

**The Messiah Has Come**  
**(A Study in Matthew - Week 2)**  
**Matthew 2:1-12**  
**“Wise Men Still Seek Him”**

**Introduction**

**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 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.”**

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

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

**‘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.’”**

**Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. 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.”**

**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. When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.** **Matthew 2:1-12**

As we discovered last week, Matthew’s Gospel was primarily directed to a Jewish audience in an effort to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long awaited Messiah. And as such, he gives us insight not only into the many *Old Testament* references to the Christ, including His lineage, but also he introduces us to the many people with whom the Savior interacted. They came from different backgrounds and different walks of life, but they were all called by God Himself to the same place, to come to faith in The Savior. As Believers, we too have been called on a spiritual journey that will end with us standing in the very presence of our LORD Jesus. God has invited us all on this journey. Just like those in “*The Christmas Story*”, we have all come from different backgrounds and different walks of life to discover Him.

How sad it is that many will refuse to take this journey of faith, because they love the things of this world more than they long to see the face of Jesus. Nothing can ever compare with knowing Christ in a personal way. God has called us to a relationship with His Only Begotten Son, not some dead and meaningless religion, but a loving *relationship*! What could possibly be more important than a personal walk with Jesus? ...To know Him by Name and to have Him, not only as Savior, but as your dearest friend. That is exactly why He came to die on the cross, so that we could have full communion with The God of the universe.

Last week, we looked at God’s choosing of Joseph and Mary. And today, Matthew gives us a glimpse of some very *different* Believers. This week, as we look at the incredible journey and gifts of The Magi, I would like to ask you a question: **“What would you be willing to give, to see the face of Jesus?”**

Imagine what it would be like to one day stand in His presence and hear Him say to YOU, **“Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21)**. I imagine that it would be worth all of the treasures of the kingdoms of this world just to hear those words. How about you?

The story of the “Wise Men” (*Magos* in the Greek) is by far the most intriguing and epic journey of all those found in the Christmas Story. Unlike what you see on Christmas Cards, the Magi didn’t arrive at the manger on that first Christmas night like Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. No, their journey took much longer, possibly taking as long as two years! By the time that they arrived in Bethlehem, The Christ Child was a toddler living in a house (**vs. 11**). The smelly stable and the manger were but a memory, but nonetheless the Magi were indeed blessed to see the face of Jesus. In fact, He may have even talked with them! I can only imagine what it must have been like to hear the wisdom of God coming out of such a little one. I would like to have been there to see the looks on these pagan foreigners faces, who had come such a great distance to pay tribute to a Judean king, but instead found the Everlasting God in the form of a child! I imagine that the recollections of all the hardships from their arduous journey must have melted away as they stood in His presence for the very first time.

Matthew assumed that those who would read his gospel would be familiar with “all things Jewish”, and therefore, he doesn’t give many specific details about the “wise men from the east”. He simply tells of their following the “star”, their encounter with Herod The Great, and their arrival in Bethlehem to bestow their lavish tribute upon the young Messiah. Had Luke the physician written this narrative, we would have been given many more details with regards to these pagan foreigners, who journeyed so far to find the One Who was born “King of The Jews” (**vs. 2**). However, he does not mention the Magi in his accounting of Christ’s birth. Therefore, it is necessary that we begin with a bit of historical context to bring us up to speed on the things that Matthew just assumed that we would know when we read his account.

The Greek word used to describe these men (*Magos* or Magi) carries with it a very specific meaning of a class of astrologer/priests that originated in Persia (Modern day Iran). These men were considered the wisest in their culture, and they would attempt to discern wisdom from the stars (among other things) in order to advise the kings of their day. In the days of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, they are referred to as “the sorcerers, astrologers, and Chaldeans.” Nebuchadnezzar had taken them from their homeland of Persia and forced them to work as his “spiritual advisors” during the time of The Babylonian Empire. The prophet Daniel speaks of these men in his writings, and because of his divine favor with Almighty God, He eventually became governor over all of them (**Daniel 2:48**).

