



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: ADVENT: JESUS, ONLY JESUS
LESSON: GOOD ADVICE FROM A BAD APPLE
TEXT: MATTHEW 2:1-12
DATE: DECEMBER 7, 2025

MAIN POINT

This Christmas, we should, like the wise men before us, pursue the Messiah and not stop until we are worshipping the one, true King.

INTRODUCTION

Do you remember a time as a kid when you received a gift that was definitely not what you had hoped for—maybe too practical or to your young mind...boring? What if it was a gift of great value or meaning that you just were not prepared to or capable of appreciating?

This week, we will discuss some unique gifts and, possibly, some more unique gift givers.

The givers, of course, are the wise men or magi. These men (traditionally three, but the text is not clear about this) who arrived from the East bearing gifts fit for a king. This passage traces the final leg of their journey as they stop first in Jerusalem and then continue on to Bethlehem. Along the way, they will get some useful advice, but prove to be the only ones willing to heed it.

Ultimately, as you know, the wise men will find the baby Jesus and worship him. They stood out among the other characters in this story because of their willingness to listen to and to be guided by the signs that God provided. While these gifts, the text refers to as treasures, were certainly valuable, they were not exactly fit for a baby. However, they were fit for the King the wise men had come to see.

As we work through this text, compare the responses of the various characters to this good news of the birth of a king. How did the reaction of the wise men (or magi) differ from King Herod or from the chief priests and scribes in Jerusalem?

Text

Matthew 2:1-12

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.

Explanation

This story is a familiar narrative, but it is one worth revisiting again during this Advent Season.

In chapter 2, Matthew picks up the story following the birth of Jesus (which he covered very succinctly in chapter 1) with a brief narrative regarding special visitors to this newborn Savior. Matthew describes them as wise men who came from the east, travelling some distance guided according to their own account by a special star. Matthew provides sparse details about the wise men's origins, their total number, their navigation, or even how they knew to be looking for a Jewish king. However, he is clear about their purpose. They know a King has come, they ask for the new King of the Jews (perhaps an important clue tying the source of their information to the Jewish people and potentially indicating they came to know about a coming king through Jews that had been dispersed throughout the Babylonian empire and the Persian empire).

The critical detail that Matthew will reiterate throughout this passage is not just that they had come for a King, but they came to worship this King. Wherever their information originated or what they knew/didn't know, they had the ultimate response correct. That stands in sharp contrast to other key characters they will interact with.

The wise men's journey has led them to Jerusalem where their inquiries get the attention of Herod the Great, the titular King of the Jews (though subject to Roman rule). Interestingly, verse 3 indicates even the questions about a new king not only got his attention but had created something of a stir in Jerusalem. This reflects both the paranoia of Herod and the sense of volatility felt by the populace. Something in the report of these men seeking the "king of the Jews" sparks his interest in hearing from the Jewish priests and scribes. Herod asks them for information about the King of Jews, and they respond (seemingly quickly) with Micah 5:2. This king will come from Bethlehem.

The response to this truth from all three key groups of characters is telling.

First, Herod uses this information to hatch a plot with the intention of destroying who he viewed as a would-be usurper. He provides the information to the wise men with a request to alert him to the child's location so he too can worship Him. We will learn later in the narrative (Matt. 2: 16-18) just how sinister his intentions were. Needless to say, his response to the birth of Christ was jealousy, rivalry, and violence. Thankfully, God intervened to protect Jesus. Like so many others who would come before and who would still come after him, Herod chose hostility toward the Gospel. Rejection, direct opposition.

Second, the chief priests and scribes were presented with the news of the anticipated new King of the Jews, but other than providing the right answer to Herod's question, they seemingly did nothing to act on this information. There is no indication that they followed the wise men, joined their ranks, or even made other efforts to watch more closely. This may be a function of the text being silent, but it is not difficult to surmise that the cold-hearted response these men (or their successors) would have toward Jesus during his earthly ministry some 30 years later made its first appearance here. They had all the information they needed, but they chose their staid religious practices and potentially the status quo with Herod, the current power in the land. Unfortunately, they modeled a response equally as hostile to the Gospel, but theirs was less direct than Herod's. Instead of open rebellion, they attempted to hide behind the veneer of religion, a guise Jesus Himself would lay bare repeatedly during his ministry.

