

## **“The Birth of the King” (part 2)**

Matthew 2:1-12

At the birth of Jesus Christ, we find every social class represented. The shepherds represent the poor, those who may be overlooked by the rest of society. Yet Jesus was born for the lower class. Mary and Joseph represent the middle class, those who are not among the most poor, but are certainly not among the wealthiest either. Jesus was born for the middle class. The wise men are kings from the east, and they represent the upper class, the wealthy among society. Jesus was born for the upper class.

Jesus is Savior of all people, no matter what class they are in.

In the passage, we find at the birth of Christ:

- *wise men who were searching*
- *opposition that was satanic*
- *gifts that were symbolic*

### **1. The TRUTH that wise men were seeking (2:1-2)**

*“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? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’”*

Their IDENTITY (v. 1a)

We are not told anything in particular about what nation they were from, or what nationality they were.

The Bible simply refers to as ‘wise men from the east.’

**“Wise Men”** - *literally the Magi; term that was used in reference to oriental philosophers and advisers in the Persian territory*

**A.T. Robertson** - *“Here in Mathew the idea seems to be rather that of astrologers. Babylon was the home of astrology, but we only know that the men were from the east whether Arabia, Babylon, Persia, or elsewhere.”*

The Book of Daniel mentions ‘Magi’ and suggests that they were among the highest ranking officials in all of Babylon, and even later in the Medo-Persian empire.

**Daniel 2:48 - “The king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon.”**

Daniel, because of the godly man that he was, came to be highly respected by the Magi or wise men of Babylon. For all we know, it could very well be that because of his witness, the eastern magi came to learn much about the character and purposes of the God of Israel.

Your witness for Jesus matters more than you think it does!

Their INTEREST (v. 1b-2a)

The interest that these wise men from the east show is seen through the questions that they ask. They are interested in the whereabouts of the One who had been born King of the Jews, for they had seen His star in the east.

This is the very first question asked in the New Testament, and it is a very good question. In fact, it ought to be the first question that every single person should ask:

“Where is the King? How can I find the King?”

**Isaiah 55:6 - “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.”**

Just what was it that had peaked their interest? It was the appearance of a star.

**Numbers 24:17 - “A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.”**

This King spoken of in Numbers would be associated with the appearance of a star, and the passage goes on to describe how this King would be one who had dominion and would deliver His people from the grip of the enemy.

**Isaiah 60:1-6 - “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall**

**come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.”**

Isaiah’s prophecy foretold that Gentiles would one day come to the light of God’s people, and that these Gentiles would bring riches and gifts for the purpose of worship.

God’s global agenda is seen in the Magi’s arrival.

Their INTENTION (v. 2b)

These wise men reveal their intention for traveling all the way to Jerusalem--they had come to worship. It is yet fulfillment of more of Isaiah’s prophecy.

*“For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

They well understand through God’s revelation that Christ was no ordinary baby, but was One who was deserving of worship. He was God incarnate, deity wrapped up in humanity.

Man is a worshiper at heart. Nowhere will you find a human being who does not worship. By our very design, you and I have been wired to worship. And apart from faith in and redemption through Jesus Christ, man is in total darkness and worships what He does not know.

**Matthew 4:16 - “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”**

The star shining BRIGHT led the wise men through the NIGHT to worship Heaven’s true LIGHT, the Lord Jesus Christ!

## **2. The TROUBLE that wise men were encountering (2:3-8)**

*“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 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. So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 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.’ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 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.’”*

Unlike the wise men, not everyone was as enthusiastic about worshipping the Christ Child and giving their allegiance to Him as King.

### The CONCERN shown by Herod (v. 3)

*“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”*

Every good story has a protagonist, the hero who is also the main character. And, every story has typically has an antagonist, the one who opposes and is against the main character.

In the Christmas narrative, Herod is the antagonist. There perhaps has never been a more wicked man than Herod.

The New Testament, as well as secular history, reveals much about Herod. He was a great builder who built many exquisite buildings in his day, and he was also a very insecure man who was always suspicious of someone who might compete for his throne.

For the record, the throne wasn't even his! He was a usurper and a Roman puppet king and had no legitimate claim to the Davidic throne.

History tells us that his insecurity led him to have his own wife killed. He had his mother-in-law killed. He even had his sons killed. The Jewish historian Josephus stated that Herod was so concerned that no one would mourn his death, that he commanded a large group of distinguished men to come, and he gave an order that they should be killed at the time of his death so that the displays of grief that he craved for himself would take place.

To hear that someone who is born King of the Jews is troublesome to him for he had bought that title from Rome for himself.

Jesus was a threat to Herod because Herod grasped what was at stake in the birth of Jesus. If what the wise men were saying was true, then Israel's true and rightful King had been born and Herod could be dethroned.

Jesus is a real threat to anyone and everyone who wants to reserve the right to run his or her own life. If Jesus is King, it means you are not. If He is to be enthroned, I am to be dethroned. His enthronement demands my submission and obedience.

