

**THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM, PART 3: “THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN”**  
**MATTHEW 2:1-12**

**Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone!

If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

**Sermon Series Introduction**

We're currently in Part 3 of our new sermon series called “The King and His Kingdom,” where we're going through the Gospel of Matthew together.

And today's sermon is titled: “The Visit of the Wise Men”

So let's get right into it.

**Sermon Introduction**

It's interesting to me how the exact same event can happen to different people, and their responses couldn't be more different.

When there's traffic, some people are honking their horns and muttering to themselves; others are singing songs and smiling to themselves.

When there's criticism, some people are crushed in discouragement; others are thankful that people care enough about them to give them honest feedback.

When there's someone better than us at something, some people get really insecure and try to find some other fault with them; others are inspired to be better themselves and try to befriend and learn from them.

The exact same situation can bring out very different responses in different people.

When we consider this, we realize that “You made me do it” or “If you didn't do that, I wouldn't have done that” are not quite accurate.

After all, someone else could go through the exact same situation and respond completely differently.

The situations and people around us may be *contributing factors* to our responses, but at the end of the day, we all *choose* our responses—and we're fully responsible and accountable for them.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:19).

<pause>

As we turn to our passage today, we'll look at how different people *respond* to the exact same event—the birth of Jesus.

And as we'll see, their responses couldn't be more different.

**Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to Matthew 2:1-12.

Keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon. It will help you follow along much more easily.

I'd highly recommend using a physical Bible, but if you don't have one, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

Two weeks ago, we looked at the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to David, to the deportation (or exile) to Babylon, all the way to the coming of Christ.

And last week, we looked at the birth narrative of Jesus from the perspective of *Joseph*, where an angel declared to him that Jesus will save his people from their sins and that he is literally God with us.

And after describing *who* Jesus is in chapter 1, Matthew now describes how people *respond* to Jesus as we begin chapter 2.

And that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

### Scripture Reading

Let's read Matthew 2:1-12.

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> "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."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

This is God's Word.

### Overview

We'll look at this passage in three parts and we'll see...

Three different responses to Jesus:

- I. Troubled
- II. Indifference
- III. Worship

#### I. Troubled

Look at the beginning of verse 1.

[<sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, ...]

Matthew introduces this new scene by giving us the *setting* of what's about to take place.

This was “*after* Jesus was born in Bethlehem,” and this was “in the days of Herod the king.”

All of chapter 1 told us who *Jesus* is, but who is *Herod*?

There are several Herods in the New Testament, but this was Herod the Great, whom the Romans named king of Judea. And he ruled for over 30 years from 37 BC to 4 BC.

Since he ruled over the *Jewish* people in Judea, Herod was given the title of “king of the Jews,” but he was not *actually* a Jew<sup>1</sup>—and therefore the Jews saw Herod as an *illegitimate* king.

He inflicted heavy taxes on the people; and in his latter years, as he was suffering from illness, he became increasingly paranoid of others threatening his rule. So...

- he killed half of the Sanhedrin (which was like the Jewish supreme court);
- he executed his wife, mother-in-law, and three sons;
- and on his deathbed, he arranged for all the notable men of Jerusalem to be assembled in one place and slaughtered as soon as his death was announced, so that the people would weep instead of rejoice on the day of his death.<sup>2</sup>

Herod was a cruel, wicked, murderous king—and the Jews hated him.

<pause>

Now, look at the rest of verse 1 to verse 2.

[<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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.”]

“Wise men from the east” show up in Jerusalem where Herod the *Roman-appointed* king of the Jews was, and they ask him about this *newborn* “king of the Jews” that Herod knows nothing about.

So how do you think Herod responds?

Look at the beginning of verse 3.

[<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, ...]

Herod was *troubled*.

<sup>1</sup> He descended from *Esau* rather than *Jacob*, so he was *not* from the royal line of David.

<sup>2</sup> “Herod the Great ruled Israel and Judah from 37 to 4 B.C. He was an Idumean (or Edomite), and was appointed king of the Jews under the authority of Rome. Herod ruled firmly and often ruthlessly, murdering any who might challenge his place on the throne. This included his own wife, several sons, and other relatives. It is no surprise, then, that he tried to kill the baby Jesus. Despite his cruelty, Herod was known as “the Great” because Israel and Judah experienced prosperity during his reign. He was a master builder who restored the temple in Jerusalem and built many theaters, cities, palaces, and fortresses. Herod also financed structures—including pagan temples—throughout the Roman Empire. Ravaged by disease, Herod died in his palace at Jericho and was buried at Herodium. (Matthew 2:16–18) (“Herod the Great” in *ESV Global Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018], <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/profiles-matthew-herod-the-great>). D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 84) writes: “Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabees), and at least two of his sons (cf. Jos. Antiq. XIV–XVIII; S. Perowne, *The Life and Times of Herod the Great* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956]; and esp. Abraham Schalit, *König Herodes: Der Mann und sein Werk* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969]).” Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “Do you want a madman or the Messiah? Do you want a man who would order the massacre of innocent children (v. 16) or a man who would open his arms to children and lay down his life for the less-than-innocent of the world? Do you want a ruler who rules by force, aggression, and cruelty or a ruler who rules by love, compassion, and the cross of his own sufferings? Do you want a man who slaughtered the last remnants of the dynasty that ruled before him, put to death half of the Sanhedrin, killed 300 court officers, executed his wife and mother-in-law and three sons, and as he lay dying arranged for all the notable men of Jerusalem to be assembled in the Hippodrome and killed as soon as his own death was announced, so the people might weep instead of rejoice on the day of his death?”

Herod knows that *he* didn't just have a newborn son, so that means that this newborn child was a *rival* king. And we've already mentioned what this paranoid king did to any potential rivals—he made sure to kill them all, even his own sons.

Herod was intent on ensuring that *nobody* would even come *close* to dethroning him, so even if there were *whispers* of a new king, he was going to squelch any such hope.

