

"This Year I Worship Christ at Christmas" Part 3 12/23-24/06
6 p.m., 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Matthew 2:1-12

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INTRODUCTION

Christmas is about God reaching out to all people everywhere in order to bring us to Himself.

He did this through Jesus Christ, His Son, Who became a baby and lived among us.

As Jesus grew into a man and began His ministry, He said that He had come **"to seek and to save that which was lost."**

"...that which was lost" refers to you and me... lost from a relationship with God.

Some of us know what it is to have someone we deeply love. Maybe a spouse, a parent, a child, a very close friend... we know what it is to have the relationship strained and then fully broken... that relationship is lost.

And some know the effort and the sacrifice to try to reclaim that relationship... but, have to wait to see if the other person will respond; if the relationship will move from *lost* to *restored*.

Jesus came to seek and to save the relationships that were lost, broken off from God by sin.

It is amazing to read in the Bible how God pursues every kind of person to seek to win them back to Himself... people of different ethnic groups, different jobs and backgrounds; very good people and very immoral people...

... God loves them all and wants them all to turn from a self-centered, self-directed life to a God-centered, God-directed life.

One of the most interesting stories of God pursuing people is the story of the Magi.

READ Matthew 2:1-12

I. Who Were the Magi?

The Magi were a priestly caste in ancient Persia; modern day Iraq and Iran.

They served as advisors to kings and other high governmental positions because they were among the most educated people of their day. They served as scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, doctors, and legal authorities.

They were also the spiritual leaders of their day. The Magi were, what we would call today, sorcerers, wizards, interpreters of dreams, and other forms of soothsaying and witchcraft. Some were astronomers and astrologers.

If you know how God opposes all forms of witchcraft and fortune telling and spiritism, you might wonder what people like the Magi were doing in Jerusalem seeking the Son of God...

God Himself issued a personal invitation. He got their attention!!

II. How Did God Get Their Attention?

The Magi in our story were astronomers (*the science of studying stars, planets, moon and sun*) and likely astrologers (*telling the future by stars*) as well.

So what would get their attention? **Stars...** a very unique **star...** different from any other star in the heavens.

Many have speculated as to what this star truly could have been:

1) One idea is that it was a natural phenomenon that can be traced back to a known comet, a supernova, or a conjunction of planets.

One widely discussed possibility is an unusual conjunction of planets that occurred on May 27, 7 B.C.

In ancient *Babylonian* astrology, Jupiter represented the greatest god.

When Jupiter came close to Saturn (which represented the Jews),

in the constellation of stars known as Pices (which represented Palestine)...

...the Magi referred to Jupiter as the *star of the king*, and the association with Saturn and Pices showed them in which nation (*the Jews*) and where (*Palestine*) to look for Him.

That's one idea.

Some speculate it may have been Haley's Comet, which appeared in 12 and 11 B.C.

2) Others suggest that the 'star' was a supernaturally created star that God used to herald Jesus' birth, since in the Gospel of Matthew the star appears and reappears and moves and directs the Magi to the precise house that Jesus and His family occupied.

3) Another idea is that the star was actually an angel. Angels are commonly referred to as stars (Job, Daniel, Revelation). And, there are a lot of angels appearing throughout the Christmas events. (NIV AC)

So, God got their attention with a star. But, there is more...

As they sought to understand what this star could mean, it appears they were influenced by a prophecy from the Hebrew Bible:

Numbers 24:17 **"A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel."**

"A star..." they were astronomers **"... A star will come out of Jacob..."**

"A scepter..." the ruling staff of a king **"...a scepter will rise out of Israel..."**

They saw the star, and through His word, God showed them it

was the star of the long-awaited king and Messiah of Israel.

Ancient historical records reveal that religious leaders in the east were regularly exposed to the Hebrew Scriptures through the colonies of Jews throughout Babylon.

And, so, we see God pursuing these lost men, these Magi, and meeting them where they were!

It's as if God is saying to them, "You study the stars seeking truth? I'll give you a star! One that will lead you to the Truth. The Way and the Truth and the Life."

And for these men to leave their homeland and travel approximately 900 miles across the desert following a star, they had to be convinced that God was doing something significant... and so... we see that...

