

## Coming of the Wise Men

Matt 2:1-12

SS Lesson for 12/26/99

**Devotional Scripture:** Psalm 98

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## Introduction

### ***Approach to Lesson***

The theme I used this week was "Seeking God Wisely". I got this from the lesson of the Wise men who sought Jesus. From the lesson, I found three major points. First, as God provided the Star to lead the wise men, only God can guide me into the knowledge of Him. Second, when Herod tried to deceive the wise men and kill Jesus, I must be prepared to have Satan against my finding God as well. Finally, the wise men gave gifts in their response to finding Jesus. My response should be no less in that I should worship, praise and give myself as a gift to God in response to finding Him.

### ***Lesson Background***

The account of the birth of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew focuses on two events. As we noted last week, chapter 1 records an angel's message to Joseph that Mary was pregnant through the work of the Holy Spirit and that she would give birth to a Son who should be named Jesus. This week we will see that chapter 2 describes the visit of wise men from the East and King Herod's attempt to kill the Christ child. Located chronologically between the events of Matthew 1 and 2 is the familiar story of Luke 2. During the final stage of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph and his fiancée traveled south from their hometown of Nazareth to Bethlehem, their ancestral home. The birth of Jesus occurred after the couple found temporary shelter, since there was "no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). On the same day as the birth, angels appeared in the night sky to shepherds tending their flocks in a field. The angels directed the shepherds into town to locate the newly arrived Messiah. For the next several weeks, Joseph and his new family apparently settled in Bethlehem. Whether this was a temporary arrangement to allow mother and child time to prepare for the long trip home to Nazareth or Joseph had decided to remain in Bethlehem is not clear. In any event, it was during this period that the wise men came to honor the one "born king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

## Scripture Text - Matt 2:1-12

- 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem
- 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east 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 Christ 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 be the shepherd of 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 make a careful search 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 in the east 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 and of incense and of myrrh.
- 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

## Major Points Analysis

### ***Thoughts on the Magi***

#### **What and who were the magi (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)**

The word *Magi* resembles the Greek word used to describe the individuals whom we generally call "wise men." It was a title used by religious wise men in several countries of the Middle East, notably Persia and Arabia. The wise men who searched for the Christ child were renowned as "stargazers" who studied the night sky looking for divine clues to the future. Some believe they were proselyte converts to Judaism; others, that they were simply scholars interested in knowing more about the Jewish messianic hope, a subject that people in all of the regions surrounding Jerusalem would have known something about. After all, many Jews had been dispersed throughout the known world centuries earlier by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Also, Jerusalem was located on a major trade route in the Middle Eastern world. Foreign travelers passing through could easily pick up bits and pieces of Jewish thought.

#### **The visit of the Magi (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)**

Many modern portrayals of the visit of the wise men stray from the actual biblical description. For example, the wise men did not kneel before a manger in a stable along with the shepherds; instead, they found the family settled in a *house*. All of this makes sense when we examine the biblical data. The wise men did not arrive with their expensive gifts until after Jesus' birth; otherwise at the forty-day presentation of their *child* in the temple, Joseph and Mary would have offered the required lamb sacrifice rather than the poor person's alternative of two turtledoves or pigeons (Luke 2:22-24). Also note that the biblical text at no point indicates the number of wise men or that they held positions as "kings." It is the number of gifts and their royal flavor that suggest the popular idea of "we three kings." The wise men treated Jesus in a royal manner, bowing before him in worship and presenting to him costly *gifts* suitable for a king. We recognize *gold* for the beautiful and expensive treasure that it is. The *incense* and *myrrh* were very expensive tree resins—the former derived from a type of balsam tree, the latter from something akin to a sturdy shrub. Incense was burned in a dish in order to release into the air a sweet-smelling

smoke; it was also used in perfumes and medicines. Likewise myrrh was an ingredient in fragrances and medicines, and in addition was often used as an embalming agent (John 19:39).

## **God is the only one who can guide me into finding Him**

### **Through God's supernatural guidance - His Holy Spirit? (vs 2)**

*Guiding into His truth (Ps 25:5)*

guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

*Guiding through provision of needs (Isa 58:11)*

The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

*Guiding through His mercy (Luke 1:78-79)*

78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

*Guiding me through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13)*

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

### **Seeking through Word (vs 5)**

*By living the Word (Ps 119:1-3)*

1 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. 2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. 3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

*By teaching me through Word (Psalm 25:4)*

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths;

#### **Commentary from Life Application Notes**

David expressed his desire for guidance. How do we receive God's guidance? The first step is to *want* to be guided and to realize that God's primary guidance system is in his Word, the Bible. Psalm 119 tells of the endless knowledge found in God's Word. By reading it and constantly learning from it, we will gain the wisdom to perceive God's direction for our lives. We may be tempted to demand answers from God, but David asked for direction. When we are willing to seek God, learn from his Word, and obey his commands, then will we receive his specific guidance.

