

**Lesson 3: “We have come to worship Him.”**  
**Matthew 2:1-12**

**Memory Verse:** “...bear fruits worthy of repentance....every tree which does not bear good fruits is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3:8-10).

**Text:** <sup>1</sup>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." <sup>3</sup> 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.' " <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

**Monday**

Jesus is to be worshiped. There is nothing more basic than this. It is, in fact, the most basic truth in all of existence. Romans 11:36 says it plainly enough, “For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.” Combine this with Colossians 1:16, “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him,” and just a few other verses, 1 Cor. 8:6, 11:12; Heb. 2:10, 13:21 etc., and the truth becomes inescapable. More basic than  $2 + 2 = 4$ , more fundamental than any physical laws, we were made by Jesus, we live through Jesus, and we were made for Jesus, that we might give Him glory in the worship that is His rightful due from us, His creatures.

How sad it is and how contemptible when we fail to realize and follow through with this most basic rule of life. The British actress Joan Winmill Brown once wrote, “Years ago John Ruskin, the English critic, said, ‘I would sooner live in a cottage and wonder at everything, than live in a castle and wonder at nothing.’ I have often thought of the statement that H. G. Wells made before his death, that his soul was “no longer moved by the sight of the stars in the sky”. The truth is, I cannot express to you all the wonder and joy that I have in my heart through Jesus

Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Oh beloved, how precious to live with the heart of a John Ruskin rather than the heart of an H.G. Wells. How good it is to have your “soul moved” and look at the world in wonder and joy and then to take that wonder and lay it at the feet of Jesus in worship, the one “through whom, and to whom and for whom” are all things.

In our text for this week, Matthew records for us a true and beautiful story, one that has captured the hearts of Christians around the world for two thousand years. It is a story of worship, and this week there are five truths that I want you to see from this text for your edification and joy. The first truth is very simple. It is this:

**1. Jesus is to be honored as the King of the Jews (vv. 1-2).** Verses 1 and 2 begin, “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, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?”

It is interesting that the wise men, don’t ask, “Where is the child who is destined to become king of the Jews,” or “Where is the child born to be king at some point in the future,” but they ask, “Where is the child born King ...?” In other words, “Where is the child who is King right now?”

And verse four makes it clear what the wise men, or magi as the original text calls them, meant by this. It also makes clear that Herod understood them very well. It says, “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.”

This title “Christ” refers to the long-awaited God-anointed Ruler who would one day come through the Jewish nation and who will one day overcome all other rule on earth. He will bring in the end of history, establish the Kingdom of God, and reign on an everlasting throne. This is what it means for the Lord Jesus to be called “King of the Jews.” It is extraordinary.

In and of itself, a child being born, who might someday be the king of a nation, is not such a big deal. It’s not a very great thing, no matter what anyone says. Somewhere in America today, there are probably three or four children, under the age of 18, who are going to be President someday. But no one really cares about this, or sets out to try and find and honor them. In fact, most people of this country don’t even know or care about the leaders or kings of other countries, let alone consider traveling to honor children that are born to someday bear that title. Herod himself had been called by the title “King of the Jews” by the Roman Senate for almost 40 years at this point; but probably no one from Babylon ever bothered to travel to see him, if they even knew who he was. Outside of a self-serving motive, they probably wouldn’t have traveled ten feet out of their way to give him a jelly donut, let alone travel the whole fertile crescent to

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Winmill Brown, “You Don’t Walk Alone,” *Great Reading from Decision* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1960), p. 166.

“worship him.” But “Christ,” the one true “King of the Jews,” now that’s something entirely different.

It is also interesting -- and strangely foreboding of evil -- that the magi clearly expected Herod to already know who and where the Christ was, but Herod didn’t have a clue. Shouldn’t the Jewish people and their ruler already have this information? Shouldn’t they have already been on their own knees and faces before the Lord Jesus? The verb tense of verse two indicates that the magi were asking and kept asking over and over again throughout the whole city of Jerusalem, which was then “troubled” (v. 3). And yet, no one had a response.

Herod calls the scribes and chief priests together to ask, “Where is the Christ (whom he is not honoring) to be born?” And they quote from the first part of Micah 5:2. But imagine, for just a moment, if Herod had asked them, “Who is the Christ?” Then, they would have continued quoting from Micah, “Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting ... And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace.” Herod may have realized, then, that this King is not just coming into being in the womb of His mother, but “His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting,” that is eternity. Or as John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And this King would not be limited in His reign to Israel, but “He will be great to the ends of the earth.”

These foreigners, the magi, somehow in God’s grace, understood this, and that is why worship was in their minds. This is why honoring Jesus as the “King of the Jews” meant so much to them. Herod, though, couldn’t be bothered with the “Who” question. His soul was no longer moved by the wonder of this universe, and so he missed the most basic truth of existence.

