

The Faith of the Wise Men

Ayren drove slowly through the strip shopping center looking for the address of Bread of Life Fellowship Church.

It was a Saturday morning, and his friend and coworker, Mikal, had long invited him to the church. Mikal was a solid, strong, good friend trying to share Christ. He had befriended Ayren a few months ago. In doing so, Mikal had talked about Christ as easily and frequently as he would another friend. He wasn't pushy about it. Mikal seemed genuine.

At first, Ayren had taken Mikal as just another "salesman" pitching him religion. But eventually, Ayren could see he was not. Ayren could see in Mikal's words and actions that Mikal lived what he talked about. That's because, as Mikal told Ayren, knowing Christ and accepting Him as Lord and Savior was the most important thing in his life.

Following the Lord was not always easy, but it was so worth it, Mikal had said. He encouraged Ayren to do the same. As of late, with personal problems bombarding him, Ayren had thought more on the invitation. So, that is why he was dressed and at the shopping center at 9 A.M. for the men's "coffee and breakfast chat" at Mikal's church.

Ten minutes after arriving, Ayren's burdens felt lighter, he was glad he came, and he wanted to know the Lord for himself.

1. *Have you ever been lost? If so, describe the circumstances and how the situation was resolved.*

2. *What is the emotional difference between being physically lost and being spiritually lost?*

3. *Has the Lord found you? If so, how did it happen? If not, why not?*

The Magi Search for Jesus

Matthew 2:1-6, KJV

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Matthew 2:1-6, NIV

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

²and 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."

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When 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."

Jesus was born Bethlehem, which was in the province of Judea, when Herod reigned as king. While Joseph, Mary, and their child were in Bethlehem, "Magi from the east" (vs. 1) visited the family. Also called "wise men" (KJV), the group traveled from their native land, perhaps

Persia or Babylon, in a several hundred mile journey to Jerusalem that would take weeks, or months, to complete.

The Magi started their journey when they witnessed an unusual light in the sky. Some think the “star” (vs. 2) was a natural phenomenon (such as a supernova or the conjunction of two planets). Others say the star was a supernatural phenomenon (a unique light that appeared at God’s command).

At that time, there was an expectation of the coming of a great ruler, and this idea was linked with Jewish prophecy. Somehow the Magi associated the star with the Jewish expectation of a king. So, while in the Jewish capital, the Magi began asking for directions to the person who had recently been born “king of the Jews” (vs. 2). They had journeyed to the land of the Jews to pay homage to Him.

When King Herod heard what the foreign visitors were asking, he became “disturbed” (vs. 3). Jerusalem’s inhabitants were also alarmed, yet not so much because of what the Magi were saying, but because Herod was perturbed. They knew the violence he could inflict on his subjects.

The last thing Herod wanted was a rival king among the Jews. Yet for Herod to eliminate his rival, he needed more information. So, Herod assembled the “chief priests and teachers of the law” (vs. 4). The Jewish leaders named “Bethlehem in Judea” (vs. 5) as the Messiah’s birthplace. This response is consistent with the common view of the day that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (John 7:42). The religious leaders based their reply on the prophecy in Micah 5:2, which said that, despite Bethlehem’s apparent insignificance, out of it would come a shepherd for the people of Israel.

4. *What prompted the Magi to travel to Jerusalem?*

5. *What caused Herod to become agitated at the arrival of the Magi?*

6. *What is significant about God choosing Bethlehem to be the Messiah’s birthplace?*

The Magi Worship Jesus

Matthew 2:7-12, 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.

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 2:7-12, 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."

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 worshipped 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.

Herod also needed to know when the child had been born, so he could kill every boy of the appropriate age in

Bethlehem. Therefore, he asked the Magi privately when the star had appeared. Evidently, they named a date within the past two years (see vs. 16). Herod then sent the Magi on to Bethlehem with his encouragement to search diligently for the Christ child, so Herod, too, could come and pay homage to Him.