Look at verses 7-8.

[<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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.”]

Herod calls a private meeting with the wise men, and he finds out when the special star had appeared (presumably because that's when the child was born).<sup>3</sup>

He then sends the wise men to Bethlehem to go find the child for him, and Herod straight-up *lies* to them by saying that he wants to come *worship* him.

Herod *couldn't* trick those in Jerusalem who knew of his murderous character, but perhaps he could still trick these *foreign* wise men who didn't yet know his true intent.<sup>4</sup>

Thankfully, in verse 12, the Lord *warns* the wise men in a dream *not* to return to Herod. And that gives Jesus' parents time to flee for safety, which we'll look at more next time.

<pause>

For us, we may say that Jesus is King over our lives, but at the same time, we want to keep our *own* power and authority.

How do we know this? Because our *responses* reveal our *hearts*.

When we cannot get what we want or what we want is threatened, hostility is often our knee-jerk response.

- We get frustrated when our kids don't obey us as they should.
- We get angry at people who disagree with us or won't affirm us.
- We get bitter when plans change and people disappoint.
- We get resentful when situations feel out of our control.

These may or may not translate themselves into harmful words and actions, but the hostility is already revealed in our hearts.

We want to be in charge, we want things to go *our* way, and we don't want any opposition to *our* rule.

When we hear the good news of salvation for sinners through faith in Jesus alone, perhaps we readily accept Jesus as our *Savior*, but we begin to resent Jesus as our *Lord* (or our *King*).

But you cannot have Jesus as your *Savior* without having him as your *Lord*. You cannot enjoy the benefits of his *kingdom* without accepting him as your *King*.

So ask yourself: Is my life submitted to King Jesus?

- What sins am I repenting of and striving to kill in my life right now?
- How am I obeying Jesus' word rather than my own thoughts and feelings?

<sup>3</sup> He wants to know the approximate age of the child, which is vital information for him, because later in verse 16, Herod is going to kill all the male children in Bethlehem who are two years old or younger.

<sup>4</sup> R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “It is sometimes alleged that the historical Herod was too cunning and ruthless a man to depend on the co-operation of these foreigners, and that he would have sent his troops with them. But he had no reason to doubt that they would return with the information he needed, and the sight of soldiers with them would have jeopardized their chances of finding the child. His hypocritical motive for desiring the information would not perhaps have deceived his subjects, but might be expected to work with foreigners.”

If we're honest with ourselves, we all struggle to give up our throne to King Jesus. The truth is that there's a bit of Herod in all of us.

<pause>

Going back, notice that it's not just *Herod* who is troubled by the news of Jesus' birth.

Look at the rest of verse 3.

[<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;]

*All* the people in Jerusalem are *also* troubled, but they're troubled for a *different* reason.

The Jews *hated* Herod, so they were *not* worried that Herod would be dethroned.

Rather, knowing the ruthless, paranoid character of Herod, the people are worried about what he might do in *response* to Jesus and how it might affect *them* negatively.

In the minds of those in Jerusalem, they think of the birth of Jesus as something that will bring them *trouble*.

So even though Herod was a wicked, illegitimate king, they'd rather keep the status quo than to rock the boat.<sup>5</sup>

It's similar to the attitude that the Israelites had while in slavery in Egypt.

God sent Moses to *liberate* them from Pharaoh, but as things get more difficult, the Israelites repeatedly *blame* Moses for even coming to them to begin with and they *complain* that it would've been better for them to have remained in slavery in Egypt (Exod. 5:20-21; 14:11-12; 16:2-3; 17:3; Num. 11:4-6; 14:2-4; 20:2-5; cf. Num. 16:3, 41).

<pause>

So how about us?

The prospect of change can be troubling and scary.

Ask yourself: What does Jesus tell me to do that *troubles* me—that makes me feel *anxious*? What do I *fear* following Jesus would mean for me?

- Would it mean your parents' disapproval or your friends' scorn?
- Would it mean walking away from a relationship with an unbeliever?
- Would it mean confessing your sins to others and facing the consequences?

Jesus warns us to count the cost before we follow him (Luke 14:25-33).

Jesus *will* bring trouble into our lives, but like Israel in Egypt, he means to *liberate* us. There was no promised land for those who remained in Egypt, and there is no heaven for those who love this world more than Christ.

We may not realize it at the time, but oftentimes, the *cost* is actually the *blessing*. Jesus means...

- to uproot idols from our hearts,
- to free us from the fear of man,
- to give us the gift of a clean conscience,
- and to fill us with the joy of his love.

But those who fear *man* will always have trouble truly loving *Jesus* because we'll constantly be anxious to please man more than pleasing God.

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<sup>5</sup> This is similar to how the men of Judah responded to their judge-deliverer, Samson, when they were under the foreign rule and oppression of the Philistines (Judg. 15:11).

The love of Christ will mean *little* to us because we'll be more concerned with remaining in the love of man.

But how long can you *really* expect to please man before you meet their disapproval?

"The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe" (Prov. 29:25).

<pause>

A great book on this topic of the fear of man is *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch.

If you're interested in checking it out, we have it in our library in the back. I'd encourage you to read it and discuss it with others.

Our pastoral interns just finished reading it and writing reflections on it, so I'd encourage you to ask them about it as well.

Again, the book is called *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch.

<pause>

So how do people respond to Jesus?

First, they're troubled; and second, they respond with...

## II. Indifference

Look at verses 3-6.

<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> "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."]

When the wise men come looking for the one born king of the Jews, Herod, as a *non-Jew*, doesn't seem to know Scripture well enough to know *where* the Christ was to be born.

So he assembles the Jewish religious leaders to ask them,<sup>6</sup> and they *easily* give him the answer, "In Bethlehem of Judea."

