest with ourselves, most of us have experienced

times when, maybe we haven't strayed very far from the path, but we have slowed to a crawl and we need a little help to move forward in growth and service again.

There's something to learn from this story of the magi. God just might give you a star to capture your attention and to guide you. And if you follow that star, everything just might change. An intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people—whether it's the first intimate encounter or the fiftieth.

There's something to learn from this story—something about following stars. I want to share with you **ten things** that I have learned from the magi's guide to following a star.

1. First, you have to see the star. This requires keeping your eyes open, and your heart too.

The magi may not have known God, but they knew stars. They knew when something extraordinary was happening in the night sky. They saw the star, and they took note. They investigated. They conferred with one another. What they did not understand captured their imagination. They did not turn their eyes to another part of the sky, hoping to see the familiar and be reassured. They did not grasp at explanations, hoping to have their own previous knowledge confirmed. They saw the star, and they took note.

The magi were open to evidence that God was doing something special in their world. When the star marking the birth of Jesus appeared, the magi saw it.

The star God sends to you or to me might be something completely different. It might be just the right word from a friend at just the right moment. It might be a vision in a dream. It might be an impression during prayer. It might be an insight from a book. It might be something we see God doing, not in our own life, but in the life of someone we know.

Whatever it is, we need to be open to evidence that God is doing something special in our world.

2. Next, you have to follow the star. This requires movement.

When the magi saw the star, they followed it. They didn't know where it would lead. They didn't know how long it would take. They rearranged their schedules, found someone to water their plants and feed the cat, and they followed the star.

The magi were willing to rearrange their lives to check out the evidence that God was doing something special in their world. When the star marking the birth of Jesus appeared, the magi followed it.

3. Persistence matters. Sometimes it takes a while before you know exactly where the star is leading you.

The magi traveled a great distance. They didn't just move, they moved a lot. I expect they had a few conversations over the campfire about the wisdom of their travels, but still they stuck with the star.

4. You're allowed to use your brain. Common sense can be helpful. So can the advice of experts.

Marking, as it did, the birth of the new king of the Jews, the star led the magi to Judea. It only made sense for the magi to go to Jerusalem, the capital city. Where else would you expect to find a king?

Once in Jerusalem, the magi were not too proud to ask directions. They consulted the authorities and they obtained advice from scholars who knew the ancient texts that they did not know.

5. Common sense and expert knowledge have their limitations. Sometimes the obvious turns out to be wrong, and the experts turn out to be dangerous.

Consulting the experts, the magi learned that this particular newborn king was to be found, not in the obvious place--Jerusalem, but in a most unlikely place--the little town of Bethlehem. Accordingly, they changed their travel plans.

Later, the magi found out that Herod, the very one who had provided access to the experts, was an enemy, not a friend, of the newborn king. And, therefore, also a threat to them.

They learned what they could from the authorities and experts, but they did not obey them without thought.

6. Keep the star before you at all times. That is, as long as it draws you into scripture and according to scripture.

Equipped with their new information about Bethlehem, the magi left Jerusalem. But still they followed the star that had brought them thus far.

So far the star had been a faithful guide. It had drawn them into scripture when they arrived in Jerusalem--taking them to the ancient biblical prophecies. And the star continued to lead them in accordance with scripture, leading them to Bethlehem.

Presumably, if the star had begun to lead them in ways that contradicted scripture, the magi would have known enough to stop and question its leading.

7. Don't get so attached to the star that you miss what (who) it points to. The star is a guide. The purpose of the star is to get your attention and encourage you along your journey. Joy comes from meeting the purpose of the journey—Jesus.

When the star had led the magi to Bethlehem, it had served its purpose. They stopped looking at the star and they looked to Jesus instead. And Matthew says they were overjoyed.

8. Meeting Jesus is just the beginning. Acknowledging his Lordship comes next.

Having made contact with Jesus, the magi acknowledged his Lordship. They bowed down and worshiped him. They didn't simply pat each other on the back for having made it to their destination. Meeting Jesus, no matter how long the journey to that point, was just the beginning.

9. Acknowledging his Lordship leads to responding with gifts. Surrender and service go well with gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Having acknowledged his Lordship, the magi gave of themselves. They presented him with gifts--the very best that they had to offer.

10. Go home another way. This requires transformation. An intimate encounter with Jesus tends to do that to people.

When they left Bethlehem, the magi were changed. They weren't just headed back to where they came from. They were going home, but it was a whole new journey entirely. They went home by another way.

Every time you and I encounter Jesus, we are given the opportunity again to go home another way. To be changed. To be transformed.

An intimate encounter with Jesus tends to do that to people.

Summary: God just might give you a star to capture your attention and to guide you. And if you follow that star, everything just might change.

Remember...An intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people.

AMEN.....