When the Magi left Herod, the star they had seen before went ahead of them to Bethlehem until it stopped above Jesus' location. The Magi were filled with joy at what they saw. The intensity of what they felt is conveyed by a literal rendering of verse 10: "They rejoiced with very great joy."

Because a period of time elapsed since Jesus' birth, the family had moved into a "house" (vs. 11) in Bethlehem. The Magi entered the house and saw Jesus with His mother, Mary. As the Magi had planned, they prostrated themselves in worship before the real King of the Jews, then opened containers they had brought with them filled with such expensive "treasures" as "gold, frankincense and myrrh."

Many people have tied symbolic significance to each of these three gifts, but that is only speculation. Frankincense was a perfume and medicine gathered by making incisions in certain trees and collecting their aromatic white gum. Myrrh, the resin extracted from a small shrub, was used in perfume, incense, and embalming (John 19:39).

Herod had told the Magi to report their findings to him. Remarkably, Herod also trusted the Magi to be his detectives, for he did not send anyone with them. But, due to Herod's sinister plans, God "warned" (vs. 12) the Magi in a "dream" not to return to Herod. So, they traveled back to their home country by a different way.

7. *What prompted the "Magi" (Matt. 2:7, NIV) to be "overjoyed" (vs. 10) when they found Jesus?*

8. *What was the importance of the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus?*

9. *What does Matthew 2:12 tell us about Herod?*

Our Spiritual Journey

“We are not primarily called to do something or go somewhere,” said Os Guinness in his book *Making an Idol of Work*. “We are called to Someone.” And, of course, that “Someone” is Christ Jesus. The ultimate destination of a spiritual journey in this world is Jesus, whether that means arriving at salvation in Him or communing with Him moment by moment.

God’s calling isn’t for a select few; His calling is to everyone. Nor is God’s calling only at special times in a person’s life; God’s calling occurs throughout our lives. Of course, there are special callings that are momentous for an event or a person, but they are not the only times when God calls us to seek Jesus. Nor is God’s calling necessarily a miraculous occurrence like Paul on the road to Damascus. Often God’s voice is as peaceful as when He spoke to Elijah through a calm breeze.

Whatever or however is God’s call to us, if we are followers of Jesus, we need to draw closer to our Lord; and if we are not, we need to go to Him and receive Him as our Savior. Like the Magi, our purpose is to find Him, follow Him, and worship Him. Our excitement in finding Him should be like that of the Magi or the shepherds: “rejoic[ing] with exceeding great joy” (Matt. 2:10).

“Here I am!” Jesus exclaims. “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Rev. 3:20). Jesus is always at our door, knocking and seeking to come into our lives and dine with us. Dining with another person can be a truly intimate occurrence, and that’s what the Lord desires to have us do.

10. *How is God currently calling you? What is He saying?*

11. *Why is God’s call to Jesus relevant to you?*

12. *How are you responding to God’s call?*

Answering God's Call

When God called the Magi to seek the Messiah, they followed the star to Him; and when they found Him, they worshiped Him and presented Him with precious gifts. Today, God calls you to humbly bow down before the Son of God and either receive Him as your Savior or deepen your faith in Him as your Lord. Indeed, God calls you to the One whose love for you is priceless and timeless.

► *The beginning of a new year is a great time to either commit to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior or to remind yourself to continue to look to Jesus in your journey of faith. Write a statement here committing to do one of those in the coming year.*

KEY VERSE

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

—Matthew 2:2, KJV

[The Magi] 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."

—Matthew 2:2, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 1 through January 7

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

Mon. Isaiah 33:15-22—The Heavenly King Rewards the Righteous.

Tue. Psalm 106:1-12—Promises and Praises for Righteousness.

Wed. Hebrews 11:20-29—The Faith of Israel's Ancestors.

Thurs. Hebrews 11:32-40—The Victory of Faith.

Fri. Psalm 106:13, 26-27, 42-48—Despite Sin, God's Covenant Prevails.

Sat. Romans 5:12-21—Righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Sun. Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32, 39-40—Assurance and Conviction through Faith.