

Through the eyes of the magi

Christmas worship 2022 – Sermon Notes

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Date preached: December 25th 2022

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1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

3 When Herod the king heard *this*, 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 inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 ‘But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” **9** When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen 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 exceedingly great joy. **11** And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

1 예수님은 헤롯왕 때 유대 베들레헴에서 태어나셨다. 그때 동방에서 박사들이 예루살렘에 찾아와서 **2** “유대인의 왕으로 태어나신 분이 어디 계십니까? 우리는 동방에서 그분의 별을 보고 그분에게 경배드리러 왔습니다” 하고 말하였다. **3** 헤롯왕은 그 말을 듣고 몹시 근심하였으며 온 예루살렘도 이 소문으로 떠들썩하였다. **4** 헤롯왕은 대제사장들과 율법학자들을 다 모아 놓고 “그리스도가 어디서 난다고 하였소?” 하고 물었다. **5** 그러자 그들이 이렇게 대답하였다. “유대 베들레헴입니다. 그것은 예언서에 이와 같이 쓰여 있기 때문입니다. **6** ‘유대 땅에 있는 베들레헴아, 너는 결코 유대에서 제일 작은 마을이 아니다. 너에게서 한 지도자가 나와 내 백성 이스라엘의 목자가 될 것이다.’ ” **7** 그 때 헤롯은 박사들을 몰래 불러 별이 나타난 때를 자세히 캐묻고 **8** 그들을 베들레헴으로 보내며 “가서 아기에 대하여 자세히 알아보고 찾거든 내게도 알려 주시오. 그러면 나도 가서 아기에 경배하겠소” 하였다.

9 박사들이 왕의 말을 듣고 떠나가는데 동방에서 본 그 별이 다시 나타나 그들보다 앞서 가다가 아기가 있는 곳에 멈췄다. **10** 그 별을 보고 박사들은 기뻐서 어쩔 줄 몰랐다.

11 그들은 그 집에 들어가 아기가 그의 어머니 마리아와 함께 있는 것을 보고 엎드려 아기에 경배한 후 보물함을 열어 황금과 유향과 몰약을 선물로 드렸다. **12** 그러고서 박사들은 꿈에 헤롯에게 가지 말라는 하나님의 지시를 받고 딴 길로 자기 나라에 돌아갔다.

Introduction

Let me begin our worship by wishing you and your families a very joyful Christmas season. However you choose to mark this day I hope you have a wonderful time. For some believers

[illegible]

[illegible]

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

As you are probably aware only two of the gospels tell us about the birth of Jesus. Mark and John begin their accounts at the beginning of Jesus public ministry when He was about 30 years of age.

So to find out about how our Lord and saviour came into this world we need to turn to Matthew and Luke. Today we will be looking at Matthew's account. In truth, Matthew does not tell us a great deal about the actual birth. There is no mention of Mary and Joseph having trouble finding a place to stay. No talk of the infant being laid in an animal's feeding trough. And no mention of angels or shepherds. Matthew just gives us the basic facts before moving on to tell us about this significant event following the Messiah's arrival. It is this event that is the subject of our investigation today. I am of course talking about the arrival and worshipping of the infant Jesus by these mysterious men from the east.

Matthew begins by telling us that these events took place some time after Jesus birth. Jesus we know was born in Bethlehem in Judea. Matthew emphasises this point because there was another Bethlehem in Galilee. He emphasises this point because the Old Testament prophesied that this is where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2). Bethlehem in Judea was the ancestral home of David, the great king of Israel.

We also are told that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod. As you know there are 6 different Herod's mentioned in the bible. This particular Herod is Herod the Great, the first of the Herods. He is referred to as being “great” because he was responsible for a large number of great and spectacular building projects. Herod was the Roman-appointed king of Judaea from 37 to 4 BC. You may at this point be a little puzzled. Today we refer to the time since the birth of Jesus as being *Anno Domini* (AD). This Latin term simply means in the year of our Lord. Time then is measured from Jesus birth which we declare as year zero. So I am preaching this sermon 2022 years since the birth of the Lord Jesus. Or am I ? Probably not, we now suspect that the early reckoning of Jesus birth were a little inaccurate. It is therefore most likely that Jesus was actually born between 6 and 4 BC.

