

Called to Worship

It was Saturday afternoon, and the house was quiet. Theadra and the children were gone for last minute Christmas shopping. They could be out for hours.

Edwyn sat flipping through cable channels. He was bored and restless. He felt a tugging at his heart after breakfast this morning to have time away with the Lord. However, there were no pressing matters of concern on his heart today. In fact, everything was good. His wife, his marriage, his children, his job, his home—all good!

Edwyn had been sitting in his favorite recliner in the family room for the past 45 minutes. He did not seem able to completely rest or find anything he wanted to watch on TV.

Then he remembered the words of his pastor about seizing opportunities and making time to pray and worship. “What kind of relationship would you have with your wife, if you were always complaining to her and asking her for something?” Pastor Coleman had said at the men’s meeting. “We should always be honored that the Lord longs for our company and wants us to be in relationship with Him, especially at Christmastime.”

Pastor was right, Edwyn thought. He shut off the television and headed to his study upstairs, where he met with the Lord.

What could be more important or precious? Edwyn would take this time to pray and worship God.

1. *What are some ways you have celebrated and worshiped Jesus at Christmastime?*

2. *How could you keep that worship and celebration ongoing all year long?*

3. *What things can hinder you from worshipping our Savior at Christmastime? At other times of the year?*

A Pretense of Worship

Matthew 2:7-8, KJV

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

Matthew 2:7-8, NIV

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He 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."

Whereas the wise men from the East sought to offer true, heartfelt worship to the newborn King of the Jews, Herod had an ulterior motive. The Magi's news that they were looking for a king other than Herod troubled the tyrant, so he used subterfuge to learn the time of the star's appearance. With this knowledge, Herod would have a good idea of how old Jesus was at the time of the Magi's visit. Sadly, rather than using this information to exercise the worship worthy of our Lord, Herod would use the knowledge of Jesus' age to execute the atrocity of slaying all those precious little ones in Bethlehem who were two years old and younger.

However, knowing the Lord's age and His town of birth was not enough for Herod's evil plan. For what he intended to do, the tyrant also needed to know exactly where he could find Jesus. To hide his true intentions, Herod told the wise men to go to Bethlehem and seek out the young child. The wicked king then told them to return with a report of Jesus' location. Herod's pretense for wanting this information was so that he too could go and worship the young Child. However, the jealous despot had only murder in mind. Though this wicked king was able to fool the Magi, Herod's evil intent was very clear to our omniscient God.

4. *What information did Herod seek from the wise men?*

5. *When Herod sent the Magi on their way, what did he tell them to do?*

6. *Why did Herod really want to know this information?*

Joy in Worship

Matthew 2:9-12, KJV

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Matthew 2:9-12, NIV

⁹After 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.

¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On 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.

¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When the Magi departed from Herod, they headed toward Bethlehem as instructed. To their great joy, the star that they had been following reappeared to lead them directly to where the Lord and His family lived, and it stopped directly over the house. When they saw this, the Magi rejoiced exceedingly. Such is the case for all who follow God's leading in their worship of Him. Christians may not have a star to guide us as the wise men did, but we have other leading—the Holy Spirit of God, who indwells us, and His Word, which is as a light to lead us along the paths of truth and righteousness

Upon entering the house, the wise men saw Jesus and immediately bowed down in reverent worship. They then opened the treasures they had brought and presented to Jesus their gifts of gold (precious metal), frankincense (a valuable form of incense) and myrrh (a costly anointing ointment). These were very precious gifts, quite worthy to present in heartfelt praise and worship to the true King of the Jews.

From the beginning of their journey, first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem, the Magi followed God's calling upon their lives in the form of the star to come and worship His Son. And their faithfulness to God's call continued by heeding His warning not to return to Herod. Instead of returning to Jerusalem as Herod commanded, they obediently heeded God's warning and returned to their homeland via a different route. In so doing, they were kept from participating, even unwittingly, in Herod's evil plot to kill Jesus.