Finally, we have the wise men. They did not stop until they found the King. Following the new information from the scribes (via Herod), they set off toward Bethlehem. Here Matthew indicates the star continued its movement guiding them on their way not just to the city but to a specific house where they found the baby Jesus and his mother Mary. When they arrived, we see great celebration (v. 10-11). They understood the magnitude of the moment—and they worshipped Him. After worshipping, they also provided gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Each greatly valuable. J. Vernon McGee in his *Thru the Bible* commentary series indicated these gifts have great meaning: gold, speaks of his birth as a King; frankincense, speaks of His life; and myrrh, speaks of His death. Even in this moment and the giving of gifts to the young child, the complete story of Jesus' life and saving work through His death is present. The wise men rightly respond to the Gospel with worship.

The passage concludes with another heavenly intervention as the wise men are warned to avoid any more dealings with Herod. Content with the true King they

have found, they head back to their homeland without anymore interaction with him. While they disappear from the narrative, they have played a key role in the story by modeling the right response to the Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

- Consider the passage again, did any of the details regarding the wise men surprise you or stand out to you? Are there any details that are featured in traditional depictions of Christmas (such as number) that you have been taught that are not specifically reflected in this passage?
- Matthew spent more verses on the wise men than he did on the actual birth of Jesus (see Chapter 1). Why do you think Matthew included/focused on the wise men? Does this passage change anything about your perception of the wise men?
- The passage provides some clues about the information the wise men were acting upon (e.g. the sign of the star and inquiring about a king of the Jews). Consider what they knew and what they didn't know as they traveled a great distance and pursued this King. What does this teach us about the journey of faith and how God can use even imperfect Gospel messages?
- Compare and contrast the responses to Jesus of Herod, the chief priests/scribes, and the wise men. How would you characterize them? Who had the right response and why? Do you see echoes of this in our world today?
 - Does it surprise you that the ones who best understand the miracle of the birth of Jesus are seemingly strangers from a foreign land while the Jews in this passage miss the Gospel completely?
- While we do not know the origin of these wise men, the details they knew about a king of the Jews and Jerusalem seem to indicate some connection to or knowledge of the Jewish faith. Some scholars believe the source of their knowledge was from interaction/engagement with the Jews who had been exiled either to Babylon or Persia. We know from the Old Testament that key figures such as Daniel not only took their faith with them but continued to faithfully practice even when servicing as “wise men” in the courts of their respective kings. Consider what this teaches us about God, what does this tell us about how He can use even bad/difficult circumstances for good?

Conclusions or Application

LEARN FROM THE WISE MEN, THIS CHRISTMAS, SEEK AND WORSHIP THE ONE TRUE KING

These wise men provided an exceptional example in this passage as they sought the Lord and did not stop until they were at the feet of Jesus worshipping Him. Their willingness to hear and to follow the signs the Lord provided was remarkable. They did not do this in isolation. We can learn from clear steps they had to take:

1. We must be sensitive to the Lord's direction. The wise men were attuned to His prompting. They saw the star. They listened to the prophecy about Bethlehem. They were receptive to the Lord's prompting.
2. We must obey like the wise men and follow! The wise men drew a sharp contrast to the learned scribes and priests. Both had access to the same truth. Both had a decision to make. One group went and found the Savior. The other group stayed put and grew hard in their hearts. The distinction was not knowledge or skill at interpretation. The difference was action, it was following.
3. We will find Jesus, and when we do, our response can only be worship. The wise men were not delayed in Jerusalem. They did not give up in their search or content themselves that scholars had ideas about the meaning of Micah's prophecy. No, they pressed on. They kept looking until they found not only the town but the exact house. When the Lord calls us to Himself. There is so much He has in store for us. Not only through salvation but through growth into spiritual maturity. The blessings are great. But we must see it through until He completes His good work in us.