III. The Magi Seek Jesus (v. 1-11a)

In v. 1-2 we see the Magi travel to the capital of Israel, Jerusalem, and they ask King Herod where they can find the one born King of the Jews.

And as a result of this question, another prophecy is given to them, one from the prophet Micah, quoted in v. 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 be the Shepherd of My people Israel."

King Herod tells them to go to Bethlehem, just about 6 miles from Jerusalem.

And as they head that direction, they see the **star** again, and follow it until it stops over the house where Jesus was, with His mother, Mary, and Joseph.

And they see, with their own eyes, the One they traveled so far to meet...

God's word, His prophecies are confirmed.

And **God's star**, what He used to get their attention, had lead them to Jesus' exact location.

And we see God's love for the Magi, men who are far from the true God in their beliefs and practices, but who were willing to respond to the guidance God gave them.

God met the Magi where they were, and He still does the same today!

Let me tell you another story of God meeting people where they are:

ILLUSTRATION

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach Biblical morals and ethics in the public schools. (*For those of us who lived through the intensity of the Cold War, that in itself is amazing*). They were also invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments, and a large orphanage.

As it neared the holiday season, they went to the large orphanage and told the Christmas story to children who were hearing it for the very first time.

The children listened in amazement. Some sat on the edges of their stools, not wanting to miss a word.

As a follow-up activity, each child was given three small pieces of cardboard to make a manger and other materials to complete the Christmas story scene.

As the Americans made their way around the room to observe the children, one of them said, "All went as expected until I got to one table where 6-year-old Misha sat. He appeared to have finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see, not one, but two babies in the manger!

I called for the translator to ask him why there were two babies in the manger."

"Misha very accurately recalled the story that had been told until he came to the part where Mary put Jesus in the manger.

"Misha then started to tell his story, "And when Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told Him, 'I have no momma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay.'

"Then Jesus told me I could stay with Him. But I told Him I couldn't because I didn't have a gift to give Him like everybody else did.

"I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. So I asked Jesus, if I kept Him warm, would that be a good enough gift?

And Jesus told me, 'If you keep Me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave Me.' So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and told me I could stay with Him - for always!"

As Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed.

The little orphan had truly found Someone Who would never abandon or abuse him, Someone Who faithfully would stay with him - for always!

And you know, we're all like Misha. We're spiritual orphans until we respond to Jesus, as He meets us where we are.

IV. The Magi Become Worshippers of Jesus (v. 11b)

READ v. 11 "On 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 and of incense and of myrrh."

When they went there, they saw the Baby, Jesus, God's Son, Messiah, the King of the Jews... and

1. They "**bowed down.**" They humbled themselves before the King of Kings.
2. They "**worshipped Him.**" They spoke words of adoration and praise.
3. And then worship flooded from their hearts in tangible expressions of their adoration: they "**opened their treasures**"
4. They "**presented Him with gifts,**" gifts worthy of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Whether they realized it or not, the child they were kneeling before would one day grow up to suffer and die for their sakes. His death would pay the price of their sins.

Because of that coming sacrifice, the Magi, whose lives had been spent in sorcery, wizardry, and the occult, would be forgiven and transformed by His power.

CONCLUSION

Where are you today? Has God met you where you are?

- for the Magi, it was a star and an ancient prophecy,
- for those in 12 Step Recovery programs, it often begins as a higher power,
- for some it is an answered prayer,
- for some it is through hearing God's word and responding to His voice,
- for everyone it is something that gets our attention in some way related to where we are in life.
- for me, it was God taking something out of my life that I worshipped, and then showing me that He was the true God.

God meets us where we are, but there is a journey involved once we see... a journey of faith... trusting Him, entrusting our lives to Him through Jesus Christ.

Are you responding to what He is showing you?

"True God in Heaven, thank You for revealing Yourself to me through Jesus Christ. Thank You for meeting me where I am and giving me my "star" to respond to. I open my life to You through Jesus Christ. Please forgive my self-centered life. I now turn to You to have You be the center of my life. Please continue to meet me and grant me the wisdom and strength to follow. In Jesus' Name, Amen."