

The King of All Kings Is Born

Matthew 2:1–12

The first statement of verse one announces the most epic event in human history: “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem.” God had been moving history towards this one event. Four thousand years of symbols, pictures, and road signs all pointed to the birth of this promised Messiah. God used history to accomplish His purpose, and now we are at the center and axis of all history—the birth of the King of all kings.

When this King came on the scene it did not happen “out of thin air.” It was not random. It was planned. People had waited for this day to take place.

Transition: We find out from this text that the coming of this King was anticipated.

1. The Coming of This King Was Anticipated.

In verse one, we are introduced to these wise men who anticipated the birth of the king of all kings. These were not just smart guys who had perfect scores on their SAT and ACT and got a financial free ride in college. They were not just *book* smart or just *street* smart; they were actually *star* smart.

These men were astrologers. They studied constellations and stars for a living. They did not walk around with their head in the skies carrying a better-than-you mentality, but they did walk around with an eye in the sky. They had an eye for stars.

There is a lot of mystery surrounding these men. In the original language, the word used for wise men is *magi*. This Greek word is where we get our English words *magic* and *magician*. But do not be mistaken; they were not pre-David Copperfields. They did not do illusions. They were Ph.D. quality scientists and professors.

These Magi saw an unusual occurrence in the sky. The Old Testament book of Numbers chapter 24 is regarded as a messianic prophesy of a man from the east and a king among the Jews. It is fulfilled here with the Magi from the east following a star to the King of all kings.¹

¹ David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 32.

These students of the stars and students of the Scriptures knew that, whatever this unusual star was, it indicated that the promised Messiah had been born.

They immediately went to Jerusalem. After all, if a King were born, wouldn't he be born in the capital city of Jerusalem? When they walked into the city they caused quite a stir with this question: "Where is He who is born king of the Jews?" You see there were likely a lot of wise men. We typically have pictured in our manger scenes three wise men. The Bible never tells us there were three wise men. This tradition came from the three gifts that were brought to Jesus. The Magi would not typically travel in triplets. It could have been 3 dozen or even a 100 Magi arriving in splendor. It was enough to trouble the entire city of Jerusalem. These wealthy men likely had a caravan of camels and donkeys, servants and buggies. It would be a modern day equivalent of a fleet of Cadillac Escalade Limousines rolling into Jerusalem.

This caravan captured even the attention of King Herod. He called the wise men in to hear their story of seeing a star that pointed to a newborn king. Herod eventually gathered the religious crowd (made up of the chief priests and scribes) to find an answer from the Hebrew manuscripts. They told the wise men that, according to the ancient manuscripts, the promised Messiah, the King of all kings, would not be born in Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem of Judea. Then they put their finger on Micah 5:2 and read the verse out loud (verse 6).

Before the wise men loaded up their camels and donkeys for this journey of less than six miles, they had a meeting with King Herod. He had a few questions and instructions for them and then sent them on their way.

It is here that we must put aside our tradition when it runs contrary to the Bible. It is sometimes taught that the wise men saw the star and followed it to the place where Jesus was born. Actually, according to Scripture, the wise men saw the star and then it disappeared. That is why they went to Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem. When they left Bethlehem, the star re-appeared. That is why they rejoiced (verses 9–10). The star not only led them to the city, but to the exact place where Jesus was staying. Notice verse 11: "And when they had come into the house." It does not say "manger." Again, our manger scenes are a little off here. The shepherds and angels were at the manger, but not the wise men. Mary and Joseph had left the manger and were in a rented house by the time the wise men showed up.

Notice where these wise men came from in verse 1: "wise men from the east." This would also point to the Messianic prophecy in the book of Numbers. These men came from the

distant east and embarked on a long and treacherous journey to the west that lasted about a year or two. Historians have selected a number of places in the east where they could have originated, such as Persia, Babylon, Egypt, or even the Arabian desert. That means this journey could have been hundreds if not thousands of miles.

One theologian believed they came from Persia. He says,

In fact, you may remember that Daniel was part of the magi—he was a wise man. These men were known in Babylon and Persia in the east as king-makers. They were not kings, they were king-makers. Any heir to the throne would sit under their instruction. The magi would instruct the future king in the sciences and mathematics and architecture and all of the skills of that day. Then, upon their approval of that future king, they would coronate him.²

So let's set the scene: maybe Joseph is sitting in the house reading a scroll while Mary makes dinner. Jesus (now 2 years old) would have been walking and talking. He was Jesus, so it was a holy night; but He was two, so it probably wasn't a silent night. They hear a knock at the door and Joseph answers. He sees a convoy of camels and people like he has never seen before. They introduce themselves and Mary and Joseph do not hesitate to let them in.

Not many people believed this child was virgin born, so Mary and Joseph knew that these men were sent from God. There is no time for small talk. Immediately, these wealthy, educated men begin to bow down and worship this child. The text says they worshipped Him (verse 11), not her. That is important, because Mary would not have received their worship; she knew who should receive the worship.

These men brought three different gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Some scholars believe the gifts have specific meanings and others do not. When I study them, I am led to believe they were for a specific purpose.

- Gold is pictured throughout the Bible as a symbol and gift for royalty. The wise men brought this gift because they realized they were dealing with the King of all kings.
- Frankincense is a gift for deity. These men recognized that this baby was God. He invaded time and space to live a life we could not never live. They knew He was the Savior.

² Stephen Davey, "The Reason for the Season," Colonial Baptist Church, accessed September 7, 2015, <http://media.colonial.org/files/PDFs/CBC/The%20Reason%20for%20the%20Season.pdf>.

- Myrrh is a gift for death. Sometimes it would be used to embalm bodies. How would you like to receive a tombstone as a gift for your new baby? Myrrh! What an unusual gift for a child! What an appropriate gift for this child. He came to die. Jesus knew it, the wise men knew it, and Mary and Joseph knew it. He came to be the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.

Mark 15:23 tells us that when Jesus was hoisted up on the cross they offered him wine mixed with myrrh. He received myrrh in the cradle and now myrrh on the cross. In John 19, they used myrrh to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.

Gold for a king, frankincense for deity and worship, and myrrh for death. All three were very appropriate gifts for our King of kings.

Transition: The coming of this King was anticipated and . . .

2. The Coming of This King Was Detested.

This birth was anticipated by the wise men and detested by King Herod. When the announcement of Jesus' birth came, it was not all party hats, balloons, and stuffed animals. Think about that: Jesus could not make everyone happy. Why are you trying to? "Well, I just want everyone to anticipate my presence and no one to detest it." Friend, Jesus could not even do that. You have one responsibility: live for the glory of God. Let the reactions fall where they may.

You may say, "I want everyone's approval." You are putting on your shoulders something Jesus never intended for you to bear. You are to live for the approval of One. Jesus lived a perfect life, and some people loved him and others hated Him, but He lived for the approval of One. He never did have the approval of the king who was reigning when he was born, King Herod. Herod did a few good things in his life accompanied by a lot of evil things. He was non-believer in the promised Messiah.

Let's survey the good things he did...

- When inflation was up and there were many problems, he decided to return some tax money to all of the inhabitants of Palestine as a gift. He was an intelligent financial leader. He was a skilled politician.
- He also built massive fortresses, splendid cities, roads and bridges.

- He developed the athletic programs of the city, and the educational system was fostered under his care.³

He was called Herod the Great, but anyone who has studied his life would certainly not call him Herod the Good.

Let's survey bad things he did...

- Because of the Jewish population he ruled, he was called, "King of the Jews." He loved this title. He loved power, prestige, and status. He would do or say anything to boost his self-image or stop anything that would weaken it.
- He was extremely paranoid and frequently had violent attacks of jealousy.
- One-by-one, he killed every rival to his throne.
- As a relaxing afternoon activity, he would watch dozens of his subjects crucified on a public platform in the middle of the city of Jerusalem. He would sit with his boys and concubines and enjoy these gruesome killings.
- He was married 10 times and had many of his wives killed because he could not trust them. He did the same with his children.
- On one occasion, he knew his health was failing so he ordered his men to incarcerate any prominent Jewish leaders and, when his death would occur, to immediately put them to death.

When the wise men went to Jerusalem, they unknowingly provoked a sleeping tiger. They did not mean to, but they put the child in dire danger. When we continue in this chapter, we will find out what events resulted from this visit.

Conclusion:

I want to draw a few applications from this text. You and I only have three ways to deal with the birth of the King of all kings. We could respond like Herod the Great, the religious men, or the wise men.

1. Herod the Great, who completely rejected Jesus

He made it very clear that he was not a follower of Christ. He was an enemy of Christ. He denied His claims to the Messiah-ship, he denied that He was deity, and he denied that he

³ Davey, "The Reason for the Season."

needed Him in his life. People who respond in this way reject Jesus' message, attack Jesus' character, and deny Jesus' nature.

2. Religious men, who casually observed Jesus

Think about this for a moment: The chief priests and scribes knew where Jesus would be born. They informed the wise men. They pointed the location out in the Hebrew manuscripts, yet not one of them tagged along with the Magi to see Christ.

This is where many church attendees and probably many church members find themselves. They are content to observe Jesus and even give him a token of allegiance. They do not mind to add Jesus as a part of their life. Sadly, God will look at this group one day and say, "I never knew you. Depart from me into utter destruction."

3. Wise men who unconditionally followed Jesus

The wise men in this text unconditionally followed Jesus. It is true that wise men still worship Him. These men were nobles of nations, yet they bowed down and brought gifts. They only bowed down when they come into the presence of someone greater than themselves. It was customary in the ancient East to bring gifts when approaching a superior.

Will you respond like one of these wise men? Will you say to Jesus, "Because You are the King there are no conditions on my obedience to You. I will gladly travel great distances if that is what You desire. I will abandon all because You are the king and You are worthy of nothing less."

The God who 2,000 years ago sovereignly arranged the stars in the sky, the God who sovereignly directed these Magi to the Messiah, is the God who has sovereignly arranged your life and every detail in it—your family, your job, your school, your background, and your relationships. Live for this purpose. Die for this purpose. Give your life and your possessions and your plans and your dreams for the cosmic, global purpose of God.”⁴

⁴ Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 16.

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