



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N49 December 20, 2020

WONDER

“The Wonder of Wise Men”

Matthew 2:1-12

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Worship

I worship God for who he is and what he has done for me.

“Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.”

Psalm 95:1-2



How should we respond to the news of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem?

Christmas is an occasion for *joy*. As Gabriel said to the shepherds, “Don’t be afraid!” he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’ (Lk 2:10-11 NLT). It’s also a cause for celebration. As Luke said *about* the shepherds that after seeing the baby Jesus, “The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them” (v. 20 NLT).

Christmas is also an occasion for *worship*. The two go hand in hand – joy and worship. Psalm 100:1-2 reads: “Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” And Luke 24:52-53 says regarding the disciples that after witnessing the ascension, “They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”

Ironically, the holiday – with all its contemporary accoutrements and with this year’s pandemic – conspires to diminish our joy and detract from our celebration of the glorious incarnation in worship. When Mary questioned Gabriel regarding how she could conceive a son since she was a virgin (Lk 1:34), the angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (v. 35). With these words Gabriel explained the incarnation of God, namely, how “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). The Holy Spirit provided the biological material necessary for conception, containing the union of deity and humanity. Diminished joy and detraction from celebration alone are not good, but what’s more, we’ll miss the practical opportunity to become more joyful people – who then are more inclined to worship.

John Ortberg writes, “You can become a

joyful person. With God’s help, it really is possible. The biblical writers would not command it if it were not so. But joyfulness is a learned skill. You must take responsibility for your joy. Not your friend, not your parent, not your spouse, not your kids, not your boss – your joy is your responsibility. For some of us, this does not come easily. You may be joy-impaired. You will have to fight for it. But it can be done. People who want to pursue joy especially need to practice the discipline of celebration. This is a primary reason that we see much emphasis placed on feast days in the Old Testament. Times of feasting were to be transforming experiences – just as times of meditating or fasting were. Celebration generally involves activities that bring pleasure – gathering with people we love, eating and drinking, singing and dancing. Spiritual celebration means doing them while reflecting on the wonderful God who has given us such wonderful gifts.” The pandemic has made celebrating with others as usual more difficult, but not impossible.

Ortberg continues: “The words of Nehemiah express this spirit of celebration. Our word holiday comes from the practice of ‘holy days.’ We often think of ‘discipline’ as abstinence from pleasurable things, but Nehemiah commanded the people to set aside a time to revel in them as a discipline for personal transformation. ‘Eating the fat’ – in other translations called ‘choice food’ – can be every bit as much a discipline as fasting. We expect a prophet to tell us to eat locusts and brussel sprouts, or maybe nothing at all, but here we see Nehemiah handing out the equivalent of Twinkies and Fritos” (*The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, 71, 72).

Advent is a season for celebration; the incarnation is a cause for great joy. Together they give us an occasion to worship. Take advantage of the opportunity to come before the Lord in joyful worship. You may just become a more joyful person.

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and 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."

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

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He 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."

9 After 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. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 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, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "Herod" and "the Magi" mentioned throughout.
- Box the *temporal* connecting words "after," "during," "when," and "then" throughout.
- Highlight the Old Testament quotation in v. 6.
- Circle "star" in vv. 2, 7, 9, 10.
- Box "to" in v. 2 and "so that" in v. 8 indicating purpose.
- Bracket "king of the Jews" in v. 2, "Christ" in v. 4, "ruler" and "shepherd" in v. 6.
- Draw a line from "worshiped" in v. 11 to "worship" in v. 2.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Commentators think events in Matthew 2:1-12 happened *sometime* after Jesus was born. What makes them think so?
 2. Why do you suppose Matthew included the story of the Magi's visit in his Gospel?
 3. Were you surprised to read that Herod was "disturbed" to hear about the birth of Jesus? Explain.
 4. Why would "all Jerusalem" be disturbed?
 5. Explain how the quotation from Micah 5:2 serves Matthew's purpose (cf. v. 1).
 6. Herod had a secret meeting with the Magi. What was he up to?
 7. Why did he want to know the *exact* time the star appeared (cf. v. 16)?
 8. How could the star in the story be a *real* star, since it led the Magi to Jesus' house?
 9. Explain the significance of the Magi giving costly gifts to Jesus.
 10. **Discussion:** Talk about how we can follow the example of the Magi.
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Commentary On The Text

