

XIII. Gospel Worship in Biblical Perspective

Worship God!

“The Wise Men Worship the King”

Matthew 2:1-12

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We will be in Matthew 2, the account of the wise men who have come worship Jesus. Matthew 2:1-12 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] (quote from Micah 5:2) “‘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.

We will be looking at a couple of other texts in this study. Our theme has been ‘Worship God’ where we have been learning to worship in a Bible-shaped, Christ-centered, God-glorifying, Spirit-filled way that honors the Lord, focused upon God and not upon us. We are the instruments giving to God adoration and praise. There is life worship in our personal lives and gathered worship with God’s people with the two being related together. We are finishing the year in the Advent by looking at six Biblical narratives in the birth of Christ.

In those six Biblical narratives there are three features that are constant. One, in each of the narratives Jesus will be identified as King and Christ. The second feature is when they talk of the birth of Christ in some way in the text they will point to the death of Christ. The manger is explained by the cross. In each of these they will look to the salvation of sinners at the cross in the glory of the Lord who has come among us. The third feature that will be evident is worship. All six, when they get to Jesus worship the King who has come to go to the cross.

In the last study, our first narrative was the King Himself. Our theme has been ‘come worship the King’ but what did the King do when He came? The King worshipped. He came to take upon Himself a body to go to the cross to save us from our

sins and the Bible says “I will praise Thy Name O God in the midst of the congregation.” So Christ came to save us, to go to the cross and He worshipped.

Now I want to give you our two summation statements from our last study. The first summation statement is the One who always has been (Son of God) came down to save His people from their sins and became what He never was (Son of Man) yet now and forever will be (Fully God and Fully Man). All other religions tell you what you have to do to get up. Christianity tells you what God does to bring you up which is He sent His Son who came down which Jesus loved to say (came down). When He came down it was subtraction by addition. He laid aside the privileges of deity and then took upon Himself humanity. He was perfect God and perfect Man and one day we shall behold Him and be able to gaze upon Him.

The second summation statement has to do with the worship of Christ Himself and it is Jesus Christ made His entrance into this world by way of a manger in humility to make His exodus by way of the cross in triumph to the praise of His Father and the salvation of sinners. The cross explains the manger. It gives glory to the Father as He accomplishes the mission to save His people from their sins. Now let’s move to this narrative of the wise men that worshipped Him. I have approached this study with a series of five questions.

So question number one based on the text I just read in Matthew 2, who shows up in the narrative? I am not going to give you a list by order of importance. I am giving you the list by order of appearances. The first who show up is the wise men. It says they are from the East and that means probably what we call today Iran and Iraq, prior to this it would have been called Assyria and Babylon. We know that at least two or more came. I know everyone who has the nativity scene has three wise men and we do that because there were three gifts presented but we don’t know exactly. They brought treasures and out of the treasures they brought three gifts. Because these wise men are courtiers of the royal court that meant they probably showed up with a caravan when they arrive in Jerusalem.

These wise men are the successors of Daniel. Hundreds of years earlier Daniel was taken into captivity along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Daniel became part of this group of astrologers, philosophers and students of the supernatural and advisors to royalty. Daniel actually served five dynasties and two empires. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were a part of this as well. So those are the wise men and they are also called Magi. Magi is the plural for what we translate as wise men and the singular is known as Magus.

The second one who appears in the narrative is Herod and the wise men arrive to see him. Herod is a political operative. He is not a Jew. He is an Edomean. He is from the area of Edom. He has been in power for forty years at the pleasure of the Roman government. He is a manipulative pragmatist. He is a tyrant because he tyrannizes. He killed two of his sons and a wife because he thought they might be plotting to get him. He will kill the innocence in Bethlehem, the children, in the following verses of Matthew 2 up to the age of two. That is why Jerusalem gets troubled when he gets troubled because no one ever knows what he is going to do next or kill next. Herod is very insecure in his position and he’ll attempt to destroy the Savior. That’s who Herod is.