In the days when Christ was born, some 500 or so years after Daniel’s time, these men were back within their homeland of Persia. Persia and the land of Babylon (modern day Iraq) were combined in those days in what was known as the Parthian Empire (due *EAST* of Jerusalem - **vs. 1**). The Romans had tried many times to defeat these fierce warriors and bring them under subjection, but they had been unable to do so. In 37 BC, Herod The Great had led an army to take the city of Jerusalem away from the Parthians. The Parthians had placed a Jewish King named Antigonus II Mattathias to reign over the Jews there, but when Herod captured the city, he had him executed. The Parthians had been kindly toward the Jews, no doubt due in part to the benevolence of Daniel, so many centuries earlier. Many Jews had stayed behind in Persia, even after the Persians released them from their captivity, when they conquered Babylon. The king that the Persians had chosen to reign over Jerusalem was a Jew himself and was very popular with the people there.

Herod was not a Jew, but rather an Idumaeen (a descendant of Essau), and therefore, not a “rightful king” in the eyes of the Jewish people. But, when He conquered the city on behalf of Rome, Caesar made him a King there, much to the dismay of the citizenry. Herod quickly proceeded to install priests that would be loyal to him as he began to rule with an iron hand, executing any who would dare speak against his reign (which included some priests, as well as members of his own family). The Jews despised Herod, and the Parthians, needless to say, weren’t very fond of him either. So, imagine this wicked king’s reaction when a large contingent of Parthian priests showed up on his doorstep asking questions about a “new king” being born?! The Magi had also received a divine invitation to have a life changing encounter with The Christ Child. Though they were pagan men, the Magi were *Divinely Included, Instructed, and Invested* in an epic quest to find The Baby Messiah born The King of the Jews.

**Included**

***“I see Him, but not now; I perceive Him, but not near. A STAR will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel. He will smash the forehead of Moab, and strike down all the Shethites. Edom will become a possession; Seir will become a possession of its enemies, but Israel will be triumphant.”***

(Fourth oracle of the soothsayer Balaam) **Numbers 24:17-18**

Ok, first of all, forget everything you’ve learned from Christmas Carols. The scripture never says that there were **three** wise men who made the journey from Persia to Bethlehem. They probably didn’t ride camels either (Parthians traveled on horseback). So, more than likely, there was a very large contingent of Parthian nobles who showed up on Herod’s doorstep with a heavily armed escort. Remember, that Herod had fought against these people and expelled them from Jerusalem some 30 plus years earlier. It would have been utter foolishness for three unarmed Persian Magi to show up unannounced at Herod’s palace. They would have never been seen or heard from again! No, this was undoubtedly a large delegation who had come to pay tribute to the new King of the Jews. And since they had no great love for Herod, they were probably pretty happy about it! Their surprise announcement of this new king absolutely terrified Herod The Great, who was already naturally paranoid, without any outside assistance. A highly placed Roman dignitary once said, “I’d rather be Herod’s dog than one of his sons.” This was because Herod had killed some of his own children, because he was afraid that they might take his crown. Word of a potential new king would have driven this already insane despot to a whole new level of madness.

The first question that we must ask is: How did the Persian astrologers know that the new star that they had seen was a sign of a new king of Israel? Well, the answer is actually pretty simple. The ancestors of these Persian Magi had spent a great deal of time with the prophet Daniel and they were undoubtedly familiar with his prophecies. Furthermore, even pagans like Balaam had long known that a great king would one day come to Israel. Daniel, in his writings, had predicted to the day when The Anointed One would come and present Himself in Jerusalem to be crucified (**Daniel 9**). These Persian astrologers knew to be looking for the “star” that was foretold by the pagan prophet Balaam; and, thanks to Daniel, they knew roughly at what time period in history to be especially on the lookout! Also, by the time Jesus was born, even the Parthians would have had access to *The Septuagint* (Greek version of *The Old Testament*), so they were no doubt in full awareness and expectation of the coming Jewish Messiah, who was destined to rule over the entire world. Not to mention, the insight they must have received from the many Jews who had remained behind in Persia, preferring them to the Romans. God always has a way to accomplish what He desires.