*By Searching the Scriptures to ensure my guidance is from God (Acts 17:11)*

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

*By knowing that God's Word always provides the right instructions (Ps 119:105)*

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

*By knowing that God's Word is for teaching and training (2 Tim 3:16-17)*

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

### **Seeking through discernment (vs 10)**

*By understanding God' will for my life (Psalm 143:10)*

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

*By understanding that if I am God's child, I will follow Him (John 10:4)*

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

*By finding out what God's wants me to do right where I am (Numbers 9:23)*

At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

*Commentary from Life Application Notes*

The Israelites traveled and camped as God guided. When you follow God's guidance, you know you are where God wants you, whether you're moving or staying in one place. You are physically somewhere right now. Instead of praying, "God, what do you want me to do next?" ask, "God, what do you want me to do while I'm right here?" Direction from God is not just for your next big move. He has a purpose in placing you where you are right now. Begin to understand God's purpose for your life by discovering what he wants you to do now!

*By discerning to listen and heed guidance (Prov 1:5)*

5 let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance--

*By discernment in obedience through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14)*

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

### **Seeking through the Church (vs 11)**

*Through preparation of unity and faith (Eph 4:11-13)*

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

*Through sharing hardships (Acts 14:22)*

strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

*Through bearing one another's burdens (1 Cor 12:7)*

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

*Through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:1-2)*

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

### **Seeking through experiencing God (vs 11)**

*By always trying to please God (Ps 37:23-24)*

23 If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; 24 though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

*By giving through trials (Job 42:2-6)*

2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3[You asked,] `Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4["You said,] `Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' 5My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

*By divine direction (Acts 9:1-6)*

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

*By stepping out in faith (Matt 14:25-30)*

25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

### **Seeking through Warnings (vs 12)**

*By having an obligation to be led by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12-13)*

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,

*Through Choices (Josh 24:14-15)*

14 "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

*Even though God allowed me mercy, I am responsible to seek Him now (Rom 11:30-32)*

30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

### **Know that Satan will be against me**

#### **Through Satan use of others (vs 4)**

*As in the case of Judas (John 13:26-27)*

26 Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. 27 As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

*As in the case of Ananias (Acts 5:3)*

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

#### **Through my weaknesses (vs 7)**

*Using my health (2 Cor 12:7-9)*

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

*Using my sinful nature (Rom 7:18-20)*

18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

*Using temptations (Matt 26:41)*

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

#### **Through use of deception (vs 8)**

*Deception is one of Satan's chief weapons (Rev 20:3)*

He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

*Deceptions trying to influence me to abandon the faith (1 Tim 4:1)*

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

## ***My response on finding God***

### **Worship and praise (vs 11)**

*For God's eternal faithfulness (Heb 12:28)*

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

*For God's unmeasurable love (Eph 3:18-19)*

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

*For God's deliverance (Dan 4:33-34)*

33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. 34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

### **Giving of myself and firstfruit of my hands (vs 11)**

*It is God's will for me to give myself to Him (2 Cor 8:4-5)*

4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

*Through offering myself a living sacrifice Rom 12:1*

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

*Through living as belonging to God (Rom 14:7-8)*

7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

*Through being the temple of God (1 Cor 6:19-20)*

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

It is a popular refrain, often found on holiday cards: “Wise men still seek him.” It reminds us of the diligence of the wise men in seeking the one “born king of the Jews” until they found him. And it challenges us to follow their example: to seek after the One whom God sent to earth as Lord and King, to bow before him in worship and homage, and to give him the best gifts we have—our hearts committed to his will and our lives devoted to his service. The lessons learned from the story of the wise men are very much applicable in our modern times: wise men still seek him.

### ***Prayer***

Father, help us to be eager students of your Word, who are devoted fully to your Son and committed to living a life of service and praise. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### ***Thought to Remember***

Consider the difference between King Herod and King Jesus: Herod killed others so he could live; Jesus died so that others could live.