Next we are told that some “wise men” came from the east. Who and what were these wise men? Since the bible does not tell us much about them history has filled in the blanks. During the Middle

아마도 그렇지 않을 것입니다. 이제 우리는 예수 탄생의 초기 계산이 약간 부정확했다고 의심합니다. 따라서 예수가 실제로 기원전 6~4 년 사이에 태어났을 가능성이 가장 높습니다. 다음으로 우리는 몇몇 "헌자들"이 동쪽에서 왔다는 말을 듣습니다. 이 헌자들은 누구이며 무엇이었습니까? 성경이 그들에 대해 많이 알려주지 않기 때문에 역사가 반칸을 채웠습니다. 중세에는 이 사람들이 왕이라는 전설이 발전했습니다. 그들은 세 명이었고 그들의 이름은 캐스퍼, 발라다, 멜키오르였습니다. 흥미로운 이야기지만 실제 증거에 근거한 이야기는 아닙니다. 얼마나 많은 헌자들이 왔습니까? 동양의 전통은 동방 박사의 수를 12로 설정합니다. 대부분의 사람들은 동방 박사가 세 명이라고 생각합니다. 세 가지 선물을 모두 받은 후, 그러나 성경은 실제 숫자를 제공하지 않습니다. 3은 있을 법하지 않은 숫자인 것 같습니다. 이들은 중요한 사람들이었고 고대 세계를 여행하는 것은 위험했으며 귀중한 화물을 운반하고 있었습니다. 그들을 보호하기 위해 일부 하인과 군인들이 동행했을 것 같습니다. 어떤 성경 번역본을 사용하느냐에 따라 이 사람들을 "헌자" 또는 "마가"로 묘사하는 것을 보게 될 것입니다. Magi는 그리스어 magoi에서 파생됩니다. 그리스어로 그것은 "박식하고 제사장적인 반열에 속한 사람"을 가리킵니다. 이 사람들을 묘사하는 데 사용되는 페르시아어는 "마법사"를 의미하는 마구쉬입니다. 그들은 사실 고대의 과학자 또는 학자였습니다. 의심할 여지 없이 그들은 의학, 철학 및 자연 과학에 능숙했습니다. 더 중요한 것은 그들은 별에 관한 전문가였습니다. 오늘날 우리는 그런 사람들을 점성술사라고 부릅니다. 이 사람들이 동쪽에서 정확히 어디에서 왔는지에 대해서는 확신할 수 없습니다. 아마도 그들은 수세기 동안 별 연구의 중심지였던 바빌론에서 왔을 것입니다. 이것은 그들이 아기 그리스도를 찾기 위해 약 900 마일 또는 1448km의 여행을 했다는 것을 의미합니다. 흥미롭게도 바빌론은 다니엘의 고향이기도 했습니다. 우리는 다니엘서(단 2:48)에서 그가 모든 자혜로운 자들의 책임자가 되었다는 말을 듣습니다. 다니엘은 메시아가 언제 오실지에 대해서도 기록했습니다(단 9:24-27). 이 박사들과 그들의 전통을 따르는 사람들은 다니엘에게서 배웠습니까? 가능성이 높아 보입니다. 전통적으로 우리는 목자들과 동방 박사들이 예수님의 탄생 직후에 나타났다고 생각합니다. 이것은 예를 들어 크리스마스 카드나 어린이 그림책에 자주 나타나는 방식입니다. 이것은 일어난 일이 아닙니다. 초기 전통에 따르면 동방 박사는 1월 6일에 도착합니다. 다시 이것은 아마도 정확하지 않을 것입니다. 정확하기는 어렵지만 동방 박사의 방문은 예수 탄생 후 1년에서 2년 사이의 어느 때였을 수 있습니다. 계속 진행하면서 이것이 왜 그런지 설명하겠습니다. 동방박사들이 예루살렘에 왔습니다. 결국 그들은 왕을 찾기를 기다리고 있었습니다. 왕은 일반적으로 수도의 궁전에서 태어납니다. 계속 읽어 보십시오.

2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

When the magi arrive in Jerusalem they are eager to find the object of their journey. They ask the people they encounter for directions. Where is the King of the Jews? The first thing I want you to note here is how the magi frame their question. They ask where is He who has been born King of the Jews. Not, where is He who will later become King of the Jews. Usually male royal babies are born as princes. It is only later that they become kings. Not so the Lord Jesus He was born a King.

The Magi tell the people that a star is what alerted them to the birth of this king. We do not know what brilliant celestial body they saw. Over the centuries there have been many suggestions. Some say it was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Others believe it was a supernova (a star that explodes and emits unusual light for several weeks or months). Some have suggest a meteor or a comet similar to Halley's comet. We cannot tell what star the Magi saw, but we should remember that it was their profession to watch the heavens. Certainly some heavenly brilliance spoke to them of the entry of a king into the world.

The magi had come to worship this king. The word worship here is the Greek *proskuneo*. It might mean to "worship" as we understand the word but more broadly it means to pay homage or respect to one mightier than you. The magi clearly expected that the Jews would be excited about the arrival of this king (the Messiah). They are about to find out that this isn't the case. Let's read on.

