

A CHRISTMAS STORY
The Birth of the King
Matthew 2:1-10

Matthew 2:1-10~ ¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ “ ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ” ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

I. Introduction

It is a very popular story during the Christmas season ... the story of three noble individuals who traveled far to see this King. The story is also made very memorable as it is put into songs titled, “We Three Kings of Orient Are”. It is a very nice song. We sing it during every Christmas. The problem is that much of the information in the song are traditions. They do not accurately reflect the teaching in the Bible. Let me give you a few examples.

1. First, they were not three.

The tradition of THREE (3) comes, not from the Scriptures, but from the three gifts that were presented to the Baby Jesus as recorded in Matthew 2:11.

Matthew 2:11~ ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

There were three gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – so naturally there must have been three people, each giving one gift a piece. But that is an assumption. We really do not know how many. The Bible never says. It is likely, however, that these travelers are many... more than three, at least.

People usually traveled in a large caravan at this time because of the treacherous journey. Bandits and raiders would swoop down on the weary, unexpectant travelers and rob them ... robbing them of their treasures, and even at times, their life. So these travelers usually traveled in large group to protect themselves against bandits.

2. Second, they were not kings.

They were not kings. The Bible called them “magi”. Some translations render them as “wisemen.” In other words, they were astrologers ... wisemen who read the stars and interpreted the signs. They were not kings but noblemen. They were the ones who gave counsel to kings as they interpreted the signs from heaven.

3. Third, they were not from the Orient.

The song renders them from the Orient. They are not Asians. The song says that they were from the Orient is because the Bible says that they were men of the east.

Matthew 2:1~¹ 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

That is a little bit too far east. Many scholars believe that they were most likely Persians. And if so, they could have known about the coming Messiah because of Daniel the Prophet. Daniel was dragged into captivity during the Babylonian invasion and was elevated as the chief wiseman because of his wisdom in interpreting the will of God. When the Persian conquered Babylon, Daniel remained as the chief wiseman during the Persian empire.

Daniel wrote about the coming Messiah in his prophetic book (specifically in Daniel chapter 9) while he was in captivity. And it is likely that these wisemen learned of the coming Messiah through Daniel’s prophesy. After all, Daniel was the most revered and respected wiseman in Babylon and Persia.

4. Fourth, they were not there during the birth of Christ

The wisemen are always a part of the Naivety scene. We got Mary kneeling on the ground and hovering over Baby Jesus as he sleeps in the manger. Joseph is standing serenely next to Mary. The Shepherds are on the side looking in. And then you have the Wisemen walking towards Baby Jesus with their gifts. That is the tradition. But really, the Bible does not put them there at the birth of Jesus.

Many other traditions have the magi coming about 40 days after the birth of Christ. Places in South America and in Europe celebrate Christmas in January because of the coming magi. They called them “Magic Men”. But really, the Bible has these wisemen coming later, after the birth of Jesus ... much later ... about two years after the birth of Jesus.

There are three reasons.

- a. One: Jesus was a child by the time they saw Jesus. He was no longer a baby or an infant.

Matthew 2:11~¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him ...

- b. Two: Jesus was in a house by the time they saw Jesus.

Matthew 2:11~ ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him ...

Luke records that during the birth of Jesus, he was in a manger.

Luke 2:7~ ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

So obviously, time has progressed from the time Jesus was born in a manger to the time the wisemen visited him in a house.

- c. Three: Herod tried to wipe out the King by killing babies two years and younger.

The biblical narrative said that Herod wanted to kill the Messiah. Not knowing who Jesus was, Herod sought to kill all the babies, hoping to smother out the Messiah in the process. And the age that Herod gave to wipe them out was two years of age.

Matthew 2:16~ ¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

So it is reasonable to assume that by the time the wisemen visited Jesus and left, Jesus was about two years old.

Estimating a town of some 2,000 inhabitants at the time, about twenty male babies would have fallen into this category and been slain, for some doubtless escaped detection.¹

II. The Story

While the song, *We Three Kings of Orient Are*, are a wonderful song, the song is birth through traditions and not from the biblical text. But what is the story of wisemen about? Let me give you three things that the story is about.

1. First, it is about a King.

This story is about a King. Baby Jesus is a King. Look at verses 1 and 2.

Matthew 2:1-2~ 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, ² saying, "Where is he who

¹ Paul L. Maier, *In the Fullness of Time* (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1991), 64.

has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Make no mistake. Yes, Jesus is the Savior. But he is also the King. Yes, Jesus came to save us from sin. He is the Savior who saves us, as Matthew 1 and verse 21 declares.

Matthew 1:21~²¹ [The angel declares to Joseph,] “She [Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

But first and foremost, He came as the King. He came to bring his Kingdom. We are the subjects of this King. And Jesus is able to save us from our sins is because he is King.

There is a debate that has been going on for a long time on whether Jesus can be our Savior and not our King or our Lord. (This is known as the “Lordship Salvation” debate). Some argues that we first accept Jesus as our Savior, and as we progress in our Faith, Jesus becomes our Lord, our King. In other words, Jesus can be our Savior and NOT our King. We can be saved from Hell by accepting Jesus as our Savior only. We do not have to submit to Jesus as our Lord to be saved. No. Submitting under the Lordship of Jesus is for our rewards, not for our salvation.