But why, do you ask, would God want to give these pagan men a special invitation to come and see the Messiah? And by special invitation, I mean, the appearing of a miraculous star, which I truly believe was no star at all, but rather a special manifestation of the Shekinah glory of God that was revealed to the Magi in the form of a star. You see, stars don’t move, and they certainly don’t stop over a particular house, as this one would eventually do, to show them where the child was staying (**vs. 9**). No, God had gone to great lengths to INCLUDE these pagans in His divine invitation to find Him! He had laid out a plan for centuries for this one special purpose. You see, even old Balaam, that wicked old diviner himself, had just been a pawn in the hands of a sovereign God. His prophecy of a miraculous “star” rising, coupled with Daniel’s rise to power in Babylon against all odds, were nothing more than careful preparations to announce to the world the Jesus was not just for the Jews, but for All of us as well. Remember what God had promised Abraham so many years earlier?

***“I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the city gates of their enemies. And ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED, by your offspring because you have obeyed my command.”***

**Genesis 22:17-18**

(emphasis added)

Did you catch that? It was ALWAYS God's plan to save us pagan Gentiles. He never intended to exclude us from "the blessing" that He gave Abraham. We were always *included*. That is why He went to such great lengths to see to it that these pagan astronomers were "in the know". I'm sure that through all his personal trials, Daniel never realized what an impact he would have on this earth as he bore witness to the coming Messiah. But God used his suffering, as well as his faithfulness, to win the confidence of the Chaldean sorcerers and astrologers in such a way, that even some five hundred years later they still remembered to be looking for the "star" that would "rise from Israel."

You see, we can't always see what God is doing when He calls us to our journey of faith, but rest assured, it will have meaning and purpose that lasts far beyond our own lifetimes. God is in the eternity business, and we just live in the here and now, but when you agree to go on your journey with Him, your life will make an eternal difference. Just as He included Daniel and those Persian astrologers in His eternal plan, He wants to include you as well. So let the journey begin!

### **Instructed**

The Magi obviously didn't know everything that there was to know about the birth of Christ. If they had, then they would have known that Bethlehem would have been the place of His birth according to the prophet Micah:

***Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah. One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.***  
**Micah 5:2**

Herod himself had to supply that little tidbit of information to the astrologers. Of course he had no idea what the answer was, so He brought in the priests who looked it up in the Scriptures for them. I am struck by how indifferent those priests seemed to be as they casually provided the information in regards to the Messiah that was written in the scrolls. Weren't they the least bit curious as to *Who* this newborn king really was? After all, God have given them all the details in The Scriptures, and yet, they seemed completely apathetic about the possibility this Deliverer had finally arrived!

There is a lesson here for us all. God will use His Word to instruct us upon our journey to find Him. And it is incumbent upon us to faithfully and eagerly respond to that instruction. The star that was guiding the wise men had apparently disappeared, forcing them to stop in Jerusalem and ask for directions. And when God provided the guidance they needed, they followed His directions.

I sometimes wonder if God was just playing games with old Herod? He could have led the wise men straight to the child of Bethlehem, but instead He arranged it so that they had to go by Herod's place first. It's possible that since they were foreigners, who had at one time been enemy combatants, the wise men felt it prudent to stop in Jerusalem first, so that they would not be perceived as spies. Or, perhaps they thought Jerusalem to be the logical place to find the new "King of the Jews". Whatever the reason, it was in Jerusalem that they were given the "final piece of the puzzle", as is were, to help them to finish their journey, and they received it from God's Holy Word. It is important to note that *just as soon as The Word of God was consulted, the star reappeared (vs. 9)*. Don't miss the significance there!!

When I surrendered my life to Christ, I began an incredible journey with Him. It hasn't always been easy, and I have most certainly stumbled more than once. There were even times that I wanted to give up. Do you know what has kept me on track all these years? God's Word, that's what. Every time that I wandered astray, it was the Word of God that convicted my heart and got me back on my journey to find Him. You see God wants to *instruct* us with His Word, just like He instructed those Magi. Just listen to this wonderful verse:

***"I will instruct you and show you the way to go; with my eye on you, I will give counsel."***  
**Psalms 32:8**

When I surrendered to the ministry that became one of my *"life verses."* I didn't have any idea what I was doing (and still don't quite frankly). But I knew that if God didn't guide me, then I was destined to fail. But God has promised to instruct us! So don't be afraid of this journey to which He is calling you. He will guide you every step of the way. You can count on it, for He is a promise keeper. He instructed those wise men, and He'll instruct you as well. When God calls you on this journey, He makes a commitment to see you through to the end.