[illegible]

3 When Herod the king heard *this*, 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 inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

King Herod is not happy to hear this news. Herod was constantly on guard against threats to his rule, especially from his own family. He was a deeply suspicious man. During his reign he assassinated many family members whom he suspected of disloyalty. So his being troubled is completely in character. He knew that the Jewish people's desire was to overthrow the Romans and take back their country. He also knew that a Jewish rebellion led by their king (messiah) would provoke an extreme Roman reaction and his position of power was in jeopardy.

We are also told that the general populace of Jerusalem was also troubled. The people were troubled because they knew Herod to be a cruel and brutal man. What steps would he take to find and eliminate this child. They were rightfully fearful about what he might do. Herod first of all calls together his own wise and learned men; the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

He wanted to know from them what they knew about the birth of the messiah. In particular, he wants to know where this messiah was prophesied to be born. The prophets of old had spoken of this. Let's see what they say.

[illegible]

**6 ‘But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”**

The chief priests and the scribes answer Herod by quoting from Micah chapter five verse two. The prophet Micah received his prophetic insight around 700 years before the birth of Jesus. They also add to this prophecy the fact that this ruler will shepherd the people of Israel. This is an allusion to what was said about David in 2nd Samuel 5:2. This verse reads;

Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’ ” (2 Samuel 5:2)

So these men demonstrate that they understand two important truths. Firstly that they understand that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Secondly that He would be a Ruler who would shepherd God's people Israel. These men knew what to look out for, all the evidence was available to them. The sad thing is as we have seen in our study of Mark's gospel that these men were not really interested in meeting the Messiah for themselves. Let us continue.

대제사장들과 서기관들은 마가서 5 장 2 절을 인용하여 헤롯에게 대답합니다. 예언자 마가는 예수님이 태어나시기 약 700 년 전에 예언적 통찰을 받았습니다. 그들은 또한 이 통치자가 이스라엘 백성을 돌볼 것이라는 사실을 이 예언에 덧붙입니다. 이것은 삼하 5:2 에서 다윗에 대해 말한 것에 대한 암시입니다. 이 구절은 다음과 같습니다. 또 옛날에 사울이 우리의 왕이었을 때에 이스라엘을 인도하여 출입하게 하신 자는 왕이시니 여호와께서 너게 이르시기를 너는 내 백성 이스라엘의 목자가 되고 이스라엘의 주권자가 되리라 하셨느니라 하니라”(삼 5:2) 따라서 이 사람들은 두 가지 중요한 진리를 이해하고 있음을 나타냅니다. 첫째, 그들은 메시아가 베들레헴에서 태어날 것이라는 것을 이해합니다. 둘째, 그분은 하나님의 백성 이스라엘을 돌보실 통치자가 되실 것입니다. 이 사람들은 무엇을 조심해야 하는지 알고 있었고 모든 증거를 사용할 수 있었습니다. 슬픈 일은 우리가 마가복음을 공부하면서 보았듯이 이 사람들이 스스로 메시아를 만나는 데는 정말로 관심이 없었다는 것입니다. 계속합시다.

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

Herod was a wily and crafty man. He summoned the magi secretly to come and meet him so as to avoid arousing the interest of the Jewish religious leaders. The last thing he wanted was the people getting aroused and passionate about the arrival of the Messiah. He wanted to determine from the Magi when the star first appeared. This would give him some indication of the age of this child. Although we are not given their answer we can make certain assumptions from Herod's actions. Later the wicked Herod commanded that all boys aged two and younger be killed in the area. Therefore we can assume that the wise men first saw the star a year or so previously (on the night Jesus was born). It had taken them some time to prepare for the trip and the journey itself had taken a long time. So Jesus would have been between one and two years of age at this time.

Herod tells them to go and find the child and then inform him of the child's whereabouts. His hypocritical humility must have fooled the magi. Presumably they thought he did genuinely want to go and worship this new king. As foreigners, they perhaps did not know about Herod's wicked and cruel nature. This is borne out in the fact that Herod did not deem it necessary to send an armed escort with them to monitor what they did. He clearly thought these wise men would report back to him when they had found Jesus. Let us read on.

[illegible]

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen 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 exceedingly great joy.

After departing from Herod the magi again see the guiding star. Does this mean they travelled at night, or was the star so bright it could be seen during the day, we are not told? Whatever the case they are able to follow it to the place where the Lord Jesus is located.

Matthew also includes the wonderful detail about how the magi felt at again seeing this guiding light. They were filled with great joy. After a long and tiring journey they had almost reached their destination. Let us see what happens next.

