

KNOWING GOD ... better

Like the Magi

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION: Christmas as a holiday and all the special celebrations have come and gone. Whatever decorations have not come down certainly will in the next few days.

But all the significant things about Christmas remain. They never depart. In fact those things are the very things that last forever.

So I like to give thought to what happened biblically after the first Christmas.

- After the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem
- After their night or multiple nights in the stable with a newborn baby
- After shepherds returned to keeping their flocks
- After the promises to Simeon and Anna were completed

What happened?

And I think you know. The wise men, or more literally, the magi came, and it is Matthew who tells us about it.

Their visit – post Christmas, maybe more than a year after the first Christmas, is not only a fascinating story, it is an instructive and inspiring one, that offers direction to each of us as to things that should happen in our lives after Christmas.

Let's read from Matthew chapter 2.

Matthew 2:1–2 NKJV 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 have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

I pause here in our reading because the text now inserts the story of King Herod and his jealous rage over someone else being called the King of the Jews. This results in Herod asking where Scripture says the Messiah King would be born, which in turn results in him ultimately sending soldiers to slaughter the toddlers of Bethlehem. But while this tragic story of Herod's sin against God is also of importance, I want us to focus today on what happened in the lives of the magi. So we continue with their story at verse 9.

Matthew 2:9–11 NKJV 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 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.

Look with me at the text.

Matthew 2:1 NKJV 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,

Wise men comes from the Greek magoi or anglicized “magi.”

The Magi had their origins in the Medo-Persian Empire in the 7th century B.C.

They specialized in astronomy, astrology, and quasi-science, as well as often practicing **dream interpretation**. and things of **the occult** such as sorcery. In fact, the words “magic” and “magician” find their origin with the Magi.

The Magi became prominent in the Babylonian Empire where because of their special skills and learning they were placed in positions of influence and authority. After the captive Daniel demonstrated the wisdom God had given him and proved even more adept at the interpretation of dreams than the magi of Nebuchadnezzar’s court, **Daniel was made to be the Chief of the Magi**.

The Magi we read about in **Matthew** were the descendants of these original Magi and they **were a group of priests in a region to the east of Palestine called Parthia**. There they enjoyed the same kind of prestige and authority as the Roman Senate. It was their privilege and duty to select and crown the King of Parthia.

Matthew 2:2 NKJV 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.”

What was the star? Both the Greek and Hebrew word for star can be used to refer to almost any heavenly body that shines with light. People have tried to explain what it was by theorizing that it was Jupiter or the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Others think it was perhaps a meteor or a super nova.

All of these naturalistic explanations run into difficulty however with the biblical text. Because the star appeared, signaling the birth of Christ, then disappeared for between one and two years, and then reappeared when the Magic came to Jerusalem and shown not only on the city of Bethlehem but upon the very house in which the toddler Jesus now resided.

The Bible does not say what the star was. **I think it was the glory of God**, such as shown in the Pillar of Fire that led Israel through the wilderness and which flamed above the tabernacle, such as shown upon Mt. Sinai as God met with Moses, such as shown

around the shepherds when the angel appeared to them, and shined in and upon Jesus Himself on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Whatever the star was, it was His star, Jesus' star; and to the Magi it had two special meanings. Before we see what was so significant about this star to the Magi and to us, we should ask,

How did the Magi know it was His star?

The answer to this question goes back to Daniel who we know as the prophet but who they knew as the former Chief of the Magi in the days of the Babylonian and Persian Empires.

I think it is virtually without question that **Daniel and others of the Jews introduced the Magi to the One True and Living God and to the Holy Scriptures.**

By the days of the reign of Herod the Great, **the four kingdoms God revealed to Daniel** would rise in succession **had indeed come upon the world scene exactly as prophesied.**

Babylon

Medo-Persia

Greece, and finally

Rome. Of the kingdoms Daniel said that God revealed would arise, **One yet remained.**

It would be a Kingdom to

conquer all other Kingdoms and one that would

cover the whole earth and

last for eternity. (Daniel 7)

It was of course to be led by a King, and according to another prophecy that Daniel's God had given him, and recorded for us in Daniel 9, **the time for the appearance of that King was near at hand.**

These things alerted the Magi to be watchful, and another Scripture left with them by Daniel caused them to take notice when a star of unusual brilliance and beauty appeared to hover over the region called Judea in ancient Israel.

