

Search and Find

Matt. 2:1-12

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Good morning...let's go ahead and jump into our text today.

Matt. 2:1-12 – “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 of 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.”

One of the highlights for me last week was sharing the gospel at the end of our Christmas Spectacular shows. And something that you may not think about that I certainly have to is how to transition from what the audience has just seen - this HUGE presentation with flying angels, kings marching in to present their gifts, one is riding on an elephant...and then there's this big crescendo with ribbons and confetti flying through the air (**SHOW PIC**).

And I GET TO transition from that to immediately jumping into a simple presentation of the gospel...and I thought long and hard about how to do it. I came up with a simple line that goes something like this:

“What you have just seen in the last portion of this program IS the story of Christmas...and here's the thing, it really happened.”

Now, I stop right there and quickly move to explain *why* God did this – he did it because of love – and I have to stop there because from a time and clarity standpoint, I can't say:

“What you have just seen in the last portion of this program IS the story of Christmas...and here's the thing, it really happened –

- EXCEPT for the part about the kings – we get that from the Christmas Carol, “We Three Kings”...there’s a passage in Isaiah and Psalms that allude to this, but they were in fact wise men or as some translate, “Magi”...
- It really happened...EXCEPT for the fact that these wise men did NOT come immediately at his birth and to the stable, but instead probably months maybe up to a year or two later and came to a house and saw a child (v. 11)...
- It really happened...EXCEPT for the part about their only being three of them, scripture doesn’t tell us that, we just fill in the blanks because of the three gifts that are presented to Jesus...
- It really happened...EXCEPT for the part about one of them riding in on an elephant named Paige and banners and confetti coming out of the sky...

It really happened EXCEPT for those things! I can’t say that...and MOST people of course know this and give us the benefit of the doubt as we share in an artistic and creative way the story of Christmas.

The passage we are looking at today DOES fill us in on what happened specifically as it relates to the wise men, AND we are focusing in on their response to the birth of Christ.

Now, as a review:

- Mary and Joseph responded in trust and obedience...
- The angels responded in praise and worship...
- The shepherds responded in going and sharing with everyone they knew what they had seen, heard and experienced...

Today, we are looking at the response of the wisemen who followed a star all the way to Bethlehem.

I’m calling the message: **Search and Find**

Now, it would be helpful to give you a little context into who these wise men are and tell you where they came from, and how they ascertained information about the birth of Jesus. And I’d love to do that...the only problem is we aren’t given that much information about them!

Really, we can only make some conjectures. So, let’s talk about what we KNOW. We know generally, not specifically WHERE they came from:

Matt. 2:1 – “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.”

We’re not given any other information regarding their origin, just that they were from the east. Now, if you remember from our Daniel study – and you’ll see why the book of Daniel plays a

part in the Christmas story today...if you remember from our Daniel study, he was trained and schooled by the wise men of Babylon.

The wise men were the scholars of the day...they were the ancient philosophers...the scientists...the intellectuals. They were the ones the kings called on to interpret dreams and decipher what was happening in the cosmos!

These were no fools! They were learned men who would have had access to the ancient manuscripts and writings of those that had gone before them.

One commentator – I quoted this in our Daniel series to give some insight into the origin of wisemen.

John Goldingay wrote: “**The Babylonian wise men were guardians of the sacred traditional lore developed and preserved in Mesopotamia over centuries, covering natural history, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, myth and chronicle. Much of the learning had practical purpose, being designed to be applied to life by means of astrology, oneirology (dream research), hepatoscopy (liver of animals), and the study of other organs, rites of purification, sacrifice, incantation, exorcism, and other forms of divination and magic.**”

Now, again, we just know they came from the east. We’re not certain whether or not they came from ancient Babylon, but if they did come from somewhere in or around Persia, they likely traveled around 800 miles to make the journey.

That’s some dedication. You travel 20 miles a day, that’s a 40 day trip...and that’s obviously without all the luxuries we have today – this is a diligent, labor-some search these men and most likely their entourages took – and again, we have no idea how many there were!

So, we know generally WHERE they came from. Secondly: We know WHY they came and WHAT brought them to Jerusalem.

Matt. 2:2 – “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.”

Okay...so evidently, these wise men had some kind of knowledge that a special king of the Jews had been born. How they received this knowledge, we can only make assume and again, make conjectures.

We do know that Daniel was living in Babylon during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus which cover the years 605-536 BC. We also know that Daniel was promoted time and again during this time and would have had a tremendous amount of influence over what the wise men of the day would have studied and read.

It's very possible...I'd say extremely likely that Daniel would have made known certain prophecies that he was aware of in what we refer to as our Old Testament.

One of those prophecies comes from **Numbers 24:17b** – “...a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...”

This was a prophecy spoken by a man named Balaam. He was summoned by Balak, the king who wanted a curse pronounced on Israel. Instead, he prophesied that a scepter would come...a ruler...a new king would come out of Israel.