Herod sent the magi on their way with the specific instructions to return to him, when they found this new king, so that he too could go and "worship Him". The Magi may have been temporarily fooled, but God would see to it that they had further instructions, when they needed them. He's good like that! Don't worry about knowing which road to take on this journey to find Him. He will go before you and prepare your route long before you get there!

### **Invested**

***"...all of them will come from Sheba. They will carry gold and frankincense and proclaim the praises of the LORD."*** **Isaiah 60:6**

It was custom in those days for visiting dignitaries to pay "tribute" to a foreign king, whom they came to visit for diplomatic reasons. The foreign representatives would bow before the king's throne and present him with the best their country had to offer. Gold has always been considered a "kingly" gift, but the other gifts offered would consist of things that were unique from the visiting country. Persia was famous for its export of Frankincense, as well as Myrrh, which come from two species of small trees that are indigenous to that region of the world. To bring these gifts would have been a normal thing for the Parthians to do, because they were highly valuable exports from that kingdom. The Magi, in their quest to find a king, were surprised to find much more than that. They found God in the flesh!

If you carefully read the text, you will see that when the Magi arrived, Jesus was no longer an infant in a manger, but instead was a small child living in a house (**vs. 11**). The journey, from preparation through actual travel time, had taken approximately two whole years (**vs. 2:16**). They didn't meet "Baby Jesus", they met "Toddler Jesus". I wonder if He actually spoke to them? And if so, what He must have said! They bowed down to worship this God/Child and presented Him with their tribute of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. To them, it represented the very best that they had to offer, but to God, the gifts were used to tell the full story of the Christ-Child.

Gold, as we stated earlier, was always considered a proper tribute for a king, and Jesus was born to be The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Frankincense was used in the Temple to burn before The LORD to represent the sweet fragrance of the prayers of His people rising up to His throne. It was given as an offering to God. Jesus is God incarnate (God in the flesh). Myrrh was a bitter perfume used in the embalming process of bodies. Its pungent odor would cover the smell of death and act as a preservative when added to the strips of linen that were used to wrap the body in preparation of burial. The offering of Myrrh to Christ was a picture of His death, that would be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. So you see, while the Magi thought that they were simply giving their country's finest offerings to the LORD Jesus, God used it to tell the story of who this young child really was: King, and God, and Sacrifice!

The Magi, after being included in the invitation to find Him, were given instructions from The Word to help them with their journey, and they were fully *invested*, offering up to Christ the very best that they had to give! God expects, in fact demands, the very same from us today. He demands our all and our very best to honor Him. He then takes those 'best' offerings that we give and uses them to glorify the precious Name of Jesus. Now I don't know about you, but I cannot think of a better honor than this; to know that I gave my all to God, and He used it to glorify His Son, who gave his life to ransom me! The Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod with the location of the child, so they went home another way (**vs. 12**). Come to think of it, when I met Jesus for the first time, I went home "a different way" too! How about you? That is what always happens when you find Him.

There are four main characters in this particular story: The Christ Child (of course), The Magi, King Herod, and the finally the priests. And the responses of each of these characters is quite insightful, for they represent the way different people respond to the message of Christ. First there are the Magi, who were *inspired* by the news of His coming and left everything behind to seek His face. Then there was Herod, who was *incensed* to hear of Him, and did everything that he could to do away with this wondrous gift from God. And finally, there were the priest who were *indifferent* to the news of The Son of God, Who came to save us.

I find that those are the same three responses that people give today, when confronted by the Name of Jesus. Some respond with joy and enthusiasm willing to forsake everything to follow Him, just as did the Magi. Some are filled with bitterness and resentment at the mere mention of The Savior's Name, for they, like Herod, are unwilling to give up their own "throne", as it were, to accept His Lordship over their lives. And many, yes many, hear The Word of God and although they may even believe it to some degree, they are largely indifferent to The Savior, choosing not to commit themselves to follow after Him.

So I ask you this morning, how have you responded to His *invitation*? **Do you simply "believe" in Christ or do you *belong* to Christ?** Will you, like the Magi, be willing to forsake all to follow His leading, to be *instructed* by His Word and to *invest* in His coming kingdom, for in the end, His Kingdom is all that shall endure. What gifts will you bring to lay at His feet?

**But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** **Matthew 6:20-21**

And let the wise ones all say... TRUTH!!!