

Series: Home for the Holidays (Christmas)
Title: Wise Men in the House
Text: Matthew 2:9-12
Series Overview:

Nov. 30: A Barn in the Field (Luke 2:1-7)
Dec. 7: Wise Men in the House at Bethlehem (Matt. 2:9-12)
Dec. 14: The Home of a Child Refugee (Matt. 2:13-18)
Dec. 21: Carpenter's Home in Nazareth (Matt. 2:19-23)
Dec. 24 (Christmas Eve Service): The Father's House (Luke 2:41-50)
Dec. 30: (John 14)

Matt 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet,

6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah;
For out of you shall come forth a Ruler,
Who will shepherd My people Israel."

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." 9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. 10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way. NASB

I. Introduction

- A. Some of you have noticed that I am not David Crosby. In so many ways, I am not our Pastor. Join me in prayer for his continued recovery from whatever nastiness has invaded his lungs.
- B. I love the season of Christmas. The holidays have a rhythm all their own. The characters of the Christmas story, many times embellished beyond what the Bible actually says, make cameo appearances in our music and in our messages.
- C. Today we talk about the Magi. Wise Guys. We don't really know how many, we don't really know where they are from and we don't really know exactly when in the narrative they showed up.
 - 1. Tradition says they were men of high position from Parthia, near the site of ancient Babylon (from the east).
 - 2. They were likely astrologers—the star plays an important part in this narrative and the Greek word for wise men in this account (magoi) is usually rendered as “astrologers.” But how did they know that the star represented the Messiah?¹
 - a. Maybe they were influenced by Jews who remained in Babylon after the Exile and knew the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah's coming.

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- b. Maybe they were eastern astrologers, descended from the Median caste called “Magi” who studied ancient manuscripts from around the world, like perhaps a scrap of Scripture that Balaam brought them (Numbers 24)
- D. We really don’t know. Yet we sing about their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Allow me to read their story, one that only Matthew includes.

READ Matthew 2:1-12

- E. This morning, I want to use five words to connect the songs and to keep us pondering a wonderful text:
- II. Part 1: Revelation: Joy to the World, the Lord has Come
- A. The first word is “revelation” which means something is revealed. Yes, I went to seminary. God revealed the joy to the world. A special star was flung into space to shine directly over the house where Jesus was.
 - B. Christmas carols are not always biblically accurate, but this one got it right. God is with us. He came to dwell among us. The glory of the Lord was revealed. Magi—wise men came from the East. So much here.
 - C. So the wise men—astrologers and all-purpose advice-givers, came to visit Jesus.
 - 1. This story takes place after Jesus’ birth--we don’t know how long after, but probably several months to a couple of years.
 - 2. Jesus is called a child (paidion, 2:9,11) rather than a baby or infant (brephos, used in Luke 2:12),. The fact that Herod had all the baby boys under two years old killed (2:16) may mean that a couple of years had passed between Jesus’ birth and this visit.²
 - 3. The wise men went to a **house** (2:11), not to a stable.
 - 4. According to Luke 2, Mary has completed the ritual of purification after the birth of a child, and the sacrifice has been offered. MacArthur suggests that the sacrifice of the two turtledoves indicated that Joseph and Mary were poor—and that the sacrifice was offered before the arrival of the gift-bearing magi.
 - D. The men from the East who were led by a star came to worship the infant Christ (Matt 2:1,7,16). The joy, rejoicing, worship, and gifts which mark the response of these wise men to the birth of Jesus is quite a contrast to the troubled state and murderous intent of Herod and his Jewish advisers in Jerusalem (Matt 2:1-12).
- III. Part 2: Ransomed: Oh Come oh come Emmanuel (who ransomed captive Israel)
- A. The second word is ransomed. Correct. Like someone has been kidnapped and some payment is required for their freedom.
 - B. The minor key of the song we just sang help us to understand the seriousness of our situation - like Israel, we are held captive without the liberating grace of the Gospel.
 - C. Messiah has come. Herod was terrified of this truth. He went to great lengths to try to make sure that King Jesus never grew up.
 - D. The magi on the other hand, went to great lengths to find him. They were helped considerably by a star. I always wondered why Herod couldn’t see it. I guess his eyes were blinded by his captivity.
 - E. Jesus has come. The Truth shall make us free. And we will be free indeed.
- IV. Part 3: Rest: Away in a Manger
- A. The third word is rest. Now despite the erroneous line in the carol that says that Jesus didn’t cry like every other infant that has ever been hungry, we have a picture of peace. Heavenly Peace.
 - B. Contrast the restful spirit of the Magi with the restless spirit of Herod. They were

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consumed with the wonder of the mysterious star, informed by the prophecies they had somehow heard and comforted by the sight of the promised child.

- C. And they worshiped. Isn't it amazing how we rest in worship? Isn't it a privilege to come in here each week and park the troubles of the day to sing the songs of faith, study the Scriptures, pray with our small groups, and hear challenging words from our pastor to both provoke and comfort.

V. Part 4: Regift

- A. The next word is regift. The magi are known for the gifts they brought. Probably pretty valuable. I read this week that the actual cost of the items in the Christmas song—the 12 Days of Christmas is over \$100,000 with the most expensive item being the dancing ladies which shouldn't surprise anyone.
- B. You probably know that regifting is the act of taking a gift that you have been given and giving it to somebody else, sometimes pretending that it is new. (Don't look so self-righteous—you have done it too). I don't know if the magi got their gold, frankincense and myrrh as gifts, but that is what they brought.
- C. In Isaiah's prophecy, when describing Jerusalem's glorious restoration, tells of nations and kings who will come and "bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:6).
- D. Even though Matthew does not include the names or number of the Magi, we surmise that there were three because that is the number of the gifts. Besides that, the song says so. We three kings of orient are...
- E. So they brought gifts that are ripe with meaning. When they left, they left the gifts, but they took the message that the gifts represented--special spiritual symbolism about Jesus.
 1. Gold representing his kingship
 2. Frankincense a symbol of his priestly role
 3. Myrrh an embalming spice that looked towards his burial.
- F. The story of Christmas, the singing of all of these songs, and the pause of worship is a reminder to go from here and "regift" the story as we have opportunity, especially during this season when our friends, neighbors and family are thinking about it already.

Note: Morning Star, segue into video. Jesus's presence is constant and available but it must be sought out. This was true for the shepherds and magi and it's true for us today. Through his Holy Spirit he draws near to those who draw near to him and he promises that those who seek will find him.

VI. Part 5: Respond

- A. The last word I want to think about today is the word "respond."
- B. The last phrase of the story says "they departed for their own country by another way."
- C. One of my colleagues at the seminary, Dr. Mark Tolbert spoke on this text in chapel this week and he pointed out something I had never considered. Without making it say what it doesn't say, it is apparent that they were changed. They avoided Herod and his evil plans and went home another way.
- D. But did they just go home differently or did they go home different?
- E. What is our response when we are guided by God's light to a place where we can recognize that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...?
- F. Can we bring both our selves and our gifts to Jesus, just as the wise guys did?
- G. Can we come home?