You take this prophecy along with some of Daniel’s prophecies which no doubt were studied by wise men through time. Daniel, if you remember wrote of an everlasting kingdom to come that would be stronger than all other kingdoms. Daniel spoke of the “Ancient of Days” and “Son of man” to come and gave certain timelines (9:24-27) to when this would occur.

Did these wise men put all of this together? It is certainly possible...especially with the help of God behind them!

They follow the star...which by the way, wise men only follow certain stars – wise men (and women) don’t follow this star! (**SHOW Cowboys IMAGE**)

They follow “his star” to Jerusalem which would make sense because this was the capital of ancient Judah. Herod “the king” at the time of course had a palace there from which he ruled and governed. They show up, and ask, “Where is the king?”

Now, I’m not going to stay on this Herod stuff long, because it’s not the point of the message today, but do you remember from our Daniel study how much of a loose cannon Nebuchadnezzar was?

- Remember how nuts he was?
- How he would fly off the handle in a moment?
- How you didn’t want to get on his bad side?

Well, Herod is Nebo 2.0. This guy was ruthless! He ruled for 37 years – his nickname was “Herod the Great” mainly because this guy was a builder. He rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, he constructed palaces in Jericho and in Caesarea Maritima.

Listen to his track record. He had one of his wives, a mother -in law, and three of his sons executed. One commentator noted, “maintaining his throne was his priority – indeed his neurosis. No rivals were brooked.”

So, when wise men from the east show up with their traveling entourage – it was for sure a scene! Word was getting around about this group being in town and questions they were asking about a king being born.

Herod’s ears are perking up...he’s on notice! If there was any threat to his rule, it’d be taken care of. He...and he alone would be “king of the Jews”!

Matt. 2:3-4 – “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.”

So, take note of what is going on here! The hope of a Messiah AND the expectation of a Messiah – i.e. a king that was to come rule and reign was NOT a news flash. It was a prophecy that most were taught and aware of!

This is proven by the fact that when Herod calls in the priests and teachers of the law, and asks where this king is to be born, they didn’t have to go search for an answer...they didn’t have to google it...it was immediate! They could quote it!

Matt. 2:5- “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:⁶ ““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.””

That prophecy is straight from the book of Micah...it’s quoted from Micah 5:2. Isn’t it interesting...and it’s just a preaching point that the religious leaders of the day KNEW where the Messiah would be born AS it was prophesied, yet didn’t care to go check it out!

That’s amazing to me. Bethlehem is only 5-6 miles from Jerusalem. These religious leaders could have said to the wisemen, “I’ll go with you...let’s check it out!” BUT...we have NO record of that happening.

Religious people who KNEW the scripture, but were indifferent to it! They were seemingly uninterested to go and see if what these wise men had traveled so far for was reality.

As theologian and author, **Sinclair Ferguson** writes: **“The prophecy of Micah made no more impact on them than if they had solved the morning-newspaper crossword puzzle or the daily sudoku. They answered Herod’s question, packed up the scroll of Micah in its sacred container, and went home. It is possible to know the Bible well and yet be deaf to its message.”**

We’re focusing on the response of the wise men today, but as religious people ourselves let’s NOT miss the response of the religious people of Herod’s day. They knew Bible trivia, but it didn’t move them to go see if the Savior had been born.

We want what we know with our heads to make its way to our heart and to our hands and feet!

That’s what true of these wise men. Look at the scripture.

Matt. 5:7-8 – “Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

Now, we know that was a lie! Keep reading Matthew. When the wise men don't come back after they see Jesus, Herod is irate and sends word to kill all boys age 2 and under in Bethlehem, and it's not until Herod dies that Mary and Joseph who escaped to Egypt to avoid his murderous rage move their family back to Nazareth.

As for the wise men, let's look at what happens.

Matt. 5:9-10 – “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.

¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”

A lot of ink has been spilled on this star and what it was! Again, we only have what the text tells us. Was it an angel? Was it a comet? Was it a nova or super nova? Does it's light represent the shekinah glory of God – much like the light that radiated from the tent of meeting or that led Israel by night as they wandered through the wilderness.

All we know is what the text tell us. It refers to it as “his star” (v. 2) and that it led them to the house where Jesus was.

Matt. 5:11-12 – “On coming to the house (so, they are not in the stable in the back of an inn any longer...this is how we know it's AFTER the birth when they come. We know this also because it say), they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they (here it is...the response of the wise men...THIS is the focus of the message today. They see the child...they one they have searched for and now found and they) bowed down and worshiped him.” Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

The major response I want to highlight regarding the wisemen seeing Jesus is that they **GIVE!**

They give to Jesus their worship...they give to him their treasure...and they give to him their time. Let's look at each of these briefly as we start to bring this message to a close.

1. They gave Jesus their worship

The text says (v. 11), “the saw the child with his mother” – incidentally 4x in Matthew chapter two, Matthew uses this phrase highlighting the child was seen first – he's the focus!

Remember, Matthew's writing his gospel with a Jewish audience in mind and he is emphasizing that Jesus is the Messiah...he is the promised one. And what was the prophecy concerning this “child”?

We read these EVERY Christmas!