동방박사들은 헤롯에게서 떠난 후 다시 길잡이 별을 봅니다. 이것은 그들이 밤에 여행했다는 것을 의미합니다, 아니면 별이 너무 밝아서 낮에도 볼 수 있었습니까? 어떤 경우이든 그들은 주 예수님이 계신 곳까지 따라갈 수 있습니다. 마태는 또한 동방박사들이 이 인도하는 빛을 다시 보았을 때 어떻게 느꼈는지에 대한 놀라운 세부 사항을 포함합니다. 그들은 큰 기쁨으로 가득 찼습니다. 길고 피곤한 여행 끝에 목적지에 거의 다다랐습니다. 다음에 무슨 일이 일어나는지 봅시다.

11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The star led them we are told to a house. This again is supportive evidence that this was some considerable time after the birth. In Luke's account we are told that there was a shortage of places to stay. Mary and Joseph did not have a house and Jesus was born in a place that typically housed animals. This may have been a stable or cave or the downstairs section of a residence. We are also told here that the magi saw the young child with Mary. I direct your attention here to Matthew's description of Jesus. He uses the Greek word *paidion* meaning young child rather than *brephe* meaning infant or baby. This further supports the idea that some time has passed since Jesus birth.

We are then told that they fell to their knees and worshipped Jesus. What an amazing event this must have been for Mary and Joseph. A group of strange foreigners turn up and begin to worship your child. Following this they opened their treasures and presented gifts to the Lord Jesus. It was common in the ancient East that when you appeared before royalty, or a person of considerable importance that you would bring them a gift. The same holds true today. I recently read a book about the British Royal family. Wherever they go around the world they are always being presented with extravagant gifts.

The magi had travelled a long way to pay homage to the king. It is not surprising that they had brought some lavish gifts with them. The gifts, as every child who has ever attended Sunday school will tell you were **gold, frankincense, and myrrh**. Since the earliest of times people have wondered about these gifts and ascribed meaning to them. What presents would you give to a royal baby? We should remember that these wise men had carefully selected these gifts and travelled a long way to present them. Let us consider each in turn.

Gold

Gold is the most precious metal that exists. It has therefore always been highly valued and desired. Crowns and other important items were always made out of gold. The Hebrews too regarded gold as being special. The Ark of the Covenant was overlaid with pure gold. Gold then is a suitable, or appropriate gift for a king.

Frankincense

Both frankincense and myrrh were aromatic gum resins derived from trees and bushes and imported from the east. Frankincense is produced by scraping the bark of certain native species of trees and then harvesting the beads of resin after they have dried. When burned as incense, it creates a strong and beautiful aroma. So here is the key detail. Frankincense was used as part of the worship in the temple. Frankincense then is the gift for a priest. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for men. This is exactly what Jesus did for us.

Myrrh

Myrrh is a fragrant spice derived from the sap of a tree native to the Near East. Like frankincense, it can be burnt and used as incense. But in the ancient world it also had wider usage as a perfume or as an anointing oil. However most notable with regard to Jesus' life is that myrrh was a key ingredient in the mixture of spices that were used to prepare bodies for burial. Jesus of course came into the world to die.

So let me summarise what we see here. Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for one who was to die.

So these were the gifts the wise men presented to Jesus. Even as a small infant he was rightly acknowledged as being King, priest and saviour of mankind. Let's conclude today's passage with verse 12.

[illegible]

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12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

It had been the intention of the wise men to go back and report to Herod what they had found. However God intervenes. They are told in a dream to not go back to Herod. They therefore leave and take another route back to their home in the east.

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Things to think about

I have two comments to make on today's passage.

1 The long journey to Christ

The journey of the magi was a long and difficult one. Many days spent either sitting on a camel or walking. Uncomfortable nights sleeping on the ground. It would have been easy to have given up and turned around. But this was not what they did they persevered in their quest to find the Lord Jesus. In many ways their journey mirrors our own lives. We have a long way to go in our Christian journey. There are ups and down. Seasons when things are difficult. Times when God seems far away. But just like the magi we are to persevere. We are not to allow anything to come between us and our journey to Christ. May we stay strong and resolute in the year to come.

동방 박사의 여정은 길고 험했습니다. □□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□ 바닥에서 자는 불편한 밤 포
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가 강하고 단호하게 지낼 수 있기를 바랍니다.

2 Listen and obey

We know that the magi were intelligent men. The bible after all calls them “the wise men,” not the “about average intelligence men.” What signals these men out for such an honour is that they

listened out for and then obeyed God. Perhaps there was some degree of danger in not going back to report to Herod. No doubt he would have been very angry to have been tricked. But these men listened to what God told them and then obeyed God. This is a good lesson for us to learn. There are many things that we might compromise on. There are things we might do that might make our lives easier but that are not pleasing to God. Let us ask for God's strength to resist and seek to listen to and obey God.

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