

Theme: In a stunning Christmas surprise, the Magi - pagan scholars skilled in religious texts, dreams, and the stars - become the first Gentile worshippers of Jesus, foreshadowing God's plan to call followers from every nation.

## I. The Magi in Christian Tradition

- A. Christians have always been captivated by the Magi
- B. Nativity scenes, We Three Kings, kids dress up
- C. Tradition gave a lot of detail not actually in the text:
  - 1. Specified that there were three (emo number in text)
  - 2. Said they were kings (text says Magi, more below)
  - 3. Named Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior (not in text)
- D. Who are the Magi? What surprising thing do they teach us about Christmas?

## II. Surprise Characters - The Magi

- A. The sudden introduction of the Magi  
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, **Magi from the east** came to Jerusalem Matthew 2:1
  - 1. Matthew suddenly introduces these mysterious men
  - 2. All he tells us is they are Magi from the east!
  - 3. This is probably why people's imaginations have made up so many details!
- B. The Magi - religious scholars & astronomers/astrologers  
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "**Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.**" Matthew 2:1-2

- 1. Magi is transliterated from Greek - wise men
  - 2. Magi originally referred to Persian and Babylonian wise men who were priests trained in texts, the interpretation of dreams, and studies of the heavens.
  - 3. This description reminds us of Daniel and his friends in the Old Testament!
- C. What the Magi discovered
- After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "**Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.**" Matthew 2:1-2
- 1. Their study of texts, traditions, and the skies led them to believe that a new King of the Jews had been born.
  - 2. We do not know the exact heavenly body, and it may have been miraculous for part or all of this time.
  - 3. We do know there was something in the skies that they saw, which coincided with texts.
  - 4. We don't know what exact texts they had read that led to this conclusion, but the Hebrew Scriptures had been widely spread because of the exile and the translation into Greek (the Septuagint).
  - 5. But some Hebrew texts may have prompted their search:
    - "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. **A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.**" Numbers 24:17
    - a. This was a prophecy of Balaam, the pagan prophet!

- b. He referred to a leader in Israel who would have a scepter (King), and he referred to this leader with reference to a star.

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. Genesis 49:10

- a. This was part of Jacob's final words in Egypt
- b. Remember, Joseph was like an ancient Magi!
- c. This also referred to a king, from Judah - but it said the nations would obey Him!

6. There were also the dreams in Daniel 2 and 7

- a. These happened in Babylon - one was to Nebuchadnezzar and one to Daniel the Magi
- b. Both predicted 4 great kingdoms - Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome
- c. Both said that during the time of Rome, the God of Israel would establish His kingdom and the nations would come to it. This climaxes in Daniel 7:13-14  
"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." Daniel 7:13-14

7. Perhaps these texts, or others, in addition to some unusual heavenly sign (and possibly dreams?), led them to go on a long journey to find the new King of the Jews.

- 8. Whatever it was, it gave them a great desire, and they were certain enough to undertake this long, arduous journey and to come with great gifts to give the new King!

### III. Surprise Worshippers - The Gentiles

A. The response of Herod and the Jewish religious leaders

- 1. As we saw last week, the people we would expect to greet the Messiah with joyful worship did not!
- 2. Herod reacted with fearful hostility, and the Jewish religious leaders reacted with complacent indifference!
- 3. This serves to highlight the surprising response of the Magi!

B. The joyful worship and costly obedience of the Magi

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were **overjoyed**.

<sup>11</sup> 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 and of incense and of myrrh.**

Matthew 2:9-11

- 1. The Magi received the news of Jesus with joy!
- 2. The Magi responded to Jesus with worship!
- 3. The worship of the Magi included costly obedience - they traveled a great distance, humbled themselves before Jesus, and gave gifts to Him.
- 4. Their devotion to Jesus also caused them to risk Herod's wrath when they did not tell him the location of Jesus.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. Matthew 2:12

- a. Herod was not a man to cross!
- b. He had spies everywhere and they were in unfamiliar country and stood out as foreigners.
- c. Yet they would not betray Jesus to Herod!

### C. The Magi are the first of many Gentile worshippers!

#### 1. This 'surprise' is a key theme for Matthew

- a. The genealogy highlighted Gentile women!
- b. Jesus' family settled in Galilee of the Gentiles

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, Matthew 2:22

1. He did not grow up in Bethlehem or Jerusalem
2. He grew up in Galilee, which was known as Galilee of the Gentiles!

- c. Almost all of Jesus' ministry in Matthew happens in Galilee until the final week of His life!

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali — <sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup> "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, — <sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." Matthew 4:13-16

1. John records the ministry in Jerusalem, and even Luke records the visit to the Temple when Jesus was 12!
2. But Matthew focuses almost entirely on Galilee of the Gentiles

- d. The Gospel ends with the call to go to the nations!

Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

1. The Gospel is not just to be proclaimed in Israel - they are to go to the nations!
2. The Magi are the first Gentile worshippers of Jesus, but they will not be the last, for the obedience of the nations belongs to Jesus!

## IV. Applying the Word

### A. God is actively at work calling you to Himself!

1. The Magi were pagan scholars, but God used even these studies to draw them to Jesus!
2. "In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere — "Bibles laid open, millions of surprises," as Herbert says, "fine nets and stratagems." God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous." - CS Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*
3. I was not seeking Jesus, but rather cigarettes and young girls - but Jesus was seeking me!
4. You may feel far from Jesus, but if you are hearing me, He is at work drawing you!
5. You may have been wounded by Christians or the Church, but Jesus is here to bring healing!
6. You may not have thought about Him, but He is drawing You! Do not resist!

7. He has come to save; stop running and look to Him!

B. Surprised and encouraged by God's global work!

1. When the Magi came, it seemed no one was drawn to Jesus - but God promised they would come!
2. When Jesus died, His few followers seemed scattered and defeated - but God was on the move!
3. When Matthew wrote His Gospel, the Church seemed small and irrelevant - but God was fulfilling His promises from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond!
4. The Jewish religious leaders, Rome, Islam, and the Vikings all tried to stop the spread of the Gospel, but it has marched on through every age!
5. Many said Christianity was gasping its last breath decades ago - but the Gospel is spreading faster than ever!
6. Even in our own region, God is on the move!
7. Never give up hope - our God is mighty to save!
8. He will draw the nations, and He is at work to draw your loved ones who are lost!
9. Pray fervently and live joyfully to commend the Gospel to those around you!

C. The Table of Love

1. This Table reminds us of the love of God
2. He created us and redeemed us!
3. He drew us when we were lost and running from Him!

4. He loves and meets us here each week!

5. Come and be strengthened by His love!

### Surprise Worshipers

Matthew 2:1-23

December 21, 2025

Communion

Psalm 67:1-3

Teaching keywords: Advent and Christmas; biblical characters; worship; evangelism and missions

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, <sup>2</sup> that His ways may be known on earth, His salvation among all nations, <sup>3</sup> until all the peoples praise our God! Psalm 67:1-3

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

<sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> "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."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> 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 and of incense and of myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. <sup>13</sup> When 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.”

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where 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.”

<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two

years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: <sup>18</sup> “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup> and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” <sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

<sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, <sup>23</sup> and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”  
Matthew 2:1-23