

Matthew 2:1-12



The Magi and the Star

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. David S. Jordan-Haas
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MATTHEW 2:1-12: Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, look! Magi (Wise Men) from the East arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is the one who was born king of the Jews? We’re asking because we saw His star at its rising and we have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was deeply troubled. So Herod gathered all the senior pastors and the Bible teachers of the people of God, and Herod pushed them with this question: ‘Where is the Christ supposed to be born?’ And the Magi’s answer was, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, because that is exactly what was written by the prophet Micah Then Herod secretly summoned the Magi and grilled them about the time of the star’s appearance. Then Herod sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: ‘Go and look really hard for the Child, and when you find Him, come back and tell me so that I, too, may come and worship him.’ So when the Magi had finished their audience with the king, they left, and look! there was the star that they had seen before at its rising! And now it was moving on ahead of them until it came and stood shining right over the place where the Child lay! When they saw this star, the Wise Men felt the deepest and most profound joy. And when they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother, they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened up their treasure chests and brought Him gifts – gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they went home to their country another way.

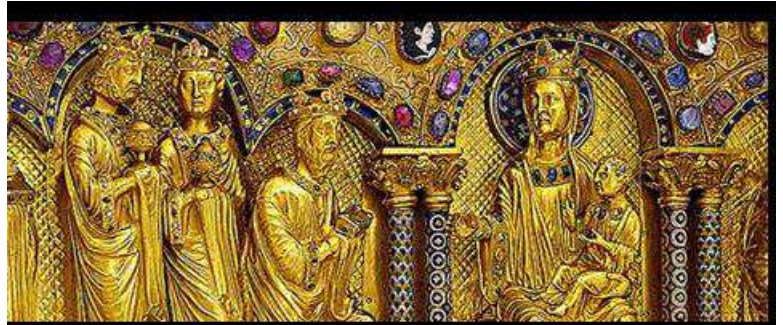
The story about the Magi—or the Wise Men or (as one translation puts it) that “Party of Astrologers,” or We Three Kings of Orient Are (take your pick)—they’re following a shining star. They’re following a star, shining down from Heaven upon the Earth. It’s a star shining right over the very place where the Child lay! The Wise Men are right on it, laser-focused, following that Star. Since it’s still very much Christmas, we have this story for you about the star, and a wise man, and also the innkeeper on that Christmas Night. Here we find Stuart (Stu), owner of Bethlehem’s very own Bed & Breakfast. Stu ponders the meaning of the star shining over his barn. Stu wonders about all the events taking place that evening.



(Drama: The Innkeeper’s Dilemma: the Encounter with a Wise Man, by John Gibb, Bill Gibb, and Mike Cash)

A “Merry Census,” is that what Stu just said? That doesn’t sound quite right, given what we just went through on Thursday Night—Christmas Eve, or, what Ru called it, a “Mary had the Christ Child in a barn after following a star all day”! I don’t think so.

I love thinking about the Wise Men. They’ve come from a distant land. Can you imagine what it was like for those Magi, for them to lay eyes on Jesus—face to face with the Prince of Peace, the Savior of the World? What a meeting! Amazing,



“The Shrine of the Three Kings”,
Cologne Cathedral, 1220 AD

really. The Magi were pagan, Gentile foreigners. They weren’t Bible-believing/Torah-keeping folk. They’ve come from far away, nowhere close to the Holy City of Jerusalem. Laser-focused on following the Star, when they meet Jesus, the Magi can’t contain their joy. They fall to their knees and worship Him. What an encounter! The least-likely men meeting Jesus in the least-likely of circumstances!



For my 5th Christmas, 1966, I got the “Daniel Boone” outfit, complete with his “Tennessee Poor Boy” long rifle, gun powder horn, plastic Bowie knife, and best of all, a coon-skin cap, just like the one Fess Parker wore! It was the best Christmas present ever! But that present couldn’t possibly come close to imagining that moment with Jesus. Maybe it would be like enjoying a big bowl of ice cream (Rocky Road) for the very first time, after giving it up for the 40 days and 40 nights during Lent! No, that’s not even close to the profound sweetness of laying eyes on Jesus for the very first time.

Now I’d be doing you a real disservice if I didn’t correct or confess some things during this sermon today. First, I confess to you that I didn’t grow up to be Daniel Boone. I ended up becoming a pretty non-descript pastor, not that rugged frontier outdoorsman!