The story is familiar to many of us. Three wise men came from the east on foot bringing gifts to Jesus, the newborn messiah. Their names were Casper, Balthazar, and Melchior. One of them is often pictured as an Ethiopian because they were thought to represent the three sons of Noah. A twelfth-century bishop of Cologne actually claimed to have discovered their skulls. But is any of this true? Do these traditions reflect what the Bible actually says in the Gospels?

The only trustworthy information we have about the Magi is found in Matthew 2:1-12, which indicates that these familiar traditions are misleading. The passage does not say that there were three Magi, much less tell us their names. It doesn't tell us exactly where they came from—only that they saw his star “from the rising,” which likely means “in the east” (NIV) or possibly “when it rose” (the NET Bible), which leaves us wondering whether they were from Arabia, Babylon, or Persia. Tradition places the three wise men beside the infant Jesus who is lying in a manger, but in fact they may not have arrived until sometime after Jesus was born. Based on details in the story some suggest that Jesus may have been one or two years old when the Magi visited him. They reason this way. The star (i.e., glory of the LORD) first appeared to the Magi when Jesus was born. However, by the time they arrived in Jerusalem following their long journey, the first family was living in a house in Bethlehem (v. 11). Furthermore, Herod apparently based his decision to kill all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and under (v. 16) on what he believed to be “the exact time the star appeared” (v. 7) suggesting that he suspected that Christ had been born sometime earlier. Obviously, our Christmas traditions have embellished the biblical narrative.

Magi (the Greek word *Magio* used for those who were experts in the stars) first appear in history in the seventh century B.C. as a tribe within the Median nation in eastern Mesopotamia. They were skilled in astronomy, astrology and in interpreting dreams, and are often associated with various occult practices, including sorcery. Because of their broad knowledge of science, agriculture, mathematics, history, and the occult, their religious and political influence grew until they became the most prominent and powerful group of advisors in the Medo-Persian and Babylonian empires. In the book of Daniel, Magi were among the highest-ranking officials in Babylon, and Daniel is found among them because of his outstanding wisdom (Da 2:24, 48).

The exile may explain how the Magi came to know about Messiah. When Judah was taken into captivity in the sixth century B.C., Daniel and the other exiles

brought the law and their customs with them to Babylon and introduced them to the Babylonians. Seventy years later many Jews returned to Jerusalem, but others stayed behind. Messianic theology passed from that Jewish community to the Babylonians in general and to the wise men in Babylon in particular. However, even though the exiled Jewish community may have been the ultimate source of their messianic knowledge, the Magi referred to by Matthew lived centuries after the exile. There were probably more like God-fearing Gentiles such as Cornelius and Lydia (see Ac 10:1, 2; 16:14) whom we meet in the New Testament than the wise men of Daniel's day. Why did they set out to find the Messiah? God may have appeared to them in a dream (Mt 2:12) or he may have appeared to them as he appeared to Abram when he was still in the land of the Chaldeans. Stephen tells us in his speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:2 that the *God of glory* appeared to Abraham before he left Mesopotamia. The “star” that “stopped over the place where the child was” could hardly have been an actual star, comet, or conjunction of planets. Instead it was likely the glory of the Lord, a brightness that guided the wise men even as the pillar of fire guided the Israelites in the wilderness (see Ex 13:21).

The most significant fact to note about the Magi is that they were Gentile wise men who were seeking to find the Messiah whose birth fulfilled prophecy. This is consistent with Matthew's desire to show that Jesus was the savior of both Jews and Gentiles, and that his kingdom would include both Jews and Gentiles. At the same time he contrasts the unbelief of the Jews with the belief of these Gentiles to encourage his readers to follow the example of the Magi rather than that of Herod and the Jewish religious leaders.