Take a few minutes to read Psalm 2. How does this Psalm impact you? Consider verse 12 in particular. Have you kissed the Son? Does the latter part of this verse describe you? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Tuesday

Yesterday we saw that the Lord Jesus is to be honored as the King of the Jews, and we talked a little bit about what that meant. That truth naturally leads into the second truth which encompasses all of us and is represented by the actions of the wise men in this text. It is this:

**2. Jesus is to be worshiped by all the nations of the world (v. 2).** Matthew portrays the Lord Jesus, from the beginning to the end of this Gospel as a universal Messiah for all nations or people groups, not just for the Jews. Here, the first worshipers he mentions are court wise men, not from Israel, but from the east, the land of Babylon. They were Gentiles, considered unclean

by the leaders of Judaism. And at the end of the Gospel, the last words of the Lord that Matthew will record for us include, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

This has not only opened the door for us as Gentiles to rejoice in the Messiah, it adds proof that He truly is the Messiah, because one of the repeated prophecies of the Old Testament was that foreign nations and kings would, in fact, come to Jesus as the ruler of the world and receive Him as their own sovereign. For example, Isaiah 60:3 says, “The Gentiles shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising.” So Matthew demonstrates the Messiahship of Jesus and shows that He is the King and fulfillment of God’s promise for all nations, not just Israel.

How would you define worship, what sort of activities does it involve? \_\_\_\_\_  
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How does your definition square with the actions of the magi in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_  
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### Wednesday

We’ve seen two simple truths relating to worship so far this week: Jesus is the King of the Jews and is to be honored as such, and Jesus is to be worshiped by all nations of the world. There is a third truth we need to explore today:

**3. God wields His glory to make Christ known and worshiped (vv. 2, 9).** The particular expression of God’s glory may take many forms. It may be a brilliant radiance in the night sky as in this text, the laughter of a child, a smile from a friend, the love of church members for one another, the sacrifice of a missionary, the singing of praises, or the death of a committed witness as a martyr, etc. In fact, this is the great goal of all things and all creation and all of God’s working, that His Son might be known and worshiped.

Over and over again, the Bible speaks of this: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world” (Ps. 19:1-4). In this text, we see a miraculous star, a light that the wise men saw in the east. God used it to speak to their hearts about the Lord’s birth, and it encouraged them to leave their home and seek the Messiah, who was born King of the Jews.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, they lost the guidance of the star, which is clear from the fact that they had to begin asking around the city for the baby. But after they were told of the

prophesied birthplace, that same star reappeared to them, guided them on the five mile walk to Bethlehem, and actually stood over the house where the Child was, verse 9. Now this was obviously a supernatural, miraculous light, and not a normal star as we typically think of them. The Greek word “aster” was used often to refer to any great brilliance or radiance, and that’s how Matthew used it here.

The radiance may have been an angel, but the Bible doesn’t say. I personally believe, however, that it was the Shekinah glory of God; the glory of God blazing as if it were an extremely bright star, which was, as is apparent from the text, only visible to the eyes for whom it was intended to be seen. It was a brilliant manifestation of the sign of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:29-30; Rev. 1:7). The Shekinah glory of God returned and stood over Bethlehem just as it did centuries before in a sad and frightening vision in the book of Ezekiel. The eyes of the prophet were opened to see what others could not, and he watched as the glory of God departed from the temple, leaving the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel. Centuries later, the glory of God returned in an incredible way at the birth of the Lord Jesus. God in His electing grace chose again who would see it, and the eyes of the magi were opened to see His great light over Bethlehem.

Now one might ask the obvious question, “Why did the radiance of God’s glory disappear for a time and then reappear?” The answer, I believe, is that God was testing the hearts of the people of Jerusalem. Had any of them believed the testimony of the wise men and come with them, I think the star would have reappeared to them also, but they missed it in their hard-heartedness.

And so, God chose these men, and is guiding these foreign Gentiles to Christ to worship Him, and He is exerting incredible power to implement His plan and His purpose. Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire so that the census comes at the exact time to get a virgin to Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy with the delivery of her baby. Matthew shows God influencing the heavens to get these men to Bethlehem so they can worship Jesus.

God’s plan will not be thwarted. Part of His plan is that His children from all the nations will come and worship His Son. As Revelation 7:9 declares, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” This glorifying of Christ in the white-hot worship of all nations and peoples is the desire and end of God’s working in the world. And He will get it done.

I wonder who of us will be a part of this great plan? Who of us are ready and willing to be used by God to be a means in the accomplishment of His purpose? Who of us will be used as God used Daniel to faithfully sow the seeds which brought the magi to bow before Christ centuries later? Who of us will catch the vision and the heart of God for the nations? Who of us longs to see Him lifted up and glorified among all peoples? Who of us will cry out to God, “Here am I God, please use me and please send me as you will, that the nations and the people might know and glorify You.”

