

29 December 2024

Lessons of the Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-15

The Visit of the Wise Men

2:1 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 enquired 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 worshipped 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 Flight to Egypt

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Icebreaker

JJohn writes¹ of Gifts being (1) Personal, (2) Practical, (3) Permanent, and (4) Purchased. How do the Christmas presents you have received rank against these measures? And how does the ultimate Christmas present of Christ rank against the same measures?

1. The Wise Men/Magi

The Greek word used is Magoi which refers to the wise men, priests and astrologers of Persia and Babylon. If you have a bible Atlas – or else search on a browser for "biblemapper persian empire".

Q1: How far would the Wise Men likely have travelled and how long might that journey have taken? Compare that to the length and time of the journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem that nobody else is recorded as making...

2. The Prophecy of Micah

Q2. Read Micah 5:2. How does this match Matthew 2:6? Is this of concern?

¹ J. John *The Gift*, 2010

In Jewish philosophy and literature, the expression of a concept was taken to be inclusive of its broader context; “bookmark” text was often taken to represent the entire body of text represented by those bookmarks. Also bearing in mind that Matthew was primarily presenting the gospel to Jews.

Q3: Now read Micah 5:2-5a. How does this prophecy relate to Jesus, the Messiah?

The reference to “shepherd my people” also ties indirectly back to “rulers of Judah” in a way which would have had meaning to Jews of that day:

Q4: After the death of Saul and his Sons, the tribes of Israel gathered to anoint David King over Israel. Read 2Sam 5:1-3. How had God commanded David to rule Israel?

Q5: God made a covenant with David in 2Sam 7. What did God promise David in 2Sam 7:16?

Q6: Now read Matthew 1:1-2 and 1:16-17. From what tribe is Jesus? How is he related to David?

Q7: Tying this all together, how does the prophecy as referenced by Matthew relate Jesus to David? What else about the Messiah can you now see Matthew pointing to in how he presents the prophecy at verse 6?

3. The Magi as a model for faith

3.1 They searched diligently for Jesus

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child,…”

Q8: How much persistence was needed and hardship endured as the magi searched for Jesus? What do we learn about our search for, and pursuit of Jesus as his disciples?

3.2 They were overjoyed in encountering Jesus

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Q9: Do we find joy each time we encounter Jesus? What might we do different to place ourselves in a position of more joy?

3.3 They worshipped Jesus

11 And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

Q10: If the Magi fell down and worshipped this child, what is it that they must have understood? What about our worship? Does it match what we know of Jesus?

3.4 They offered Jesus Gifts

11 ... they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Q11: Although they probably didn’t understand their significance, what is the symbolism attached to each of the gifts offered by the wise men?

From the Sermon: *“Discipleship isn’t cheap. We too need to bring gifts to the service of Jesus which cost us - whether in time, or treasure or talent.”*

Q12: As stewards of what God provides us, what gifts should we now be bringing to the service of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer:

Lord Jesus, may we follow the example of the Wise Men in searching for you diligently. Thank you that you promise in Mt 7:7 that where we seek you, we will find you. May we then know the joy of the Wise Men in pursuing whole-hearted worship, whole-minded learning of your ways and whole-giving service as your disciples. Amen.