This is bogus understanding of Jesus’ birth narrative. The misunderstand comes from the notion that Jesus came to save us from Hell. (Note that Jesus did not come to save us from Hell. He came to save us from our sins).

So, as we believe in Jesus, he is our Savior in a sense that he delivers us from Hell. This is Justification. But as we grow in Christ and become more sanctified, Jesus becomes our Lord or our King. This is Sanctification. Moreover, even if we do not submit to Jesus as King over our life, we are still save from Hell because He is our Savior.

This is a major misunderstanding of the biblical text. Once again, Jesus did not come to save us from Hell but to save us from our sins ... to save us from our sinful way of life ... to save us from living under the kingdom of darkness and transfer to His Kingdom of righteousness.

Ephesians 2:1-5~¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

Saved from what? Notice what Paul writes that Jesus saves us from:

- Sins (2:1)
- Following the Prince of the Power of the Air (2:2)

- Disobedience to God (2:2)
- Following the passions of our flesh (2:3)
- Carrying out our own deprived desires (2:3)
- Wrath, not necessary future wrath but present wrath (2:3)
- Trespasses (2:5)

Jesus saves us from our sins ... from living for ourselves so that we can live for God. This is what he saves us from. Jesus saves us so that we can live in righteousness as subjects of this great and awesome King, namely, King Jesus.

Jesus is not our Savior and then our Lord. It is the other way around. Jesus is our Savior because He is our Lord. Look at Luke chapter 2.

Luke 2:11~¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

You see that? He is our Savior because He is our Lord. He is our King. Salvation means that we enter into His Kingdom. We are His subject. And because Jesus is King, the wisemen naturally went to the Jerusalem where the King of the Jews, the Son of David, would sit on his throne.

And what does the subject do for the King? That's the second point.

2. Second, it is about Worship.

What do we do to the One who is born King? Well, we worship Him. And that is exactly what the wisemen did.

Matthew 2:2~² [wise men] 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."

Notice that we need to do two things to this King.

a. One: we come to King.

We need to come to Him. We do not just sit back and say, "Well, King, if you want me, come and get me." We need to come to Him. He is the King. He calls and we come.

Now, there is a sense in which God comes to us and seeks us out. Luke 19 tells us that.

Luke 19:10~¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

But there is also in another sense where we need to come to Him. Jesus tells us to come to Him and He will give us rest.

Matthew 11:28~²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

James says that we must come nearer to God first, and then God will come near to us.

James 4:8~⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

So we have to come to Him. I know there are some people that says, “Well, if Jesus wants me, he will come a get me.” Or, “If Jesus needs me to do so and so, then He just has to come and get me.”

He already has come. He came as the Baby King. He came and gave us His words through the Sacred Text. Now we need to come to Him as King. I find the contrast in Matthew chapter 2 to be interesting.

- 1) The Jews were God’s people, but they did not come. The Gentiles were not His people, but they come.
- 2) The Jews were “near” but they did not come to Him; the Gentiles were “far” but they came to Him.

During this season, the question that must be asked is, “Will we come?” “Will we draw near to Him?”

- b. Two: we worship the King.

The other thing that we need to do, like the wisemen, when coming face to face with this King is to worship Him.

Worship is an offering. Worship is bringing a sacrifice. Let me pause here and say a little bit about sacrifice. There is so much misunderstanding when we use the word “sacrifice”.

Sacrifice is NOT GIVING UP something. Sacrifice is BRINGING something ... offering something. Sacrifice is not a negative, an absent of something. Sacrifice is a positive, it is the present of something being given.

Some people have the tendency to think that I have to give something up. I have a so-called friend who thinks that sacrifice is giving things up. He would compare himself to me and tell me how much he had “sacrificed” ... how much he had given up.

- I sacrifice my career for God. I could have a good paying job, but I gave that up to serve God.
- I sacrifice my wife for God. I could have spent more time with my wife but I sacrifice our time together so I can serve God.
- I sacrifice my kids for God. I robbed them of their childhood so that I can serve God.

- I gave all these things up for God.

That is not sacrifice. At least, that is not biblical sacrifice. Worship is a sacrifice in a sense that it is bring an offering. It is bringing something to God, not taking something away from God. I do not understand that mentality.

That mentality of giving something up instead of bringing something to God is reinforced in our tradition. Every year during Lent Season, people and pastors and priests would ask, “What are you giving up during this 40-days of Lent?”

“Giving up?” Why give up? Better question is, “What are you giving to God?” What are you sacrificing for God? What are you bring to give to God?” It is positive, not negative.

And notice that this is what the wisemen did. They came and worship Baby Jesus. They brought some sacrifices. Again, they did not bring nothing. They brought something.

Matthew 2:11~ ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

How did they “worship”? They offered Him something. They sacrificed. They brought Him an offering. In the Old Testament, worship is blood sacrifice. It is a blood offering.