How has God wielded His glory to bring you to worship His Son? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Has God given you a testimony to test the hearts of others? If so, how can you serve as a “star” to lead others to Christ? Or what starlike or shining deed can you do today to point others to Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
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### Thursday

Today we come to a fourth truth from this text relating to the worship of the Lord Jesus. It is this:

**4. Jesus is troubling to those who do not want to worship Him. This brings opposition against those who do (vv. 3-8).**

In this text we see three basic responses to the Lord Jesus. Two are the responses of fools, who do not want to worship the Messiah, and one is the response of the wise men. The first response of those who do not worship the Lord is to simply do nothing about Jesus, to treat Him as a nonentity in their lives. This group is represented by the chief priests and the scribes. Verse 4, “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.” Well, they told him, and that was that – back to business as usual.

The sheer silence and inactivity of these people is overwhelming in view of the magnitude of what was happening and the testimony of the wise men. And notice, verse 3 says, “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” In other words, the rumor was going around that the magi, the “king-makers” from the east thought the Messiah was born, and the inactivity on the part of the chief priests and scribes in light of this is simply staggering.

Why not go with the magi? Why not follow them and check it out? But, it is evident that the chief priests and scribes are simply not interested. They don’t want to check it out, and they do not want to worship the true God. They just cannot be bothered about it, even though this is the great promise and hope of the very religion they have supposedly pledged their lives to serve. Oh sure, they give lip service to the Christ, but when it comes to actually getting up and walking five miles to see if He is here, then forget it. That’s just too much effort. The wise men had journeyed a thousand miles or more, but the leaders of Judaism at that time couldn’t be bothered to take a two-to-three hour trip to Bethlehem. What a foreshadowing of things to come!

It is unfortunate, but this is a very common response to the Lord in our day and time. People give lip service to Christ; they give lip service to worship; they may even faithfully attend church as these men undoubtedly faithfully went to the temple and synagogue services. But, when it come to actually doing something about the faith they give lip service to, when it comes to actually putting Scripture into practice, or putting feet to all their talk, then they are nowhere to be found. And the truth is, if you could really look at their lives and their hearts, if you could see past the facade, then you would see that the Lord really doesn't mean that much to them at all. They really live day to day, bumping along without much concern for Him. He is really just a minor player or nonentity in their lives, not even on the radar screen of their thinking. And in truth, this kind of indifference is really a form of rejection and hatred concealed by a veneer of politeness.

The second response of those who do not want to worship the Lord is active hostility, open opposition. These are people that feel deeply threatened by Him, and they are represented by Herod in this passage.

After Herod received the information he wanted from the religious leaders, he secretly called the magi, and ascertained the time the star appeared. His concern was for the time, not its meaning or significance, because he had already hatched a murderous plot in his mind. It was enough for him to know that the sign pointed to the birth of someone who could be a threat to his own power and position. The time of the star's appearance would indicate the age of the child who had been born. So Herod instructs them to proceed with their mission and then report their findings to him as they returned home. He hypocritically gave the magi a good sounding reason for wanting to know the exact location, "in order that I too may come and worship him." He lets them go unescorted, because he doesn't want to put them on their guard, and he is confident that they are deceived.

His ultimate purpose is made clear, though, by what he actually did. When the wise men, again obedient to the Lord's leading, did not report to Herod, he ordered his soldiers to slaughter every male child in and around Bethlehem two years old and under in accordance with the appearance of the star and the timing of the Lord's birth. (He probably left a margin for error of six months to a year, so we can infer that the wise men came to Christ approximately a year to eighteen months after His birth. This is also implied from the fact that the Lord's family was staying in a "house" (v. 11) at the time they arrived). Herod felt threatened by Christ and was truly hostile. So much so, that he schemes and lies and then commits a mass murder of all the little boys in the area in an effort to get rid of the Lord.

This brings us to the third basic response to Christ, that of the magi, and the final and most important truth I want to point out to you from this text regarding worship. We'll get to that tomorrow.