Isaiah 9:6-7 – “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

This child is “God in the flesh” and so the response of the wise men when they saw him was to “bow down and worship”. I love that they bowed down...you bow before a king!

You know posture in worship says a lot! Our worship team has led us in worship and we are progressively more expressive in our worship probably than ever before...and I’m grateful for their leadership!

We are much more expressive as a people...and I’m not talking about Champion Forest, I’m just talking about church in general.

Illus. Church growing up - When I was coming up, you didn’t express yourself in worship! You couldn’t! For one thing, you were holding a hymnal!

I remember when I was growing up and we went from hymnals to the screen...this was like the early 90’s. I remember seeing a person raise their hands and vividly thinking, “What is he doing? Want a weirdo...he’s going to get asked not to come back here. We don’t do that!”

Worship and our expression of worship has changed through the years...there seems to be much more freedom. And look, when we worship, we should strive to never be a distraction or bring attention to ourselves because it’s not about us, but I say all this to say that posture IN worship is important. It really does communicate something!

Mark Batterson in his book, *The Circle Maker*: “**Physical posture is an important part of prayer** You can just substitute the word worship). **Posture is to prayer (worship) what tone is to communication. If words are what you say, then posture is how you say it. There is a reason why Scripture prescribes a wide variety of postures like kneeling, falling prostrate on your face, the laying on of hands, and anointing the head with oil. Physical postures help posture our hearts and minds.”**

So, whether it’s lifting the hands in surrender (the Bible says this is as an evening sacrifice to the Lord) or bowing a knee or silently standing before God...I’m not telling you HOW to worship and I am certainly not saying that those who raise their hands or jump and shout in church or more holy than those that do not...that’s not the point!

The point is that posture is important and as we see in this scripture, nobody had to tell the wisemen to bow down! They knew this was the right and willing response to seeing a king, and so they bowed down and worshipped.

I want our church to a culture where different outward postures of worship are welcomed AND where if you are not as expressive, that's not your personality you don't feel judged for standing in silence – posture of the heart is what is MOST important! It's different strokes for different folks...what matters is that we give Jesus the gift of our worship!

For these wise men, they bowed down. Are you? What's your response to King Jesus? He deserves our worship! Secondly, notice:

2. They gave Jesus their treasure

They gave gold – as they should! This is the gift fit for a king! And many scholars point out that this is probably how God provided for Mary and Joseph to make the trip to Egypt.

They gave frankincense – this was a type of resin that was used as incense. It was used in worship and gave off a pleasing aroma when it was burned.

They gave him myrrh – this was used in embalming as well as an antiseptic. This is what Jesus was offered when he was on the cross dying for the sins of the world – it was called “gall” when mixed with wine to drink...had a numbing affect to it.

Just think of this gift! It symbolized bitterness and suffering, and affliction. Quite a gift for a child...makes you wonder what these wise men were thinking in presenting to Jesus a gift like this.

Illus. Saw this cartoon earlier (SHOW IMAGE)

These gifts are important...they are significant because they were not given mindlessly. They foreshadow who Jesus is and what kind of life he would have...they point to his death. These gifts had value and it came at an expense!

The scripture says (v. 11b) – “opening their treasure”! This was a personal, sacrificial gift.

What about you? Are you giving God your best? OR are you just tipping him? Are you offering him that which costs you something or that which you will never miss when you give it!

I'm reminded of the story in the Old Testament where David is building an alter for the Lord and wants to build it on the site of Araunah, the Jebusite.

2 Sam. 2:22-24 – “Then Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood.”²³ All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God accept you.”²⁴ But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.”

David was not going to bring an offering that didn't cost him...and it's a good lesson for us. Jesus is our king! He is worthy of our very best and any offering we bring should cost us something!

We should respond in the same way these wise men did and that is give in a mindful, thoughtful, and sacrificial way.

They gave Jesus our worship. They gave him their treasure. Third, and finally:

3. They gave Jesus their time

Think about it...they traveled nearly 800 miles to see him. That took some time. They put everything on hold to go and see this newborn king, and they were not for a moment disappointed.

I loved that they searched for Jesus...asked questions...pursued him. I could paint a picture and say, they were led by the light of a star – certainly God guiding them. They get clarity from the word of God (Micah 5:2) – God's word will always give clarity to your search AND his word promises that WHEN you search for him, and search for him with all your heart, you will find him (Jer. 29:13).

I think one of the greatest gifts we can give God is our time! THIS shows our love for him and that he is the priority of our life like nothing else.

? – Are you giving Jesus your time? The first of it when you wake up in the morning. Are you pursuing him with all that's in you?

This Christmas...let this be the gift you give Jesus – that he will have first place in your heart and you can demonstrate this by giving him your time.

I love how one pastor I heard or read put this. He said, these wise men had all the treasure under heaven in their hands, the question is, do you have the treasure of heaven in your heart?

How will you respond to Christmas?

I hope you will trust and obey like Joseph and Mary. That you will praise and worship like the angels...that you will go and tell the world like the shepherds, and that you will give Jesus your worship, treasure and time like the wise men.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.