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<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 86-87) writes: "'Chief priests' refers to the hierarchy, made up of the current high priest and any who had formerly occupied this post (since Herod, contrary to the law, made fairly frequent changes in the high priesthood) and a substantial number of other leading priests (cf. Jos. Antiq. XX, 180 [viii. 8]; War IV, 159-60 [iii. 9]; the same Greek word is used for 'high priests' and 'chief priests'). The 'teachers of the law,' or 'scribes' as other EV call them, were experts in the OT and in its copious oral tradition. Their work was not so much copying out OT MSS (as the word 'scribes' suggests) as teaching the OT. Because much civil law was based on the OT and the interpretations of the OT fostered by the leaders, the 'scribes' were also 'lawyers' (cf. 22:35: 'an expert in the law'). The vast majority of the scribes were Pharisees; the priests were Sadducees. The two groups barely got along, and therefore Schweizer (*Matthew*) judges this verse 'historically almost inconceivable.' But Matthew does not say the two groups came together at the same time; Herod, unloved by either group, may well have called both to guard against being tricked. If the Pharisees and Sadducees barely spoke to one another, there was less likelihood of collusion. 'He asked them' (*epynthaneto*, the imperfect tense sometimes connotes tentative requests: Herod may have expected the rebuff of silence; cf. Turner, *Insights*, p. 27) where the Christ (here a title: see on 1:1) would be born, understanding that 'the Christ' and 'the king of the Jews' (2:2) were titles of the same expected person. (See 26:63; 27:37 for the same equivalence.)"

In *contrast* to Herod, these religious leaders seem to know their Bibles very well. They can even make appropriate cross-references to support their answer.

They refer to Micah 5:2, which would have been written about 700 years before the coming of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

And they even seem to have a *high* regard for the *authority* of Scripture.

They say, “for so it is written by the prophet.” Or in other words, “*God’s word* says this.”<sup>8</sup>

Now, given how well they *know* Scripture and their high *view* of Scripture, surely *they*, along with *all* the Jews, would be eagerly awaiting and anticipating the Christ to come, right?

Throughout the opening chapters, Matthew has been *preparing* us for this moment by recapping the expectations of all that the Christ would be and do:

- He’s the son of Abraham who would bless the nations;
- he’s the son of David who would bring in his glorious kingdom and reign in righteousness forever;
- he’s the one born of a virgin, who will save his people from their sins and be God with us;
- and he’s the one born in Bethlehem.

And these wise men from the east have now come to proclaim his birth.

How would we *expect* these Jewish religious leaders to respond?

“He’s here! He’s finally here!”

But that’s *not* how they respond.

Instead, they remain *indifferent*.

The religious leaders *should* have recognized the *magnitude* of the Christ being born more than anyone. And yet, they don’t move.

<sup>7</sup> Craig L. Blomberg (“Matthew,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007], 5–6) writes: “Micah prophesied in the eighth century BC, warning both Israel and Judah of impending judgment. As so often happens with the OT prophets, short- and long-range prophecies are starkly juxtaposed. Micah 4:6–13 alternates between predictions of the more distant return from exile (4:6–8, 13) and of more imminent judgment (4:9–12). Micah 5 begins with this latter theme (v. 1), but the rest of the chapter returns to the more distant future, promising a ruler who will shepherd his flock in the Lord’s strength and majesty and bring peace to the land (vv. 2–5a). Indeed, a complete cadre of rulers will one day destroy Assyria (5:5b–6), leaving the remnant of Israel triumphant (5:7–9) and purged of their past idolatry (5:10–15). In this context 5:2 is most naturally taken as messianic. Micah consciously predicted that the tiny city of Bethlehem would produce an Israelite king “whose goings out are from aforetime, from ancient times [or ‘from days of eternity’].” Though not as clear as Isa. 9:6, this final clause suggests a king who is more than a mere human (see McComiskey 1985:427).” R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The answer to Herod’s question was well known; cf. John 7:41–42. Matthew introduces here his second formula-quotation (see pp. 42–43; the absence of the phrase ‘that it might be fulfilled’ is due to the insertion of the quotation into the Jewish leaders’ answer rather than into a narrative of the birth in Bethlehem). The text cited differs considerably from the Hebrew and other known versions of Micah 5:2. The ancient name of Bethlehem, *Ephrathah*, is replaced by a currently recognizable term, *in the land of Judah* (differentiating it from Bethlehem in Galilee, Josh. 19:15, but more significantly emphasizing Jesus’ origin from the royal tribe). Micah’s statement of Bethlehem’s insignificance is reversed by the addition of *by no means*, and the ‘thousands’ (or clans) of Judah become its *rulers*. The following description of the one who shall come is a paraphrase of the rest of Micah 5:2, with an allusion to the shepherd theme in v. 4 (*poimainō*, *govern* in RSV, means ‘to shepherd’), but its actual words are drawn from 2 Samuel 5:2, the description of David’s role as shepherd of Israel. Not all these changes involve much difference in Hebrew (‘are little to be’ could become *are by no means least* by the substitution of *l’hyt* for *lhywt*, and *rulers* is a legitimate translation of the same Hebrew consonants as for ‘thousands’ or ‘clans’, *lpy*), but taken together they show clearly that Matthew is quoting freely, in such a way as to point out the application of the text. His addition of *for* after *rulers of Judah* makes it clear that he regards Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem as conferring on it an importance in contrast with its insignificance in Micah’s day, hence the change to *by no means least*. (This reversal of fortunes was of course the point of Micah’s reference to Bethlehem’s insignificance; Matthew has merely made it explicit.) And the introduction of words from 2 Samuel 5:2 makes clearer the status of Jesus as son of David, born in the city of David, to rule like David over the people of God.”

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 87) writes: “The Jewish leaders answered the question by referring to what stands written, which is the force of the perfect passive verb *gegraptai* (NIV, “has written”), suggesting the authoritative and regulative force of the document referred to (Deiss BS, pp. 112–14, 249–50). NIV misses the preposition *dia* (lit., “what stands written *through* the prophet”), which implies that the prophet is not the ultimate source of what stands written (cf. on 1:22). Both in 1:22 and here, some textual witnesses insert the name of the prophet (e.g., Micah or even Isaiah). “Bethlehem in Judea” was introduced into the narrative in 2:1.”