7. *What was the Magi's reaction when the star stopped over the house where Jesus was?*

8. *How did they worship Jesus when they entered the house?*

9. *What warning did God then have for the wise men?*

Obedience Is Worship

Matthew 2:13-15, KJV

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

Matthew 2:13-15, NIV

¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

KJV

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

NIV

¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

From the Magi's example, we have seen that true worship involves answering God's call to honor Him, as well as heeding His warnings to avoid the harm that evil can bring. After the wise men had obediently departed for their homeland via a different route, it was Joseph's turn to hear and heed God's warning of the evil that was about to come their way. The angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and told him to escape to Egypt with Mary and Jesus because Herod sought to kill the young King. Joseph wasted no time in doing so; he immediately gathered his family and fled that very night for Egypt where he would await instructions on when to return to his homeland.

There were many ways that God could have chosen to protect His Son, but as is so often the case, He did it here by using one who was willing to heed the divine call upon his life. Joseph faithfully answered God's call when he took Mary to be his wife, even though the child she carried was not his (Matt. 1:18-25). And here he answered God's call to carry Mary and Jesus to safety in Egypt. That Joseph understood the urgency and the need for secrecy is seen by his immediate response and departure while it was still dark. By heeding God's call upon his life so readily, Joseph demonstrated his love for God and His Son, Jesus. Loving obedience is a beautiful and practical form of worshiping the God who loves and protects His people.

10. *What did the angel of the Lord warn Joseph about in a dream?*

11. *When were Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to return to Israel?*

12. *What does this event tell us about true worship?*

The Heart of Worship

True worship is more than just merely a church service, music, nature, beauty, etc. It has nothing to do with style or preference. True worship is a matter of the heart—what we ultimately value and prioritize. What is the state of our heart supposed to be in worship? We are to worship with “clean hands and a pure heart” (Ps. 24:4).

How are we to worship? Jesus said, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). First, our worship is to be spiritual in nature, flowing out of a growing and personal relationship with Jesus. God is not after tradition, but a love relationship. God is not merely after Sunday morning in the sanctuary, but Monday morning in the office or classroom, or Saturday morning on the ball field, or Tuesday in the grocery store. Worship is a matter of the heart; it is not limited to a particular place or time.

Second, our worship is to be in truth—in line with God’s Word. Truth is not a concept or idea, Truth is a Person, and His name is Jesus! He is the Living Word of Truth (see John 14:6; 1:14; 17:17). Any song, word, or deed that does not line up with God’s Word is not worship. We worship wholeheartedly to an audience of One for who He is in all of His glory and splendor and all that He has done in our lives redeeming us to eternal salvation (Rev. 5:9). God’s great love for us in Christ Jesus demands a response in awe and wonder. It should always cause us to fall down in worship and adoration before Him. He alone is worthy of all our praise.

God delights in the praises of His people (Isa. 22:3). Therefore, our lives are to demonstrate a lifestyle of continuous worship in service and praise to our God both corporately and privately throughout all eternity.

13. *What are some misconceptions concerning worship today? How do these things detract from true worship?*

14. *What could hinder us from having true worship?*

15. *Why is it important to worship Him in all His glory?*

Commit to Worship

A well-known preacher defined worship as our giving all that we know of ourselves to all that we know of God. Again, we are talking a commitment to wholehearted worship and devotion like the Magi who went out of their way from the East searching for the One worthy of all worship, honor, and devotion. They gave out of the best of all their resources. True worship requires “a living and holy sacrifice” on our part, which is not only “acceptable to God,” but is also “our reasonable service of worship” (Rom. 12:2).

► *How could you respond to God’s call to worship Him this week with the best of your time and ability?*

KEY VERSE

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened up their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

—Matthew 2:11, KJV

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.

—Matthew 2:11, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of December 21 through December 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 40:1-5—A Voice Cries, “Comfort My People.”
- Tues.** Matthew 11:2-15—Is John the Baptist the Greatest?
- Wed.** John 1:19-34—The Baptist’s Testimony of Faith.
- Thurs.** Matthew 17:1-8—Jesus, the Father’s Beloved Son.
- Fri.** Matthew 17:9-13; Malachi 4:4-5—In John, Elijah Has Come.
- Sat.** Matthew 3:13-17—John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan.
- Sun.** Matthew 3:1-12—John Prepares the Way for Jesus.