In the New Testament worship or sacrifice is three things. There are three sacrifices that please God.

Hebrews 13:15~ ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

There is the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips. It is giving praise and thanksgiving and honor to Him. We come to Church every week and sing praises, not out of tradition, but because it is a sacrifice that pleases God.

There is the sacrifice of doing good. And as we read the earlier verses of Hebrews 13, we note the “doing good” that the author of Hebrews has in mind.

- Showing brotherly love (13:1)
- Showing hospitality (13:2)
- Helping the mistreated (13:3)
- Honor the marriage (13:4)
- And so on and so forth

This sacrifice of doing good pleases God.

And there is the sacrifice of sharing, that is, sharing your money. It is giving monetary to the poor. It is giving monetary to the needy. It is giving monetary to support people. It is easy to make excuses why we cannot or do not want to share our money ... rather to share Jesus' money. But the King is not into excuses. He is into obedience. And if we want to please God, this is what we do.

You see that at the end of verse 16 in Hebrew 13?

Hebrews 13:16~¹⁶ ... for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

I don't know about you, but I want to please God. I want to please the King. So these sacrifices ... these offerings, I gladly bring with joy.

There are a group of characters in the Bible that begrudge bring an offering for worship. The Pharisees. So if we begrudge and complain that we have to sacrifices by bring these things, we are in good company with the Pharisees.

3. Third, it is about Endurance.

There is a third thing that this biblical narrative is about. It is about endurance. The wisemen saw the star in the East. I believe that it was a supernatural star. It was not some astronomical planetary alignment as scholars purport. It was most likely supernatural as the star rested over the house where Baby Jesus was staying at.

Matthew 2:9~⁹ ... 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.

What kind of planetary alignment does that? So, I believe that the star was supernatural.

This is what I believe happened. The wisemen saw the star in the east, in Persia. I do not think they followed the star to Jerusalem. I think the star disappeared and they went to Jerusalem because that would be were the King of the Jews, the Son of David, would be born. After all, the Son of David would sit on David's throne (symbolically for the David's physical throne was long gone) which would be in Jerusalem. Arriving to Jerusalem, they made inquiry on where the one born King of the Jews would be. When the scribes told them that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, they traveled to Bethlehem to find the King. It took them two years looking for the King until finally they saw the same star that they had seen in the East. They were full of joy as the star led them to King Jesus two years later.

The wisemen traveled for two years to see the King. They were away from their country, their family, their connect, to find this King.

- It cost them time.
- It cost them money.
- It cost them.

But the Sacred Text said that they were full of great joy.

Matthew 2:11~¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Coming to the King and worshipping Him requires endurance. It is not a one shot thing. It is not a temporary thing. It is required endurance ... but endurance with exceedingly elation.

You and I know of people who were once in the Church serving the King. But now they are gone. Left the Church. Left Christ. It requires endurance. If only they had stayed and continue their worship of the coming King, then they would continue to experience the exceedingly joy that Jesus came to give.

These wisemen knew what true joy is. These wisemen knew the value of this King, so they endure to find Him for at least two years.

III. Conclusion

This is a wonderful Christmas story. It is a story that is sung in many different ways during this joyful season. It is a story about:

1. The King
2. Worship, and
3. Endurance.

Let us come to the King and worship Him

IV. Blessings

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.

V. Forgiving Life Living

The story of the wisemen is a story about:

1. A King
 - a. Do you consider Jesus as both your Savior and your King or just a Savior? _____

b. As a subject of the King, do you submit to His authority and obey His commands? Do you submit all aspects of your life fully to God - your family, your time, your finances, your health, your plans etc? _____

c. Go to the link below to find the definition of the word "submit".

<https://biblehub.com/greek/5293.htm>

To submit is to arrange oneself under the command of divine viewpoint rather than to live according to one's old way of life based on a human viewpoint. It is a process surrendering our own will to that of our Father's.

What do you think of the following definition? _____

d. Read Colossians 1:9-14 and list the qualities that help a Christian to mature. Can you pray for someone at Forgiven Life church for them to grow in these qualities? _____

e. Read Colossians 1:13-14 again. How has your life changed from when you were in a kingdom of darkness to now in the kingdom of the beloved Son? _____

2. Worship

- a. Read Psalm 34:1-3. Worship is more than something we do when we sing songs to praise God on Sundays. Do you worship God on a daily basis as you go through your daily lives - for example praising Him during the week for who He is, letting your light shine before men so that they can praise God in heaven, and sharing your finances with someone you know who is in need? _____

- b. Do you wait for God to speak to you, or do you reach out to Him to share both your joys and your troubles? _____

- c. Read Psalm 29:1-4. Verse 4 says "Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness". Do we bring offerings to God because we feel obliged to, or do we bring Him offerings because we serve a great God and simply want to worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness and majesty? _____

3. Endurance

- a. Read Colossians 1:9-12 again. Should we count on our own endurance to make it in our ministry work, or do we count on His glorious might to be able to endure? _____