Bethlehem was just 6 miles (or about 10 kilometers) south of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> It was so close to them!

But there's *no* record of them going to Bethlehem.

They *know* the Scriptures, they *agree* with the Scripture, and yet they remain *indifferent* to the Scriptures.

<pause>

This is a huge *warning* for us who are more *familiar* with the truths of Scripture.

As is often noted, "familiarity breeds contempt."

The more familiar we are of someone or something, the more prone we are of despising them—or at least becoming indifferent towards them.

- We *know* that God created the world and everything in it out of nothing—and it doesn't awe us.
- We *know* that our sins deserve to be punished eternally in hell—and it doesn't make us think twice about sinning.
- We *know* that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ to live the perfect life on our behalf, to bear the wrath of God that we deserved for our sins, and to resurrect three days later to confirm who he is and what he has done—and it makes us yawn.
- We *know* that all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior are forgiven their sins, adopted into God's family, and have new and eternal life in him—and it bores us as irrelevant.

We've heard the gospel *so many times* that we cease to be moved by who Christ is and what he has done for us.

In our hearts, we begin to say, "This *again*? I *already* know the gospel. Tell me something *different*; tell me something *new*."

<pause>

So if we find that *indifference* is creeping into our hearts, where Christ and his word no longer *move* us the way they once did, what can we do?

Let me first say what we should *not* do. We should *not* chase feelings.

When I first came to know Christ, I read the whole Bible cover to cover within a few months, and I shared the gospel with everyone I could. I prayed for hours and devoured Christian books. I wanted to know Christ and his word with all of my being. There was such *passion*.

And yet, over time, the intensity of feelings waned, and I began to think that something was wrong. "Do I *really* love Jesus if I'm not as *passionate* as I once was? Does he *still* love me if I can't *feel* his love like I used to?"

And so, I chased after the *feelings*—the spiritual *highs*. Like a drug addict looking for the next high, I wanted the *intensity* of feelings again.

And perhaps this was a similar experience for many of us.

But then, the question I began to ask myself is this: Is the Christian life to be lived by *faith* or by *feeling*?

Because faith is only faith when I believe even when I don't always feel. If I only believe because I *feel*, then I really trust my *feelings* more than I trust Christ and his word.

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<sup>9</sup> Study note on Matthew 2:1, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

God in his sovereign grace often provides Christians with such intense feelings—and we ought to maximize them. Read, pray, evangelize, and disciple all you can, but just know that such intensity of feelings is not the norm—and we ought not to chase them. Rather, maturity of faith and depth of love is often cultivated in the everyday.

<pause>

Now, if we should *not* chase feelings, then what *can* we do when *familiarity* with Christ and his word leads us to *indifference*?

Let me suggest *three* ordinary means of grace to help us “unfamiliarize” ourselves (so to speak)—or to see Christ and his word with fresh eyes.

First, expositional preaching.

Rather than using the passage as a springboard to say whatever I want, or pulling a bunch of texts out of context, expositional preaching is about *exposing* or *explaining* the text, where the point of the *text* is the point of the *sermon*.

Now, when I first came to the genealogy of Jesus a few weeks ago, and I realized that I needed to preach this text to our congregation, I wondered to myself, “What is the point of this being here? And what in the world does this have to do with us now?”

But the more I *stared* at that text—re-reading, studying, and praying—the more I saw. And then the question became, “How in the world am I going to preach this in just 45 minutes? There’s way too much here!”

And then, I did my best to help us see that the genealogy of Jesus shows us...

- that God *always* keeps his word,
- that God sovereignly came *through* sinners *for* sinners,
- and that God amazingly began a *new creation* in Christ.

And by the end of the sermon, my hope was that you would have seen Christ and his word with *fresh* eyes—not because I told you anything that wasn’t *already* in that text, but it’s because the *same* text and the *same* truths became more alive to you (Heb. 4:12).

We never *make* the Bible relevant to our lives; the Bible *is* relevant, and expositional preaching is one of God’s ordinary means of grace to help us to recognize that afresh.

<pause>

Second, engage meaningfully with other Christians.

There’s a big difference between reading the Bible by yourself and discussing the Bible with other Christians.

Many Christians can attest that, even though they’ve read a Bible passage many times before, when they do inductive Bible study with others on the same passage, they feel like they’ve never read it before.

It feels unfamiliar all over again, and they see and understand things that were always there that seem so obvious now, but somehow, they’ve missed all those previous times.

It doesn’t *always* have to be a Bible study though.

As we see fellow brothers and sisters go through difficult trials and we hear how *they’re* holding fast to Christ and his word, we experience vicariously through *them* how much we ought to treasure Christ and his word.

We're shaken out of our indifference, and our *own* faith is strengthened.

We can *also* learn from Christians in different *places* and different *times*.

There's much encouragement to be found in good Christian books, especially those written by or about saints who have been faithful to the end.

The fellowship we have in the *local* church and the *universal* church help us treasure and submit to Christ and his word more than we ever could if left to ourselves.

<pause>

Third, evangelism.

One of the greatest ways to see Christ and his word with fresh eyes is to see it through the lens of an unbeliever or a new believer.

They ask simple but profound questions that you never thought much about. They are offended by things you've taken for granted. They are in awe of things that we don't even think twice about.

Becky Pippert, author of *Stay Salt*, recalls a Bible study she had with both believers and unbelievers (or what she calls "seekers"); she writes this:

I was leading a study for women when one seeker asked, "Why do you think Jesus hugged the leper?" One of the few Christians present (one who clearly had not grasped the ethos of the gathering) answered, "Oh, Jesus wasn't worried! He couldn't contract leprosy, since he was the Son of God." Then the seeker said, "Well, I am 40 years old, and this is the first time I have ever read the Bible. I don't know if Jesus is the Son of God, but from what I've seen of Jesus thus far, I think he'd be willing to risk contracting leprosy if he thought he could help that poor man."