The third in appearance is ‘all Jerusalem.’ The whole city gets in on the act. There is this caravan coming in, Herod is getting troubled and everyone else gets troubled

so there is a commotion in the entire populous of the city for two reasons. One, is because Herod is upset and two they are wondering why all these people from the East are here. John Hopkins, the writer of the song We Three Kings, not only attempted to give us some interpretation which I'll point out a little later but he also tried to write it so that you felt like you riding in a caravan and a camel. So all Jerusalem is moved.

The fourth appearance in the narrative is the chief priests and Scribes. These are the sons of Levi, sons of Aaron and they also have this group of experts on the Law and the Prophecies which are the first five books of the Old Testament and the prophecies. So these are the chief priests and the Scribes.

The fifth appearance in the narrative is Mary and Joseph (?). Mary's genealogy is found in the Gospel of Luke and Joseph's is found in the Gospel of Matthew. Both of them come from the line of David and the tribe of Judah. Therefore Christ comes as the Lion of Judah. The reason I have a question mark by Joseph's name is because he's never mentioned in the text here and my guess is that Joseph is at work when the wise men show up. I don't have the slightest idea if he is there or not but he is just not mentioned in the text. They had been there for a while and I really think Joseph found some carpentry work and was out working somewhere in Bethlehem while the baby was recuperating before they had to move on.

The sixth appearances in this narrative which are not mentioned in the text are the innocent, which are soon to be mentioned and those are the children under the age of two that will be killed in Bethlehem. That probably is about 10 to 30 children. You are probably thinking hundreds but at the time Bethlehem was a very small village. Those who have done studies on this say there are probably about 10 to 30 children who would have been under the age of two at that time in this small village.

The seventh appearance is the Centerpiece, Jesus Christ, the King, the Messiah, who has come. Here He is in the house that the wise men find, that the star points out and it is this Christ that the wise men worship who has come to go to the cross to save us from our sins. So that answers the question who, now let's answer when.

How can we date this? There are five clues as to how we can date this. Number one, is the wise men arrive after the birth of Jesus. The second clue is that it takes place during the days of Herod which means it would have happened before 4 B.C. for that's when Herod died. So this is probably around 6 or 5 B.C. The third clue is that they came when the star of Jacob arose, His birth star. The fourth clue we have is how far it is to travel from the East to Bethlehem. They would have travelled over 900 miles. In those days in their mode of transportation that would have taken them two to four months to go 900 miles. So it would have taken anywhere from 60 to 120 days. The fifth clue is that Jesus is in a house. He is no longer underneath the house in a stable for He is now in a room in the house. The other thing to realize is that Herod is trying to kill this Jesus and he'll kill all those who are two months all the way to two years of age. My guess is that the wise men came two to four months after the birth of Jesus but it is sometime between two months to two years after the birth of Jesus.

Now where did this happen? We have a little bit of a travel log here. They come from the East. They arrive in Jerusalem. They are sent six miles south to Bethlehem. Then after going six miles south of Jerusalem they arrive at a house in Bethlehem. So they go from old Babylon (Iran/Iraq) all the way to Jerusalem then six miles south to Bethlehem as the star guides them to the house itself.

Now what do we find in the text? First of all the text tells us about a star. Secondly, it tells us they are in a house at a place called Bethlehem. Thirdly, it tells us that gifts are given by pagan royal representatives and the gifts are gold, frankincense and myrrh. Why did that happen? I believe that happened to fulfill four prophecies in the Old Testament. One of them is mentioned in the text from Matthew 2 and that is the prophecy from Micah 5. I want to show you this passage because they don't quote all of it in Matthew 2. There is a reason they don't quote all of it, I think. Number one is when Herod heard that they had come to find the King of the Jews he immediately thought of the Christ. So he calls chief priests and scribes together and says "Where is the Christ to be born?" They say to him, "In Bethlehem, why?" The prophecy of Micah tells you why. This is where the King, the Prophet, Priest and King is going to be born.

