

## Follow God's Word

- Traditionally, their names were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. But we really don't know for sure. The Bible doesn't tell us their names.
- Traditionally, we believe they were three men. But we really don't know for sure. It is assumed that they were three men because there were three gifts given to Jesus.
- Traditionally, we sing of these men, "We three kings of orient are." But we really don't know for sure. In fact, it is far more likely that they weren't kings. They were Magi, men who were into astronomy and astrology and magic.
- Traditionally, we place these men at the manger scene. But that's not accurate. From Jesus' birth to the point these men visit Jesus, Joseph and Mary had moved from a stable into a house. It says, "**On coming to the house,**" these men saw the child with his mother Mary.

So if you are following all of this, you've got to wonder why is the story of the Magi in God's holy, inspired Word? Why does Matthew include this story in his gospel account? It's for two very important reasons:

The story of the Magi is included in Holy Scripture because as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6, the Messiah (the Christ) would be a light for the Gentiles so "**that the Lord's salvation may reach to the ends of earth,**" (Isaiah 49:6). To reach Gentiles like the Magi, and like you.

Technically, this Epiphany weekend is your Christmas, and the story of the Magi proclaims to you, promises you, assures you that God really did love the world so that he gave his one and only Son. The reason you are here today, the reason you bow down and worship Jesus today, the reason you present Jesus with your gifts is because, by God's grace and power, you, like the Magi, know and believe that Jesus is your Savior. Merry Christmas, Gentiles!!! It's because of him and through faith in him that you never have to walk in darkness again. Jesus is your light of life!

But allow me to show you another reason the story of the Magi is included in Holy Scripture. Listen carefully, because it is going to lead you in a very specific direction:

When you read the story of the Magi, you have to wonder: "What prompted the Magi to travel from the area of present day Iraq all the way to Jerusalem, and how did they know a king would be born in Israel at the precise time they journeyed to Jerusalem? According to Google maps, why would they travel some 600 miles, 247 hours on foot, to see a baby that they have no relation to? Well, the quick answer is the star. They said to King Herod, "**Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.**" But even the star is too simple of an answer. Yes, God specially created that star to guide the Magi to Jerusalem, and ultimately to Bethlehem. But the star doesn't answer how they knew a king would be born in Israel, or how they knew the star was this king's star. Notice they said, "His star."

So how did the Magi know? How did they know the “who,” “what,” and “where” of Matthew 2:1-12? They knew for this one reason: They followed God’s Word. Listen to that reason again: They followed God’s Word. Dear friends, if you want direction in your life, follow God’s Word. When you do, it will always lead you to Jesus, your Lord and Savior.

**THE** reason the Magi went to Jerusalem is because God’s Word promised a light to the Gentiles, promised a coming Messiah who would bring peace on earth and good will to mankind, promised a King who would rule the world with justice and righteousness forever. The Magi knew these promises because 600 years prior to Jesus’ birth, the Jews were held in captivity in Babylon, and during that time of captivity, it is clear that Jews, like the prophet Daniel (or even Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), shared their God and his Word with the Babylonians. And by God’s grace and power alone, there were those Babylonians who believed. Otherwise, there is absolutely no other reason the Magi would know of a future king or look for a future king in Israel, of all places.

What the Magi knew of the true and living God of Israel and their continued faith in God’s promises is another clear testimony to the power of God’s Word and how it preserves the faith of those who put their humble trust in God’s Word. It also describes the true nature of faith, believing what you don’t see and holding fast to what God’s Word says.

What happens in Matthew 2:1-12 and the Magi’s long journey to worship the newborn King is not legend or myth. It is the clear truth of what the apostle Paul states in Romans 1:16: **“The Gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the awe and wonder of Magi’s story in Matthew 2:1-12 is not only seen in the Magi themselves, BUT IT IS SEEN IN YOU. If you look at your life and the faith you have, your story is equally miraculous. Consider how God, through his Word, brought you out of your sinful darkness into his wonderful saving light; how you were once dead in your sins, but now, by God’s grace, have been made alive in Christ. Never take for granted how you came to faith in Jesus. Never take for granted what you know of him or why you know him. Never take for granted that **“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ”** (Romans 10:17). Yes, Merry Christmas, Gentile!

Now look a little more closely at verses 4-9: <sup>4</sup>**“When Herod had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written [that’s the prophet Micah in chapter 5]: <sup>6</sup>“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” <sup>8</sup>(Then Herod) sent them to Bethlehem... (and) <sup>9</sup>After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.”**

Why did the Magi specifically go to Bethlehem to find the newborn King? Because God's Word in Micah 5 directed them to go to Bethlehem. They followed God's Word, and it led them to Jesus. But notice who didn't go to Bethlehem with the Magi. The very ones who quoted the Word of God to the Magi – the chief priests and the teachers of the law - NONE of them go to Bethlehem. Do you find that strange? But that's the difference between faith and unbelief. One will follow God's Word, and the other will not, and as a result, one will find Jesus, and the other will not.

If you feel lost in life, if you struggle what to do or where to go, if you are not sure of your direction in this New Year, don't make the mistake the chief priests and teachers of the law made. Don't pass up following God's Word to Bethlehem. Don't pass up seeing Jesus. Don't pass up meeting your Lord and Savior.

- When you feel alone and wonder where God is, follow God's Word, and it will lead you to the One whose name is Emmanuel, God with us, and then you will be assured that you are never alone.
- When you are sick of making the same mistakes and repeating the same sins, follow God's Word, and it will lead you to the One who lived a perfect life for you in your place.
- When you struggle with the shame you wake up with in the morning and the guilt you go to bed with at night, follow God's Word, and it will lead you to the One who was condemned on the cross, in your place, for all your sins.
- When you are crushed or terrified by the reality and prospects of death, follow God's Word, and it will lead you to the One who conquered death and rose from the dead.
- When you are pessimistic of where this world is headed, follow God's Word, and it will lead you to One who has prepared a place for you in heaven and has written your name in the book of life.
- When you are experiencing difficulties in your life and are skeptical of how things are going to work out, follow God's Word, and it will lead you to the One who sits at the right hand of God and is actively working all things out for your good.

Do you understand who this One is? Do you understand to whom God's Word leads you? The Magi did too. Now you know why the Magi bowed down, worshiped Jesus, and presented him with gifts. Dear friends, Jesus is worthy of the same humility, adoration, and generosity from you. Amen.