Which of these women came closer to understanding the true nature of Jesus? The believer who said there was no risk for Jesus, or the seeker who stated, without realizing it, something close to the doctrine of the atonement: that Jesus became sin for us so that he could pay the price for our sins and offer us forgiveness and a new life (2 Corinthians 5 v 21)?

What moved me deeply was when the Christian woman said to me afterwards, "God really convicted me in the study today. I saw how quickly I dismissed that woman's question, which is something we never see Jesus doing. And I realized that her answer may have been closer to the truth than mine! I have so much to learn."<sup>10</sup>

As we evangelize, we begin to see Christ and his word anew (as it were) from those who are literally beginning to see him for the first time.

And every baptism we witness and conversion testimony we hear, we remember afresh the power of the gospel.

So talk to unbelievers and new believers about Jesus; and ask them what questions they have about him and what strikes them about him—and as you see through their eyes, it's like you're falling in love with Jesus and his word all over again.

He's more amazing than we remember, and his word is more trustworthy than we realize.

<pause>

So expositional preaching, engage meaningfully with other Christians, and evangelism.

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<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020), 225-226, Kindle.

Those are *three* ordinary means of grace that God has given us to shake off our *indifference* to Christ and his word.

And we would be wise to make good use of those means.

<pause>

So, again, how do people respond to Jesus?

First, they're troubled; second, they respond with indifference; and third, they respond with...

### III. Worship

Look at verse 9.

[<sup>9</sup> 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.]

The wise men continue to follow this special star until it brings them to the place in Bethlehem where Jesus was.<sup>11</sup>

The language of the star “rising” (here and in verse 9) likely alludes to Balaam’s prophecy that “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17), which was understood to be about the Christ.<sup>12</sup>

There’s been much speculation of what this star could have been. Perhaps a comet, a supernova, or conjunction of planets. But given that this star *moves* and *rests*, it’s probably best to consider it as a supernatural phenomenon on par with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that guided the people of Israel through the wilderness (Exod. 13:21-22).<sup>13</sup>

Look now at verses 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 88-89) writes: “Matthew does not say that the rising star the Magi had seen (cf. on 2:2) led them to Jerusalem. They went first to the capital city because they thought it the natural place for the King of the Jews to be born. But now the star reappeared ahead of them (v. 9) as they made their way to Bethlehem (it was not uncommon to travel at night). Taking this as confirming their purposes, the Magi were overjoyed (v. 10). The Greek text does not imply that the star pointed out the house where Jesus was; it may simply have hovered over Bethlehem as the Magi approached it. They would then have found the exact house through discreet inquiry since (Luke 2:17-18) the shepherds who came to worship the newborn Jesus did not keep silent about what they saw.”

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 86) writes: “Matthew uses language almost certainly alluding to Numbers 24:17: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” This oracle, spoken by Balaam, who came “from the eastern mountains” (Num 23:7), was widely regarded as messianic (Targ. Jonathan and Onkelos; CD 7:19-20; 1QM 11:6; 1QSb 5:27; 4QTest 12-13; T Judah 24:1). Both Matthew and Numbers deal with the king of Israel (cf. Num 24:7).”

<sup>13</sup> “The movement of the star (Matt. 2:9) suggests that it is not a natural phenomenon (e.g., a comet, supernova, or conjunction of planets) but was supernatural, perhaps a guiding angel that appeared as a star, or perhaps some specially created heavenly phenomenon that had the brightness of a star” (study note on Matthew 2:2, in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]). D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 85) writes: “The Magi saw a star “when it rose” (NIV mg.; cf. note at 2:1). What they saw remains uncertain. 1. Kepler (died 1630) pointed out that in the Roman year A.U.C. 747 (7 B.C.), there occurred a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the zodiacal constellation of Pisces, a sign sometimes connected in ancient astrology with the Hebrews. Many details can be fitted to this suggestion (Alf, R.E. Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, pp. 172-73; DNTT, 3:735; Maier), not least that medieval Jews saw messianic significance in the same planetary conjunction. Moreover the conjunction occurred in May, October, and November of 7 B.C.; and one of the latter two appearances could account for 2:9. But there is no solid evidence that the ancients referred to such conjunctions as “stars”; and even at their closest proximity, Jupiter and Saturn would have been about one degree apart—a perceived distance about twice the diameter of the moon—and therefore never fused into one image. 2. Kepler himself preferred the suggestion that this was a supernova—a faint star that violently explodes and gives off enormous amounts of light for a few weeks or months. The suggestion is no more than guess: there is no confirming evidence, and it is difficult on this theory to account for 2:9. 3. Others have suggested comets, what some older writers refer to as “variable stars.” The most likely is Halley’s Comet (cf. Lagrange), which passed overhead in 12 B.C.; but this seems impossibly early. 4. Martin opts for a number of planetary conjunctions and massings in 3/2 B.C. This suggestion depends on his entire reconstruction and late date for Herod’s death (see on 2:1), which is no more than a possibility. The theory also shares some of the difficulties of 1. 5. In the light of 2:9, many commentators insist that astronomical considerations are a waste of time: Matthew presents the “star” as strictly supernatural. This too is possible and obviously impossible to falsify, but 2:9 is not as determinative as is often suggested (cf. on 2:9). The evidence is inconclusive.”

[<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> 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.]

This is the *climax* of the entire passage.

In *anticipation* of meeting Jesus, the wise men “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” I love that phrase. I don’t think you could describe a greater kind of joy.

And from there, it’s as if everything goes into slow motion: “And *going* into the house, they *saw* the child with Mary his mother, and they *fell down* and *worshiped* him. Then, *opening* their treasures [or treasure boxes], they *offered* him gifts, *gold* and *frankincense* and *myrrh*.”