Micah 5:2 says [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.* In Matthew the wise men only quote the part of the verse that says where but not who where it says, *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.* In other words, He doesn't originate in His birth. He always has been. This is the eternal Son of God who has now come in the flesh. Ancient Days is a code language for a title, O Ancient of Days and that this is the Son of God. So we are told where and who in this prophecy. That is why they are in a house in Bethlehem with the line of Judah, Mary and Joseph as the parents over this Jesus.

That's not all that is there. Why are there gold, frankincense and myrrh? Why do we have pagan royal representatives? There are three other things that are being fulfilled. Why would they begin to look when they saw a star and follow that star? It is because of what it says in Numbers 24. You may be thinking 'where did they get their Bible?' My guess would be that it was from Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who could have stocked the library with a bunch of Bibles. They had Scripture all over the place and they would have studied it for hundreds of years since Daniel's time. They would have known this passage that talks about the Messiah. This is a prophecy that comes from another Gentile wise man and his name is Balaam. Notice what he says in Numbers 24:17, [17] *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; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.* Here is something that will have an immediate fulfillment but the ultimate fulfillment is in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will be marked out by the star of Jacob that rises.

Now let's look at Psalm 72. These are royal representatives coming from pagan, Gentile nations. Why are they here? Psalm 72:1, 8-11 says [1] *Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son!* [8] *May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!* [9] *May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust!* [10] *May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!* [11] *May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!* The down payment of the fulfillment of this prophecy of the nation's worldwide is now given to us with these wise men. Now let's look at Isaiah 60. Here we will be looking at the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 60:1-2, 5-6 says [1] *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.* [2] *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick*

darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. [5] Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. [6] A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD. All of this is fulfilling. It is fulfilling Numbers 24, Psalm 72 (the Messianic Psalm), Isaiah 60 (the Messianic prophecy) and Micah 5. All of that is fulfilled in this narrative hundreds of years after these prophecies had been made.

The last question is why. Why do these wise men come? There is no ambiguity for they tell you. Their immediate purpose is to find the King, whose star has risen. Number two, their ultimate purpose is they have come to worship Him. Herod knows this and that's why he is troubled. They have come to open up their treasures and give Him praise. God will providentially warn them so that they don't lose their lives by Herod and they go back "another way" after they have worshipped the Lord, bringing him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

I want to give you seven implications from their worship of the Triune God of glory. The wise men arrived in Bethlehem in search of the promised King for the singular purpose of worshipping Him which actually provides multiple life-changing insights. The first one is the true worship of the Triune God of glory is instigated and motivated by the Advent of Christ and focused upon the preeminence of Christ. What we will learn in all of these narrative is that it is because Jesus came to save us that we are brought to worship, motivated to worship and inspired to worship.

When Jesus saves you there are two things that become very important to you and that is the praise of God the Father through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. In other words, you will want to be a true worshipper. So I would be remiss if I did not ask you, is your heart moved whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do to do it to the glory of God? No one is asking you to do it perfectly, because we don't but are you moved to do that? The second thing that happens is that you want to be a witness for Jesus Christ. You have a vertical relationship and that's worship and you have a horizontal for you want to be a witness to tell others. Notice these wise men. Not only do they come hundreds of miles to worship, even in the face of one who would take their life, but they bear witness of Christ. Worship and witness, is what Christ instigates and only Christ. Religions can't do it. Preachers can't do it. Nothing in this world can keep a long and glorious, imperfect but growing grace life of worship (gathered and life) and of witness.

