

Encountering Jesus: The Wise Men, Matthew 2: 1-12, 12/10/17

Play Video: Not everyone is excited about the new baby. Today we are going to look at three very different responses to the announcement of the birth of the King of the Jews, the Messiah, Jesus. Be listening for them as we read the text.

Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "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."

³ 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.

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."

⁷ 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."

⁹ 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. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Response of King Herod

Who is King Herod? While he's King over Judea, and religiously Jewish, he was not a Hebrew- he was Idumean, a descendent of Esau. His father was instrumental in the Roman conquest and so Caesar gave him and his family reign over the Jewish territory.

Matthew 12:3

*When King Herod heard this he **was disturbed**, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Upon hearing this news Herod is disturbed. He became anxious, a feeling of dread came over him. That's the idea. He's disturbed because he was aware of the prophecies about the Messiah, he would establish a kingdom that would have no end. However, while he may have been religiously Jewish, his response reveals that

his religion was merely a shell, a politically convenient label. When the Magi ask, "Where is the one born King of the Jews" he understood this as a threat to his throne, a threat to his power, his kingdom, his way of life! Kind of like that boy in the video.

And all Jerusalem with him. Why?

Ill- Screaming child in the plane. When he's having a bad day everyone's having a bad day! When Herod's having a bad day, everyone around is also having a bad day. From history, we know that Herod was a violent, quick-tempered, paranoid king. Possible threat of his throne he killed his wife, two of his sons, multiple family members. There was a saying about Herod that it was better to be one of his pigs than one of his princes.

While Herod is filled with dread and anxiety inside, he's trying to keep a façade among these Magi out-of-town visitors. He schemes to try to get names and locations so he can kill this so-called "King of the Jews." We find out his real intentions when we get to verse 13, he's going to wipe out all children under 2. Herod represents the kind of person who is deeply threatened, disturbed, angered by Jesus. Some people in our world today feel threatened by the person and message of Jesus.

-Threat to Religion: Maybe because Jesus is a threat to religiosity. Jesus is the religion killer, because he says that religious works get you know closer to salvation. But salvation is a free gift only available through faith in Jesus! That's scandalous to many religious people who demand that salvation be earned.

-Threat to Our Self-Image

Most people generally want to believe they are self-righteous. Jesus tells us what is really going on in our hearts. "Don't commit adultery." But adultery begins in the heart. Jesus spent much of his ministry trying to convince people that they are more sinful than they ever dared believe. And therefore in need of a savior far more than they ever dared imagine.

-Threat to Lifestyle

John 14:15

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Spiritual but not religious... really means I want to feel a connection to something above me, bigger than me, but without that God telling me what to do, I still want to live however I want. Aldous Huxley- Admitted toward the end of his life, that his belief system, that Christianity wasn't true and life was meaningless was determined by his desire for what he called, "Political and sexual freedom." He wanted to live his life however he wanted without anyone telling him he can't. A believe that behind most "intellectual barriers" is actually a lifestyle barriers.

Response of The Religious Leaders

Matthew 2:4-6

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. 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."

Ding! Ding! Ding! Answered correctly. But here's something that blows my mind upon reading this. Why didn't they start gathering their stuff and go to Bethlehem? These are the chief priests and the scribes. They know the promises. They are the experts on the Messiah who is to come. See how quickly they answered? But they're not gathering their stuff. They're not making a beeline to Bethlehem. They're not searching the sky for the star. In fact, even upon giving the news, we see nothing in Scripture to indicate they moved at all. What happened to them?

In fact, in **John 5:39**, Jesus says to a group of them

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

What we see here in this text is that there can be a disjoint between knowing about and knowing personally. Between a head-deep faith and a heart-deep faith. That's the condition of the religious leaders during the life of Jesus. This is why he calls them White-washed tombs.... These religious leaders represent people the apathetic and unchanged. You can have a Bible degree, going to church your whole life, quote multiple verses of Scripture, try to keep the ten commandments and yet have not come to Jesus for life! This is dead religiosity. James- Knowing and yet never having your heart moved to action is not true, saving faith. And when we continually know truth but are unmoved by it- it inoculates us to the gospel.

Unlike Herod who is threatened, unlike the religious leaders who are apathetic, there is a 3rd response to Jesus that should characterize our lives.