<pause>

Before we unpack that more together, let’s first debunk a few common misconceptions.

First, *unlike* the shepherds who visited when Jesus was born in a manger (Luke 2:8-20), if we consider verse 16, the wise men did not arrive until up to *two years* later, when Jesus and his family are in a “house.”

Second, we don’t know *how many* wise men there were. It’s often assumed that there were *three* of them because they present *three* gifts, but the number of gifts doesn’t necessitate the same number of wise men. There could have been two, three, or twenty wise men. All we know is that there was more than one.

Third, these wise men were probably not real “kings” as they’re often assumed to be; we even have a popular Christmas song called “We Three Kings.”<sup>14</sup> But they’re not called “kings” here but “wise men.”

You may have a footnote in your Bible that tells you that “wise men” is a translation of the Greek word *magi*. And during this time, the term *magi* was a catch-all way of referring to magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, dream-interpreters, and astrologers.

Kings would employ *magi* but they themselves were probably not kings.

<pause>

So, what *can* we say about these “wise men from the east” (as they’re called in verse 1)?

First, they were *Gentiles* (or non-Jews).

We can’t say with certainty *where* exactly these wise men were from, but we know that the Bible refers to *magi* in Babylon (Dan. 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7), and that the Jews were exiles in Babylon for 70 years, so they would have been *familiar* with Judaism and the prophecies about the Jewish Messiah or the Christ.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 85) writes: “The tradition that the Magi were kings can be traced as far back as Tertullian (died c. 225). It probably developed under the influence of OT passages that say kings will come and worship Messiah (cf. Pss 68:29, 31; 72:10–11; Isa 49:7; 60:1–6).” Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were very expensive. Such gifts tell us that these men had abundant resources. They had money that allowed them to travel and to give Jesus what they gave him. But such wealth does not necessitate royalty.”

<sup>15</sup> R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The *wise men* are, more correctly, ‘Magi’, originally the name of a Persian priestly caste, but later used widely for magicians and astrologers (cf. Acts 13:6), a numerous class in most countries in Western Asia at the time (see further, Brown, pp. 167–168). Astrology had been developed into a sophisticated science especially in Babylonia, and there is evidence for its influence also in Palestine (see AB, p. 14). From what part of the East these Magi came can only be guessed; their gifts (v. 11) are most likely of Arabian origin, but would be available to and used by the Magi of Babylonia, and this is perhaps their most likely place of origin. Their reference to ‘the king of the Jews’, and their need to enquire about the birthplace of the Messiah, imply that they were Gentiles, though with a limited knowledge of Judaism (which was well established in Babylonia).” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 84-85) writes: “The ‘Magi’ (*magoi*) are not easily identified with precision. Several centuries earlier the term was used for a priestly caste of Medes who enjoyed special power to interpret dreams. Daniel (Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7) refers to *magoi* in the Babylonian Empire. In later centuries down to

If they were from Babylon, then there's some irony here. The Jews were once *exiles* in Babylon, but now the Babylonians are coming to *worship* the king of the Jews.

Either way, these wise men were clearly *not* Jews.

It's interesting that, in Matthew's Gospel account, which was written for more of a Jewish audience<sup>16</sup>, the very *first* people to come and worship Jesus as the Christ are *not* Jews but *Gentiles*.

Jesus is not *just* the king of the *Jews*, but many Old Testament passages prophesied that *all nations* will come to worship him and present gifts to him (e.g., Ps. 68:29, 31; 72:10–11; Isa. 49:7; 60:1–6).

And Matthew *bookends* his Gospel account with this truth. Here, the *nations* are coming to worship him, and at the end, Jesus calls us to go and make disciples of *all nations*.

Jesus has *all authority* as king over *all creation*; and Jesus is worthy of *worship* from *all nations*.

<pause>

NT times, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future, and the like. Some Magi honestly inquired after truth; many were rogues and charlatans (e.g., Acts 8:9; 13:6, 8; cf. R.E. Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, pp. 167–68, 197–200; TDNT, 4:356–59). Apparently these men came to Bethlehem spurred on by astrological calculations. But they had probably built up their expectation of a kingly figure by working through assorted Jewish books (cf. W.M. Ramsey, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, 4th ed. [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920], pp. 140–49). The tradition that the Magi were kings can be traced as far back as Tertullian (died c. 225). It probably developed under the influence of OT passages that say kings will come and worship Messiah (cf. Pss 68:29, 31; 72:10–11; Isa 49:7; 60:1–6). The theory that there were three “wise men” is probably a deduction from the three gifts (2:11). By the end of the sixth century, the wise men were named: Melkon (later Melchior), Balthasar, and Gasper. Matthew gives no names. His *magoi* come to Jerusalem (which, like Bethlehem, has strong Davidic connections [2 Sam 5:5–9]), arriving, apparently (cf. Note 5), from the east—possibly from Babylon, where a sizable Jewish settlement wielded considerable influence, but possibly from Persia or from the Arabian desert. The more distant Babylon may be supported by the travel time apparently required (see on 2:16). Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “In Daniel 2:2, 10 LXX, the term *magos* is used of the wise men Nebuchadnezzar asks to tell and interpret his dream. Also in Daniel 5, which I referred to earlier, after Belshazzar sees the writing on the wall, he “called loudly to bring in the enchanters . . . and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, ‘Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation . . .’ and on he goes. So his “wise men” (although note the Greek word used is *epaoidos* instead of *magos*) are likely ours—astrologers, enchanters, magicians, wizards of sorts. I picture them as a mix between Gandalf, David Copperfield, and Jeane Dixon. While I doubt they wrote “the daily horoscopes for the Baghdad Gazette,” I don’t doubt that they were stargazers who thought present and future events were to be found in the stars. And while I don’t think that they were quacks or charlatans as are most astrologers today—for example, Sylvia Browne or Miss Cleo—I do think they believed in and practiced magic of sorts, the same kind as Pharaoh’s wise men (“Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt . . .” [Exodus 7:11; cf. Genesis 41:8]) and as Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer, as he is known in Acts 8:9–24 (cf. Acts 13:6, 8).”