Just like Herod, many do not welcome the news that the real King has come, because it means that they have to abdicate the throne.

### The COUNSELORS sought by Herod (v. 4-6)

*“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...”*

Herod's men know what the Scriptures said. In fact, they even quote Micah 5:2 which predicted Christ's birth in Bethlehem.

They know what the Bible says, but they are indifferent.

Whereas Herod could well represent those who are in opposition to Jesus, these chief priests represent those who are indifferent to Jesus. In other words, they know what Scripture says about Him, but the weight of it has not gripped their hearts.

Unlike the wise men, their lives are not motivated by the truth of who Jesus is. It had become 'second-hand' truth to them.

Sadly, where there is a BOUNTY of truth you will also find a BOREDOM with truth. When the truth of Christ becomes commonplace and familiar, our spiritual fires need to be stoked and revival is necessary.

It is not enough to simply know the truth; a person's life must be transformed and gripped by the truth.

The CRAFTINESS seen in Herod (v. 7-8)

*"...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."*

Herod sends the wise men on to Bethlehem, but if he and his counselors were truly interested in worshiping Christ, they would have accompanied the wise men on the five mile trip there.

Herod had no intention of bowing to the King, but only of preserving his own kingdom.

**Mathew 15:8 - "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."**

Actions speak louder than words!

### **3. The TREASURES that wise men were bringing (2:9-12)**

*"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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 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. Then,*

*being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.”*

The Bible says that these wise men brought gifts with them to present to the King. Don't you find it a bit ironic that the only gifts that were given on the first Christmas were given to Jesus alone?

**Illustration** - *Could you imagine friends gathering in celebration of your birthday, but instead of bringing gifts to you, they exchange gifts with everyone BUT you?*

How does Jesus feel when we lavish so much on ourselves but give nothing to Him?

Notice in the Scriptures what the Magi present to Jesus, and what each gift represents:

Gold is a gift fit for a KING (v. 11a)

In his lost condition, a man likes to think that he reserves the right to run his own life. He wants to live and do however he pleases. In his rebellious heart, he thinks of no one but himself and his own sinful inclinations.

The gift of gold reveals that Jesus has come to RULE us.

Frankincense is a gift fit for a PRIEST (v. 11b)

In the Old Testament, frankincense was a fragrance that was used in grain offerings in the temple. Before the offering was given in worship, it was applied to ensure a sweet smelling aroma.

**John MacArthur** - *“Origen, the church father, suggested that frankincense was the incense of deity. In the Old Testament it was stored in a special chamber in front of the Temple and was sprinkled on offerings as a symbol of the people's desire to please the Lord.”*

The gift of frankincense reveals that Jesus has come to REPRESENT us.

**Hebrews 4:15** - **“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

We have a sympathetic Priest in heaven who understands and cares. He knows what it is like to hurt. He knows what it is like to be human.

This brings great confidence into our lives.

Myrrh is a gift fit for a SACRIFICE (v. 11c)

Of all three gifts presented to Jesus, this gift would have been the most perplexing. Myrrh was an antiseptic that was used to embalm the dead. When mixed with wine, it was also an anesthetic. It was a fragrance that would often be applied to a body before burial.

This would have been a strange gift indeed to give a baby! But it is not so strange when you consider the purpose for which Christ came.

The fragrance of death surrounded His life. He was born to die for the sins of the world. The shadow of Calvary's cross falls upon the scene of Bethlehem's stable.

The gift of myrrh reveals that Jesus has come to REDEEM us.

**v. 12 - "Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."**

In other words, they came to Jesus one way, but they left another. Isn't that what He does best?

What a stark contrast we find in these verses when we look at the lives of the Magi versus the lives of Herod and his men. The difference is seen in the way they each respond to Christ the King.

**Illustration** - *"Howard Hughes, worth \$2.5 billion at his death on April 6, 1976, was once the richest man in the United States. He owned a fleet of jets, hotels, and casinos. When asked to claim his body, his nearest relative, a distant cousin, exclaimed, 'Is this Mr. Hughes?' He had spent the last 15 years of his life a drug addict, too weak to even administer the shots to himself. His 6'4" frame had shrunk to 6'1" and he weighed only 90 pounds. Not one single acquaintance or relative mourned his death. The only honor he received was a moment of silence in his Las Vegas casinos. Time magazine put it this way: 'Howard Hughes' death was commemorated in Las Vegas by a moment of silence. Casinos fell silent. Housewives stood uncomfortable clutching their paper cups full of coins at the slot machines, the blackjack games paused, and at the crap tables the stickmen cradled the dice in the crook of their wooden wands. Then a pit boss looked at his watch, leaned forward and whispered, 'Ok, roll the dice. He's had his minute.'"*

The way that Hughes lived, the way that Herod before him lived--they lived their lives without Christ, and that's no way to live and it is certainly no way to die.

Wise men seek the King, while fools ignore Him. The question, "Who is King?" demands an answer. We all have a choice to make.