The second implication from this text is the worship of the Triune God of glory is to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea by bringing all kinds of people from all the nations. The primary burden of Matthew when he writes his Gospel and the biography of Jesus is to let the Jewish people know that Jesus is the Messiah, so why would Matthew in the opening salvo of His biography take pains of his primary audience to Jewish people be consumed with pagan astrologers, kings and royal attendants from a land that used to oppress the Jews who have come to worship? He is giving us a message and it's the same message he'll his Gospel with. The message is 'See the nations are coming to see Him.' He'll end his Gospel by saying "Go, to the nations and tell them of Him." He is bringing to us this glorious truth that the worship of God and the work of salvation is to the Jews, through the Jews, to all the nations of the world.

The third implication from this text is the worship of the Triune God of glory is secured by a sovereign God who rules over all the nations and all of His creation. We have royal ambassadors, wise men, from Iran/Iraq area, old Babylon, travelling almost a thousand miles, opening up their treasures giving gold, frankincense and myrrh. How did that happen? It was because they read a Bible. Where did they get that Bible? They got it from Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego. How did they get there? It was through oppression. How did they get there? Their nation was conquered and Jerusalem was destroyed. Do you not see the sovereign hand of God here?

If you had been a Jewish person living during that time would you not have been mad at God at that time saying 'God what are you doing to our nation'? In fact, are you little upset with what is happening right now to our nation? There is a sense that you should be. One thing God was doing at that time was He was getting some young men to stand up for Jesus Christ who would last for five dynasties and two empires to put the books of the Bible in there that would move astrologers to fulfill four prophecies to come all the way hundreds of years later. That is one of the things He was doing.

How did they find Him in Bethlehem? Why weren't they in Nazareth? It was because a man named Quirinius. Who is he? He was an emperor under Augustus. He was taking money from people at that time. That is what the state always does. The state always taxes and takes. Another King whom you worship, gives. In other words, they are in Bethlehem because of the IRS or the RRS, the Roman Revenue Service. That is why they are there and of course we would have gotten upset about the tax, wouldn't we? When Christians see tragedies they think "Ok God what are You up to? What are You doing?" What they mean for evil You mean for good. God is putting things into motion over 900 plus years to get these guys here.

How did they get there? It was because of a star. Where did the star come from? I'm sure I'm going to get a lot of emails and videos after I answer this and I think all that is interesting but I am not of those who have to take miracles and find a natural explanation for them. I think miracles are miracles. That could be a mutated star that God worked on. I really think it was an angel. Angels are called stars in the Bible. I think it was one of those angels who are singing to the shepherds and the angel appeared at the right time to get them all the way to Bethlehem and they stood over that house so they knew which house it was. It's okay to think about all that other stuff, but so what. A miracle is just God being God. If you think it was a comet and it makes you feel better then fine but I just think it was an angel because when an angel shows up they have this glory in this life. In other words, God moves the nations and creations to accomplish His purposes.

That is why we are worshipping today. Did your worship today at all reflect that this is the God of glory who makes stars, uses stars, moves stars, moves nations, puts in empires and all of that to fulfill His Word? Does our worship reflect the majesty of this God that it fills our heart? We have a small worship that is focused upon our preferences in life because we have a small God. You have a big God and then it becomes about Him and worship begins to reflect that. We're serving a God who moves nations, stars, mountains and everything.

The fourth implication is the worship of the Triune God of glory will provoke admiration and also the opposition of either indifference or hostility. Have you ever noticed that when God is worshipped how it draws unbelievers? Worship is admirable.

It's attractive. It's magnetic. When we bless the Lord it brings blessings. When the wise men went six miles south to Bethlehem from Jerusalem did the city go with them? All Jerusalem knew about it. No, apparently they had something that was more important. They were just indifferent to it. Worship is okay if it works into the schedule but it's not the priority that would take me 900 miles to make sure it's done.

Some people have asked me if I thought these wise men were converted. I don't really know. I don't know if they are doing something that becomes a model for saved people or whether they were really saved. I do know that I don't know many that would confess worship is important and travel 900 miles to make sure we were there. I don't know many of us that open up our treasures to bring the gifts. I'm starting with myself on this. If the wise men aren't saved they are acting more like saved people than I know or that I am. So here is this enormous testimony of God's saving grace and these wise men are completely drawn to it. Jerusalem hasn't got time but there is not only indifference but there's hostility.