<sup>16</sup> Daniel M. Doriani (“Matthew” in *Matthew-Luke*, ESVEC, vol. 8 [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) writes: “Matthew wrote for Jewish readers who would embrace the mission of making disciples of the nations. Matthew is not simply “the Gospel for the Jews,” although it is the Gospel most readily understood by Jewish readers. When Matthew mentions Jewish customs, he feels no need to explain them. So he refers to fasting (6:16) ritual handwashing (15:2, 10–11; 23:25–26), the temple tax (17:24–27), phylacteries (23:5), and whitewashed tombs (23:27), to name a few, and he explains none of them. He uses Hebrew or Aramaic and does not translate them into Greek in 5:22 and 27:6.7 By contrast, John translates even common terms, such as *rabbi* and *messiah* (John 1:38, 41). Further, Matthew frames theological discussions in terms of rabbinic debate. For example, Mark records the general question “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” But Matthew couches the issue in terms of rabbinic debates: “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (Matt. 19:3; cf. Mark 10:2). Matthew also quotes the OT more than the other Gospel writers do. He quotes the OT eight times in his first four chapters, either introducing the quotation by stating “it is written” or including a note declaring that an event fulfills the quoted OT prophecy. The “it is written” formula highlights the quotations and teaches readers to understand Jesus’ life through the OT (1:22–23; 2:5–6, 17–18; 3:3; 4:4, 7, 10, 14–16). Then, early in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes OT law and interprets it six more times (5:21–48). Later, when Pharisees criticize Jesus for dining with tax collectors and sinners, Matthew alone records that Jesus justifies himself by citing OT prophecy: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (9:13; cf. Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32). All of this reflects Matthew’s interest in Israel’s Scriptures. Matthew’s frequent references to law and righteousness (5:6, 10, 21–48; 6:1, 33) show Jesus’ reverence for both. Jesus’ interpretation of the law simplifies it, which should appeal to pious Jews who do not live like scribes or Pharisees but still pursue holiness. On the other hand, Jesus is eager to interpret the law correctly. He explores its true meaning, sometimes in unexpected ways, yet promises to uphold it (5:17–20). Matthew also mentions OT characters such as David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jonah more often than the other Gospel writers do. He alone mentions cities and regions such as Sodom, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Finally, Matthew’s phrasing of Jesus’ language seems to be adapted for Jewish readers. With few exceptions (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43), Matthew has “kingdom of heaven” instead of “kingdom of God,” which Mark and Luke use. Gentiles might not understand “kingdom of heaven,” but Jews would prefer “kingdom of heaven” because it avoids the use of God’s name. These points all suggest that Matthew is most easily understood by Jews. Matthew also addresses distinctively Jewish concerns. He appeals to Jews who want to know if Jesus is the Messiah. So his genealogy starts with Abraham, father of the Jews. Matthew often calls Jesus “son of David” (9:27; 20:30; 21:9) and “king of the Jews” (2:2; 27:37). And when Jesus is born, magi come to worship Jesus, fulfilling expectations that the nations would come to Israel to worship. So yes, Matthew wrote for Jews. But he included Gentiles, too.”

Second, the wise men were *sinners*.

When we think of the *magi*, we ought to think of the magicians and sorcerers in Pharaoh's court who tried to *imitate* Moses' miraculous signs "by their secret arts" (Exod. 7:11). They are not well thought of in Scripture.

In fact, the Old Testament *mocks* astrologers (Isa. 47:13–15; Dan. 1:20; 2:27; 4:7; 5:7) and *forbids* sorcery, astrology, and all such pagan practices (Deut. 18:9–14; Jer. 10:1–2).<sup>17</sup>

God does *not* approve of astrology. He does *not* want his people looking to the stars to understand present and future events but rather to look to his revealed word.

Yet, he *revealed* himself to these Gentile sinners *through* such sinful practices.

Just consider that for a moment. God *may* save sinners even *through* means he does *not* approve.

Think of God beginning to save Israel from the Philistines through Samson's constant sinful actions.

Think of God saving people even in false churches or extremely unhealthy churches. By the grace of God, people can still come to understand and believe the true gospel *despite* all the ways the church denies it or undermines it.

God clearly does *not* approve of sinful actions and false churches, but he is *so* kind and *so* gracious to *still* save his people from their sins even *through* such sinful means.

Now, just because God *can* and *does* save people through such means does *not* mean that we should then *adopt* those means.

God saved Balaam from death through making his donkey speak to him (Num. 22:31–35). Yet our strategy for evangelism and missions is *not* to drop donkeys in front of lost people. Instead, God calls us to personally go and speak the good news of Jesus Christ to them (Rom. 10:14–15).

God *ordinarily* saves through the right preaching of his word through the healthy witness of his disciples in healthy churches—and *that's* what God's word says should be our strategy. But he is free to sovereignly save sinners through *whatever* means he chooses, and that should give us much reason to rejoice!

<pause>

Third, the wise men *worshiped* Jesus.

The word for "worship" here may mean simply to pay homage (or honor and respect) to someone, which would make sense if they believed Jesus was born "*king* of the Jews."

But the same word can also refer to worship of *God*, and Matthew frequently uses it in that context towards Jesus where his more-than-human status is recognized (e.g., Matt. 14:33; 28:9, 17).

And given all that Matthew has told us about Jesus thus far, it seems that the wise men worshiped Jesus better than they knew.<sup>18</sup>

Just consider the faith that was required of these wise men.

<sup>17</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 86.

<sup>18</sup> R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "The verb *worship* (*proskynēō*) need mean no more than to pay homage to a human dignitary, but Matthew frequently uses it in contexts where Jesus' more-than-human status is recognized (e.g. 14:33; 28:9, 17), and the same implication may be present here." D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 85–86) writes: "'Worship' (cf. Notes) need not imply that the Magi recognized Jesus' divinity; it may simply mean 'do homage' (Broadus). Their own statement suggests homage paid royalty rather than the worship of Deity. But Matthew, having already told of the virginal conception, doubtless expected his readers to discern something more—viz., that the Magi 'worshiped' better than they knew."

- They believed Jesus was the “king of the Jews” (v. 1) or “the Christ” (v. 4) even before they ever saw him.
- They believed in him even before Jesus would later teach with authority and do many miracles.
- They believed in him when he was just a young child, helpless and weak, cleaving to his mother for care.

And they fell down and worshiped this child as the Christ.<sup>19</sup>

<pause>

The three gifts that the wise men gave Jesus were very expensive and fit for a king.

Though they would not have realized it, as early as the third century, these gifts were found to have symbolic value.

- Gold signified Jesus’ royalty as king,
- frankincense signified Jesus’ deity because it was used in the temple worship of God (Exod. 30:9, 34-38),
- and myrrh signified Jesus’ humanity because it was used in his crucifixion and burial (Mark 15:23; John 19:39).<sup>20</sup>

That’s why, even in the song “Joy Has Dawned,” which we sang earlier in our service, it says:

Gold, a King, is born today;  
Incense, God is with us;  
Myrrh, His death will make a way  
And by His blood He'll win us.

Just like they *worshiped* better than they knew, the wise men gave *gifts* better than they knew.

<pause>

For the wise men, “[t]hey had set their hearts on seeing Him ‘who was born King of the Jews;’ and they never rested until they saw Him.”<sup>21</sup>

Consider their faith, their travel, their joy, their falling down, and their gifts—all for *Jesus*.

<sup>19</sup> J. C. Ryle (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/expository\\_web.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/expository_web.html)) writes: “They believed in Christ when they had never seen Him—but that was not all. They believed in Him when the Scribes and Pharisees were unbelieving—but that again was not all. They believed in Him when they saw Him a little infant on Mary’s knee, and worshiped Him as a king. This was the crowning point of their faith. They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of divinity and greatness to overawe them. They saw nothing but a new-born infant, helpless and weak, and needing a mother’s care like any one of ourselves. And yet when they saw that infant, they believed that they saw the divine Savior of the world.”

<sup>20</sup> “Frankincense is resin used ceremonially for the only incense permitted on the altar (Ex. 30:9, 34–38). Myrrh is sap used in incense and perfume and as a stimulant tonic. The gifts were likely used providentially to support the family in their flight to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15)” (study note on Matthew 2:11, in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]). R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The homage of these learned Gentiles is intended to indicate the fulfilment of such passages as Psalm 72:10ff.; Isaiah 60:1ff. (these passages probably account for the later Christian tradition that these Magi were ‘kings’), and two of the gifts are specifically mentioned in Psalm 72:15 (gold); Isaiah 60:6 (gold and frankincense). They are gifts fit for a king, as is also myrrh (Ps. 45:8; Song 3:6), and they remind the reader of the homage of the Queen of Sheba to the son of David, with her gifts of spices and gold (1 Kgs 10:2). The use of *myrrh* in the crucifixion (Mark 15:23) and burial (John 19:39) of Jesus has led to the tradition that it symbolizes his suffering, but in the Old Testament it is rather a symbol of joy and festivity (see references above, and Prov. 7:17; Song 5:5).” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 89) writes: “Bringing gifts was particularly important in the ancient East when approaching a superior (cf. Gen 43:11; 1 Sam 9:7–8; 1 Kings 10:2). Usually such gifts were reciprocated (Derrett, *NT Studies*, 2:28). That is not mentioned here, but a first-century reader might have assumed it and seen the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20) as leading to its abundant fruition. Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees; myrrh exudes from a tree found in Arabia and a few other places and was a much-valued spice and perfume (Ps 45:8; Song of Songs 3:6) used in embalming (John 19:39). Commentators, ancient (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1. 60) and modern (Hendriksen), have found symbolic value in the three gifts—gold suggesting royalty, incense divinity, and myrrh the Passion and burial. This interpretation demands too much insight from the Magi. The three gifts were simply expensive and not uncommon presents and may have helped finance the trip to Egypt. The word “treasures” probably means “coffers” or “treasure-boxes” in this context.”

<sup>21</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/expository\\_web.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/expository_web.html).

They did not just *passively* wait to have a worship encounter with Jesus, but they *actively* pursued Jesus in a way that was *costly* for them.

And how about us, who know *much more* about Jesus than these wise men did—who he is, what he's done, and what he's promised?

Worship may not always look *this* extravagant, but there is a *costly pursuit* to worship Jesus even in the everyday. Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

So as we examine our *worship* of Jesus, let's ask ourselves some sobering questions:

- What desires am I denying for the sake of loving Christ?
- What diligence am I showing in my fellowship of Christ?
- What does my faith in Jesus cost me?<sup>22</sup>

Though the wise men were *Gentile sinners*, in their *diligent worship* of Jesus, we see that they were truly *wiser* than they knew.

Herod and all those in Jerusalem were *troubled*, the Jewish religious leaders were *indifferent*, but the way these wise men *worshiped* Jesus revealed the worthiness of Christ.

### Conclusion

As we close, we need to remember that these are all *responses* to *Jesus*.

So our focus is not so much on Herod and all those in Jerusalem, the religious leaders, or even the wise men who responded rightly, but our focus is on *Jesus*—the *only* one deserving of worship.

If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ today, I pray that you would come to see him as he truly is.

If you've been a believer for as far back as you can remember, and you're *familiar* with the gospel, I also pray that you would see him *afresh* today.

What a Savior, what a Friend,  
What a glorious mystery:  
Once a babe in Bethlehem,  
Now the Lord of history.

Let's pray.

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<sup>22</sup> J. C. Ryle (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/expository\\_web.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/expository_web.html)) asks similar questions: “It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men's example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our souls? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.”