That Scripture was the prophecy of Balaam. His story is told in Numbers 22 to 24.

When Israel was moving toward the Promised Land, they neared the territory of King Balak or Moab. Balak sent for a seer to come and curse Israel for him. Balaam at first refused because he knew he could not curse Israel because he knew Israel's God was more powerful than all, and He would not allow Balaam to utter such a curse.

Eventually Balak persuaded Balaam to come, but Balaam told the king he could only speak what YHWH permitted. So Balaam uttered prophecies over the encamped nation of Israel such as YHWH allowed him to do. Look at the one recorded in

Numbers 24:15–19 NKJV

15 So he took up his oracle and said:

“The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,

And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened;

16 The utterance of him who hears the words of God,

And has the knowledge of the Most High,

Who sees the vision of the Almighty,

Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

17 “I see Him, but not now;

I behold Him, but not near;

A Star shall come out of Jacob;

A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,

So the Magi understood that when the Eternal King was born, it would happen in Israel, and a star would signal His birth.

Because the time was approaching, the Parthian Magi were watching. When a new and very different star appeared to the west of them, over the land of Israel, they knew it was His star.

Matthew 2:2 NKJV ...For we have seen **His star** in the East and have come to worship Him.”

Wow, that took a lot to explain two small words in the text. But this offers a good opportunity to remind you or to teach you, depending on where you are in your spiritual growth as a student of God’s Word of **a key principle in understanding the Bible.**

Scripture explains other Scripture. If it were not for the Books of Numbers and Daniel, we would have no idea why the Magi came looking for the King of the Jews when they saw a star appear to the west of where they lived.

I entitled this sermon “Like the Magi,” and one of the ways you and I should be like the Magi is that we should be searching for Jesus, the King of the Jews.

- Searching to know who He is if you do not already know that.
- If you are saying, "I already found Jesus, and I have trusted Him as my Lord and Savior," then you should be
- Searching to know more and more about Him and
- Searching out how to know Him better and follow Him more closely.
- Who of us does not need to do that?

But here is something important for all of us. **Whether we are seeking to know Jesus initially or we are seeking to know Him better after years of trusting in Him, the way we learn is through the study of the Scriptures.**

Apart from the Word of God, the Magi would not have known what the new star meant. They would not have set out on their journey to find the King of the Jews.

Until you have fully mastered the Bible, and I can tell you that I know I will never get that done before I enter eternity with my Lord, you need to be in small group Bible study and under the preaching and teaching of God's Word. It is the only way we find more and more about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now on to verse 9

Matthew 2:9 NKJV 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.

You see, this was no ordinary star as we think of stars. Stars don't move in such a way as to guide us on a path. A star cannot point to a single town and certainly not to a single house.

But when we see the meaning of star, it is used to mean any light giver in the heavens. So this light shined which I think was the glory of God, and it guided the Magi right to the door of the house where Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus were living in Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:10 NKJV When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

The reappearing of the star as they headed toward Bethlehem was a joyous occasion because it told them they were on the right track. And it took them right to Jesus' house!

Matthew 2:11 NKJV 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.

OK, reset the arrangement of the Nativity Set in your house. The Magi never made it to the stable to worship Jesus in the manger. By the time they arrived, Joseph had moved the family into a house.

Matthew 2:11 NKJV 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.

And Jesus is no longer a newborn baby. He is a young child, probably a toddler.

Matthew 2:11 NKJV 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.

See here the immediate response of the Magi. They fell on their faces, they prostrated themselves before Jesus and worshiped Him.

You know these Magi, and there may not have been three. All we know from Scripture is that there was more than one and few enough to be able to fit into Joseph's house. And to have been sent out from such a prestigious group as the Magi, they were considered leaders themselves.

Yet when they desired to worship, they fell down, they prostrated themselves before the Lord. That's the second way we should be like the Magi: We should abandon our worries about what others think and lose ourselves in our worship of Christ.

Matthew 2:11 NKJV 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.

And here is the final thing they did. They opened their treasures and gave to the Lord. That is an act of worship when we open our treasures and give from our treasures to the Lord rather than from our extras or our leftovers. Lord, help us be like the Magi.