Herod wants to know where the child is. Why? He says he wants to go worship Him but he really wants to kill Him. Herod wants to do what Pharaoh wanted to do when he thought Moses was the Messiah. He wants to stop Him from getting to an atoning cross. So worship shows not only the attraction to those whom the Lord is calling but it shows the indifference of those who could care less and it shows the hostility of those who are scandalized by Christ, just as Herod was.

The fifth implication is the worship of the Triune God of glory is intentional and therefore prioritized, prepared and sacrificial. Notice these men were intentional to a 900 mile trip to going to worship under the intimidation of Herod, of overcoming the indifference of all Jerusalem. They would not be stopped and they showed they had brought themselves because they opened their treasures. They weren't bribing they were worshipping. They weren't trying to buy salvation they were worshipping. That's why they brought gold for that's regality. That's why they brought frankincense for that declares honor. They brought all of these things to declare where their heart was.

The sixth implication is the worship of the Triune God of glory is first doxological but is also transformational and missional. They come to worship but noticed they get changed and I don't think it's any accident when it says they came away, then they went their way to Bethlehem and then it says after they worshipped they went another way. Worship transforms. We don't go to worship to get transformed, we go to worship to praise the Lord but worship transforms and changes God's people. It is also missional. It allows us to get the mission done. Where are Mary and Joseph going to take Jesus when they find out of Herod's intention to kill the Messiah? They will leave to fulfill prophecy. Now where did Jesus' family get the money to do that? God has a way through the worship of His people to resource the mission. It is amazing to see how God gets the mission done with the worshipping we are doing.

Not only is He getting that mission done with that gift but He's pointing you not just to Egypt but they give gold, frankincense and myrrh (His death on the cross). In the song We Three Kings one of the verses says;

*Myrrh is mine: it's bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom.
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.*

The wise men brought the spice that would embalm Him. See how the manger points to the cross. The mission of Christ is upheld in the gifts of these wise men.

The seventh implication from this text is the worship of the Triune God of glory is Gospel saturated by the exaltation of Christ and Him crucified. Matthew 2:16 says *[16] Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.* What is happening? Jesus has come to a mission to go to the praise of the Father to go the cross. Satan is trying to stop Him and one of the ways he is trying to do this is to kill Him before He can get to the cross for an atoning death. Now from the manger on Christ is headed to the cross and from the manger on Satan is trying to kill Him but our Lord will win the victory to the praise of the Father and the salvation of our souls so that we might be redeemed in the Lord. He will not be stopped from that cross and the myrrh that would embalm Him in a tomb that will be cast aside as He comes forth in glory to the praise of God.

Yet in the worship of these wise men notice something. They worshipped not with joy but they worshipped with great joy. They worshipped with exceeding joy and they worshipped with exceedingly great joy while they were rejoicing. He is trying to tell you that the worship of God by those who know Christ, are dependent upon Him, long for Him and are fixed upon Him, you can't get enough adjectives or enough adverbs. He just keeps piling them on. They can't be stopped. Why? It is because they have a great Savior who loves us and has become what He never was, to have forever so that we might be with Him and see Him. Praise His Name! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the Lord Jesus our Redeemer, our Savior, the One who lifts up our hearts into Your presence. We would give You that praise and joy this day for there is none like You. We lift up praise to You because You left Your throne to save us. You humbled Yourself that we might be enthroned with You. O fill our hearts with joy, not emotional manipulation or redefining You in terms that the world exalts, but in seeing You and Your glory, the Savior of sinners, whom the Father moves mountains and celestial stars, send angels and raises up nations that one day we might, like these wise men, know Him, worship Him, and open up our heart to give ourselves to Him who gave Himself for us that we might have Him forever. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.