Response of The Wise Men

Who are these Wise men?

Magios- Magi. History tells us that they originally came from Persia, priestly cast of the Medes. Advisors to kings and monarchies. Interpreters of dreams. They became so high ranking in fact that no king ever took the throne of the Persian or Parthian empire that wasn't trained in their laws and no king ever took place that was not approved by them. It was not uncommon for these wealthy magi to use the trade route through **Petra (Picture)** to do business. Encountered a "Wise Man" Selling Myrrh. **PICTURE...** legend that this is where these Magi were from. So they were the official kingmakers of the great empire to the east of Israel. So why in the world are they here in Jerusalem?

Matthew 12:1b-2

Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "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."

Coming to see the one BORN King of the Jews. Now, in itself that's not particularly worth a long journey. Somewhere alive in America today there are probably three or four children or young people under the age of 18 who are going to be President of the United States some day. But nobody really cares about this, or sets out to find them or honor them. They knew this was the MESSIAH, not just a political king. The Long-awaited, God-anointed ruler- savior of the world.

Question to ask, how did these gentile outsiders know about the Messiah's birth when it seems that even the religious elite were caught off guard? Teaching of Daniel, a wise man himself. They knew the prophecies. And God gives them a sign. A star- There are a lot of theories out there about the origin of this star they were following. Maybe wasn't a star, rare alignment of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, supernova, a comet...Here's what we do know for sure- God, who has his creation at his disposal, used it to draw these people from gentile nations to worship the Messiah. And this is just a foreshadowing of how Jesus at the end of the book will call his disciples to take the gospel to all nations.

But I want to concentrate on the response of faith from these magi.. Let's put ourselves into this story. They see this star. Maybe they heard some things out of Daniel's writings. Maybe they heard some things in Babylon. We don't know. Then they set across the first-century world. They head west to find this king.

I like to go west, maybe San Diego, Santa Barbara. In fact, does anybody want to start a church out there? Who wants to come with me? Brandywine Valley- Santa Barbara Campus. Here's what it involves: Backing a bag and a 5 hour plane ride packing of a bag. *Bam!* Headed west.

That's not how things work in the first century. It's unbelievably dangerous, unbelievably costly, and extremely uncomfortable. These men, by faith, start heading west. They don't even know where to go. They stumble into Jerusalem and ask the question, "Hey, we're here to worship the Savior of the world; where is he going to be born?" Does anybody know how crazy that is?

But it's also faith that responds in worship of this baby. Now they show up to this humble little house where these teenage, blue-collar types will, with their toddler. Most scholars are going to say we're probably looking at him being about a year and a half to 2 years old. And they are overjoyed! Freaking out in excitement. They are moved. Remember the story? What did they do? They fell on the ground and worshiped him, which overflowed into gift-giving...not your typical baby gifts. Faith drives that. If there's nothing overly impressive about him... You don't fall on your face and worship a 2-year-old unless God has granted to you an amazing measure of

faith. Have you been around 2 year olds? That's faith! A little different than the religious leaders...later they say of Jesus- isn't he just the carpenter's boy? Isn't he from Nazareth, what good can come from there?

So unlike the threatened response of Herod, or the apathetic response of the religious leaders, the magi response in faith- evidenced in action, in joy, in worship.

How do you respond to Jesus?

Maybe for some of you the message of Jesus is a yawn... yeah I know this already, I grew up with it, but you remain unmoved, unchanged. That is a dangerous place to be. If you say that you are a Christian, that you know that Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins to reconcile you to God for eternity. That Jesus is Lord...and yet remain unchanged, a life indistinguishable from the world. If you say that you are a Christian- I just don't know what you mean by that. Christianity doesn't give you that option.

Maybe for some of you the message of Jesus as Lord, as God in the flesh the one who deserves all our worship and allegiance feels like threat to how you view yourself. Because you see yourself as a generally good person and Jesus tells us that we have a sin problem that can't be fixed by religion and good works. That only he can fix it. Or Jesus feels like an affront to your way of life. This was me.

Or are you more like the magi whose faith is evidenced in action, worship, joy?

Is your life distinguishable from those who don't know Christ? Is there fruit of faith growing in your life? Is there joy, peace, love increasing? Are you holding on to the things of this world loosely but holding onto the things of eternity tightly? When we sing these songs can you sing them with joy?