More importantly, though, I’ve got to correct some myths surrounding the Magi and baby Jesus story. There are three corrections to make: First, we’re never told in Scripture how many wise men there were. They’re only mentioned in Matthew’s gospel, and we assume there were three Magi only because three gifts were given to the Christ Child—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—three gifts, one each, from each Magi.

Second, the three (not four or 12 or 20) men, the three men weren't "wise men" (sorry Mike Cash). Here's how scholar Anthony Billington busts the Wise Men myth: By the 1st-Century, the term "Magi" referred to astronomers, fortune-tellers, or star-gazers. So, (when you think of them) think "magicians." Think Horoscope Fanatics. Think those who claim to tell the future by reading stars, tea leaves, and chicken gizzards. In the Bible, think of the magicians in Egypt at the time of Moses, or the interpreters of dreams in the book of Daniel, or Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8 (LICC, Dec 21st 2009).

Jesus really does have that kind of life-changing impact on people who are (seemingly) farthest away on the margins. Jesus (when you meet Him) can bring a life to life, from any walk of life, or belief, or unbelief—magical, philosophical, astrological! The Magis' lives are changed when they meet Jesus Christ, Immanuel!

Third, despite all the Nativity Sets and Crèche Scenes, the truth is the Magi weren't there on that Silent Night/Holy Night, Away in the Manger scene. They weren't there singing "Joy to the World" with the shepherds. Jesus was more likely a toddler by the time the star-gazing astronomers arrived at Mary and Joseph's doorstep! When the Magi did find Jesus, the Holy Family had long since moved out of the Innkeeper's barn! Tracking that bright Morning Star took time; then add the travel time, some 550 miles from Persia or Babylonia (modern-day Iran/Iraq) to Bethlehem. Jesus had to have been two-to-three years old by the time the Magi laid eyes on Him.



When those men meet Jesus face-to-face they are overwhelmed with joy. When the Magi lay eyes on Jesus they can't help themselves but to worship him. Frankly, how many Magi there were, or who they were, or even where they came from, or however old Jesus was or wasn't—these questions don't ultimately matter.

Here's what matters: The Magi provide a textbook example of seeking a life with Jesus and worshipping Jesus upon finding Him. Two things: The Magi were, one, single-focused on the star. And when the star led them to Bethlehem, two, the Magi were single-minded on Jesus. Single-minded and single-focused. Single-focused—tracking that star, the Magi didn't let up, they didn't waver, or get off course. They weren't

deterred by a threatening, suspicious, malicious, insecure king. The Magi were single-focused on seeking a life with Jesus the Messiah. Then single-minded—after searching comes finding. When the Magi find Jesus, the overwhelming joy they feel leads them to the single-minded act of worshipping Him. They bow down and give the Savior of the World everything they've got. This is the way for us, too. There is no other choice for them/for us. With their possessions, posture, and praise the Magi bow down and worship the Christ-Child.

Whether it's accurate or not, I think there's a reason for positioning the three Wise Men at the Manger scene. I mean, down through the Christian ages almost every piece of Sacred Nativity Art has the three Wise Men at the stable with the shepherds and cattle and drummer boy (a whole other story!). Why? The Magi are the example of giving true gifts to the One who ends up giving the most ultimate gift—His death for our life, a life of freedom from sin, a life in abundance, and a joy that will never come to an end!

3 Best Gifts to give to the Christ-Child:

Spending **TIME** in God's Presence

Using your **TALENTS** to glorify
and worship Him

Giving the **TREASURE** of our
heart and devotion to Him

With irrepressible joy, the Magi give the best, most precious, most valuable they've got -- gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Question: What is the equivalent "gold-frankincense & myrrh" gift in your life, to give to Him? I recommend three gifts. Give God your gift of **time**:

Time spent in His Presence, seeking Him daily, in prayer and study, daily time spent serving Him, imitating Him. Give God your gifts of talent—of using our skills, abilities, energy, resources to glorify Him, by the work of our hands, voices, eyes, our minds, hearts, doing more to establish His Kingdom on earth. Give God your gifts of treasure—our fervent desire and devotion, our single-focused, single-minded love for Him, our families, our neighbors, His world. Time, talent, treasure. Giving Jesus the best gifts of our lives—every nook and cranny, every room in our lives—is our offering to the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords—to the baby born in a barn. This Christmas...this life...our lives—it's about Jesus Christ, after all.