First, let's reflect a little on the actions of the religious leaders and Herod. Do you think the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees can be found in the church today? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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How would such an attitude manifest itself? \_\_\_\_\_

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Are there any texts in the Bible that tell us? Consider Matt. 15:1-9. Can you think of others? \_\_\_\_\_

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How can you guard against being the kind of person that honors God with your lips, but whose heart is far away from Him? \_\_\_\_\_

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If Herod were speaking to you today and trying to defend himself, what do you think he would say to justify himself? \_\_\_\_\_

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What kind of thoughts and attitudes lie behind this kind of opposition against God? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Friday

We come today to the response of the Magi to Christ and the final truth we can see in this text relating to worship. It's this:

#### **5. Worshiping Jesus involves joyfully ascribing authority and honor to Him with sacrificial gifts (vv. 10-12).**

There are four elements to that definition of worship that I want to mention to you. All four are grounded in this text. First, I see the magi ascribing authority to Christ by calling Him "King" and by literally falling down before Him in verse 11. Then we see it again in verse 12, by their immediate willingness to obey the divine warning. Second, I see the magi giving Him great

honor by their journey and by their earnest desire to find Him. The verb “saying” in verse 2 means that they literally kept asking their question over and over and over again, everywhere they went. Then I see it again in their falling down and worshiping Him in verse 11.

Third, I see the joyful ascription of this authority and honor in verse 10: “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.” Now this, beloved, is a quadruple way of saying they rejoiced. It would have been much to say they rejoiced. More to say that they rejoiced with joy. Even more to say that they rejoiced with great joy. But this verse says that they “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” Joy is intensified by the language here three times. And what was the joy all about? They were on their way to see the Messiah. They were almost there. They could almost taste it. One commentator I read said, “You could translated this phrase, ‘They were deliriously happy.’”

When I think about being deliriously happy, I think about the night I got engaged to Eve. I think about our wedding day or the days when Noah and Drew and Emma were first born. On those days I smiled so much that my cheeks were in actual pain. And despite the pain, I simply could not stop smiling I was so happy. That’s the kind of “happy” these wise men had. I cannot avoid the impression that wonderful, beautiful worship, worship that is pleasing to God, is not just ascribing authority and honor to Christ, but doing it **joyfully**. It is worship because you have come to see something about Christ that is so desirable and so much to be treasured, that simply being near Him to give Him honor and to receive His authority personally is overwhelmingly compelling and glorious in your heart. It simply makes your soul come alive with happiness. That is worship the way it should be.

The fourth part of the worship we see here is that it is done with sacrificial gifts. Worship means joyfully ascribing authority and honor to Christ with sacrificial gifts. Now this needs to be considered carefully, because we know that God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything (Acts 17:25). So the gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need meeting. No. It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal “care packages.” And when we give to the church and to missions, we are not giving because the kingdom of God and His plan will fold up and fail if we don’t. Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes; some attempt to buy God off in some way or pay Him to look the other way because of personal sin. Deuteronomy 10:17 says that God takes no bribes. You will never be able to buy Him off or cut some kind of deal with Him through giving, so just forget it.

Well, what then do the gifts mean? How are they worship? The answer is that the gifts are intensifiers. They intensify desire for Christ Himself in much the same way that fasting does. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it’s a way of saying, “The joy that I pursue is not in the things of this world. The joy that I pursue is not the hope of riches and wealth in this life. It does not consist in clinging to material possessions. The treasure that I treasure is not the things of this world. I am not living for things; I am living for you, Jesus. And this desire I now express fully and intensify by giving up my substance in the hope of enjoying you more.”

Listen beloved. When you give, you should be thinking towards God, “By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying as earnestly and authentically as I can, ‘You are my treasure; You, Lord, are my treasure and not the things of this world and life.’ Call on me Lord, and I will give you my time, my career, journey a thousand miles or more and give my earthly goods. I will give even my life in worship of You.”

Is that your response to Christ as you come to worship Him? Or is your response like that of the scribes and chief priests, basic indifference, a heart that says, “I can’t really be bothered about the things of God right now?” Have you got your nose aimed down at the earth and your thoughts all wrapped up in things that don’t really matter like the crowds that trample each other for what -- Wal-Mart sales?

We could spend a lot of time with a passage like this, discussing the origins of the wise men and the history behind their knowledge. We could spend time speculating about the meaning and purpose of the three different gifts that were presented. We could dig into a lot of other things. But if that’s all we did, beloved, then we would be completely missing the Holy Spirit’s point. This is a text about worship, and in this vision of the wise men, we are meant to test our own hearts toward Christ.

Matthew wants a desire for Christ to be awakened in our hearts. We are meant to say, “Lord Jesus, you are the Messiah. All nations will come and bow down before you. You have used your power, creation and all that is glorious so that your children might see you and worship. So Lord, whatever opposition and indifference I might find in others, I joyfully receive your authority, honor you and bring my gifts to say that you alone can satisfy my heart; not these things that others go after, but You alone.”

What gift will intensify your joy in Christ this week? With what gift of time, money or effort has God burdened your heart? \_\_\_\_\_  
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If you do not have a longing to give, why? Is it possible that your heart is far more aligned with the hearts of the chief priests or even Herod? Take some time to test your desire and your treasure. Write out a prayer of commitment in the space provided: