

Advent in Biblical Perspective
“Going Another Way”
Matthew 2:1–12
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We'll start by looking at Matthew 2:1–12 which says [1] *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, [2] saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” [3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

[6] “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

[7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” [9] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I have the opportunity to take people to Israel and we call the trip ‘learning the Bible in the land of the Bible.’ We were able to locate the place of the palace of Herod the Great that stood over 2000 years ago when he was king during the days that Jesus was born. When I stand there I can't help but think of the things that happened there. This is one of those things. There were wise men sometimes known as sages. It was considered an official position in the courts of emperors and kings. They were called counselors and were supposed to be men of wisdom, men of great learning. They would have their own quarters that would be attached to the king and there would be volumes and volumes of writings from all the philosophers and religions of the world.

These particular wise men were from a kingdom that was to the East. Today, the place they were from is known as Iraq and Iran. They found their way to Jerusalem on a mission which was to find the King of the Jews that they were convinced had been born. The place they would go to find out would be to the king's palace. So they went to Herod the King to ask ‘Where is the King of the Jews?’ That was a very pointed, powerful question because they were talking to a man who held a position by Rome's appointment as king of the Jews. Herod was not of David's royal line and he wasn't even Jewish. In fact, he was an Edomean who was known as a sworn enemy of Israel. Herod did much to stay in favor with the Caesars' and now comes this question from the wise men.

No one from the line of David had sat on the throne for over 600 years at this point. Here is a usurper who is appointed only by the power of an oppressive tyranny called Rome. Herod knows exactly what these wise men are asking because of those nagging prophecies that always stayed before him of a Son of David who is greater than David that would come as the Messiah – Prophet, Priest and King. As soon as Herod hears this from the wise men he is troubled. It says in the text that when he was troubled all of Jerusalem was troubled with him because you did not want this king to get upset. One of the Caesar's had said 'it is better to be a pig in the house of Herod than to be one of his wives or children.' Herod already had had one wife killed and children killed because he thought they were in a conspiracy. So if he thinks anything is there to upset him and to take his throne from him he will stop it quickly. So people are thinking now 'who is going to die next if Herod is troubled right now?'

So Herod calls for the chief priests, scribes and lawyers and asks 'Where is the Christ to be born?' He goes immediately to the Messiah. It is clear for them because the prophecy is in Micah 5:2 that the Christ will be born in Bethlehem. Why will He be born in Bethlehem? It is because He is the tribe of Judah, of the line of Jesse, a son of David and Bethlehem is David's city. That is where David grew up and was a shepherd. His family roots were there. So Herod secretly call the Magi (wise men) together.

How many wise men were there? I don't know. I do know that 2000 years ago they had found their way from the East to that palace. People are used to three but we know there were at least two because it is written in the plural. Traditionally people assume three because of the three gifts that they bring for the Child – gold, frankincense and myrrh. The wise men have this secret meeting with Herod and they have already said three things to Herod that has his interest.

The three things was they told Herod they had seen His star, followed His star and were there to worship Him. After Herod consults with the chief priests and scribes he tells the wise men to go to Bethlehem because that is where they would find Him. Herod also tells them to diligently find Him and then come back and tell him so that he could go and worship Him too. We know from the rest of the text that that was not his plan at all. His plan was to kill Him. Herod had even asked the wise men when His star appeared to them.

The wise men showed up after the birth of Jesus and they didn't go to the manger. They went to the house. We don't exactly how old Jesus is at this point but it could be somewhere between a couple of weeks to two years old because when Herod wants to do what he really wants to do which is to kill someone who would be a rival to him, he sends out an order to have all baby boys killed that range in age from birth to two years of age.

The wise men then again are assisted by the Lord as the star again rises and leads them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. I think the Bible is very clear on this star for it was His star and I think when God does signs, wonders and miracles, I think this was a miraculous star. It is indicated that it is a miraculous star because the wise men, who would have known all about astrology, say it rose and that is not the language typically used in talking about stars. It rises in appearance. When they arrived in Jerusalem they didn't see it anymore until after their conference with Herod where the star rises again. His star rises and leads them from Bethlehem to the house where Jesus was.

When they get to the house and see Jesus they rejoice exceedingly with great joy. They lay their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh before Him. Then an amazing thing happens as God protects them. The wise men are in jeopardy just like the boys two years and under are in jeopardy. Through an angelic ministry the Lord warns the wise men so that when they left the house of Jesus they didn't go back through Jerusalem but left another way.

It's interesting to note the wise men found their way and then after their meeting with Herod they went on their way and then after meeting Jesus they went another way. I want to leave you with a thought about that. How did they find their way to Jesus? They are finding their way because when they get to Jerusalem they get more information about how to find Jesus and the star again appears and the text says they go on their way from there. They finally meet Him. This is like anyone else who finds Jesus as their Lord and Savior. You only find Him when God by His grace has found you and brought you from death unto life. He gives you eyes to see and ears to hear. He does this gloriously through His Word and His Spirit and that's exactly what happens to the wise men.

Where did the wise men get this star stuff? The first author of Scripture is Moses and he writes 1600 years before Christ came in Numbers 24:17a, *[17a] I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.* Then 600 plus years before Christ came to this earth the prophet Micah wrote in Micah 5:2, *[2] But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* The reason the wise men are finding their way to Jesus is because Jesus has marked out His way in His Word. More than that, the illuminating light of star shines that they can find their way, which has been marked out through the Word of God.

It's interesting to note that lowly Jewish shepherds have come to hear the redeeming grace of Christ and are now joined by the down and outers and now the up and inners all the way from a court. Courtiers (wise men) have arrived with all their pomp and show and the majesty of their gifts. You see God in His saving grace when He now brings people to Himself (as they find their way to Him because He found them as He put them on the way and lights the way) He lights the way through the light of His Spirit who gives us eyes to see and ears to hear to understand. As He lights our way to Him to get to Him, who is the Way and the Truth, we have now found the One who gives us everlasting life.

Do you remember the empire in the East that has brought much of Israel into captivity? This empire was Babylon and this empire came three times to take them into captivity. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were ones that were taken in at this time and they became counselors to five kings and two empires. They would have brought with them the Word of God – the Old Testament. These wise men who occupy the same office as these four would now have the Word of God so when they see the star they would understand Number 24:17 and Micah 5:2 sends them there. Some would say here 'Praise the Lord, weren't these guys lucky?' But no, that is called the providence of God. That is God sovereignly moving to get His Word to get His people to bring them on their way to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Joseph will be warned that Herod is coming so he will take Mary and his Child and go to Egypt. Where would a carpenter get the finances to get to Egypt and stay for a while? What about the gold that was given them when the wise men came to see Jesus? What about the frankincense and myrrh? Can you smell them? They will smell them again 33 years later when Jesus is taken down from the cross where He has paid for our sins as He is wrapped and sprinkled with the spices of frankincense and myrrh in His burial, as He was sent to a grave that would and could not hold Him from which He rises gloriously for our salvation. Oh the amazing providence of God!!

Do you know Jesus today as your Lord and Savior? If you do it's because the Word of God that marked out the way and the Spirit of God who came to you because God sent others to you – Daniels, Shadrachs, Meshachs and Abednegos. Through that you found your way to the

One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Once you have come to Him everything changes. Worshipping Him is the mark of salvation for God's people love to gather together like wise men and shepherds to worship the Lord with great joy. This is not done with manipulated emotions but soul reaching joy. We long to praise Him and give Him glory who came to bring us to glory.

He changes you. II Corinthians 5:17 says [17] *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* The Lord does this work in your life and you go another way for your life is changed. Your priorities change. What you value changes. Your mission changes. Your significance changes. Your security changes. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). When the wise men left Jesus they went another way with a changed life as the Lord preserved them and protected them.

Consider how the Lord might use us to light the way for others to come to Christ. If you know Him then give thanks to God that He lit the way for you to come to Christ. If you are reading this and you are on your way I tell you that Christ is ready to receive you. When you come to Him everything changes for you will go another way, into the glories of a new heavens and a new earth, forgiven of all of your sins and right with God who is now right within you. I ask you to come to Him if you don't know Him.

The Lord may use a season of Christmas in your life. There are only two ways. There is a narrow way and broad way. The reason it's a narrow way is because only one can fit through at a time. You have to come to Christ personally who is the Way. For some of us, with the call of the world, it's so easy to lose our way. I want to invite you back to Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus and your way will never be the same because of Him who made His way here to give you a way to Him for everlasting life and a life of another way. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments in Your Word. Thank You for the great privilege to worship and celebrate the birth of Christ. Praise Your Name for a night that was not like any other – a holy, sacred, unique night – the night the Savior came into the world and everything changes. Now O Lord, bring us to Yourself. For those who don't know You may they turn from themselves to Christ. Say 'Jesus You are now my Way, You are the Truth and You are my life.' For others reading this, if they have lost their way bring them back to You. Fix your eyes on Jesus and may we bring ourselves to Him that our lives will be lived another way for Him who is the Way. Thank You O Jesus for all that You are and all that You've done. In these moments seal in our hearts our desire to take the Light of the Gospel to others that they will see the Way, find the Way, on the way and Christ will be there life that You will use us to bring the Word and the Light of the Spirit of Christ would bring them to the Savior. Father, speak to our hearts in these moments as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of our Savior in this season, for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.