Clearly the *upper* story of this narrative is about Jesus. Matthew quotes the Magi to identify him as “the one who has been born king of the Jews” (v. 2), and quotes Herod to identify him as the “Messiah” (v. 4). Matthew also quotes the prophet Micah to identify Jesus as the prophesied “ruler” and “shepherd” of Israel (v. 6).

The *lower* story is about the Magi, who serve as a foil to Herod, and their response to seeing Jesus, coined in the familiar expression, “Wise men still seek him.” And when the Magi find Jesus, they worship him and give him gifts fit for a king. We, who have “found” Jesus, should do the same—worship him and give of ourselves to him.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *After* “As chapter 2 opens, the narrative time frame has jumped ahead upwards of two years . . . Luke informs us that before the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea for the mandated census ordered by Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-7). They most likely performed a wedding ceremony in Nazareth, after which they traveled to Bethlehem for the census, where the child was born. Luke does not mention any of the events found in Matthew 2 except to say that after the presentation of the child in the temple, ‘when Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth’ (Luke 2:39).

Most who try to harmonize the infancy accounts suggest that the events of Matthew 2 occur after the temple visit but before the permanent return to Nazareth to raise the child. Others suggest the trip to Nazareth in Luke 2:39 took place prior to the events of Matthew 2, proposing that after the family left the temple, they went to Nazareth for their personal belongings (Luke 2:29) since they had decided to raise the child in Bethlehem. Then, after taking up residence in Bethlehem, the events of Matthew 2:1-22 unfold. When they return from Egypt and discover the danger of continuing to live in Bethlehem, they return permanently to Nazareth” (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 92).

v. 1 *King Herod* I.e., Herod the Great who ruled Judea from 37-4 B.C. “Like most rulers of the day, he was ruthless, murdering his wife, his three sons, mother-in-law, uncle and many others – not to mention the babies in Bethlehem” (*NIV Study Bible*, note on Mt 2:1), which explains why Augustus said he would rather “be Herod’s sow than Herod’s son” (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 62). Herod’s “reign was also noted for splendor, as seen in the many theaters, amphitheaters, monuments, pagan altars, fortresses and other building he erected or refurbished—including the greatest work of all, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, begun in 20 B.C. and finished 68 years after his death” (*NIV Study Bible*, note on Mt 2:1). Since Herod is still alive when the Magi arrive in Jerusalem as much as two years after Jesus was born, the dating of Jesus birth is placed by most scholars at between 6 and 4 B.C.

v. 1 *Magi* Gentile astrologers who came to Jerusalem to worship “the one born king of the Jews,” Jesus, suggesting that believing Gentiles will be included in Messiah’s kingdom. “The Magi were not kings but a combination of wise men and priests probably from Persia. They combined astronomical observation with astrological speculation. They played both political and religious roles and were figures of some prominence in their land” (Blomberg, 62). “They apparently had been exposed to Old Testament prophecies from Jewish colonies situated

in the east . . . there were significant Jewish centers of learning in Babylon at the time of the Magi. Gentile religious leaders in the east were regularly exposed to Hebrew Scriptures, prophecy, and teachers” (Wilkins, 93).

v. 2 *star* Probably not a natural astronomical phenomenon no matter how remarkable (cf. 2:9). More likely, this was a supernatural phenomenon, e.g., an angel (cf. 1:20, 24; 2:12, 13, 19, 22; Lk 1:11, 19, 26; 2:9) or the glory of the Lord (cf. Lk 2:9). “They didn’t see the star rise in the eastern part of the sky, otherwise it would have caused them to travel east. Rather, while they were to the east of Jerusalem, the star rose, perhaps to the west of them, causing them to travel west to Jerusalem” (Wilkins, 95).

v. 2 *worship* Cf. v. 11. Their purpose implies Jesus’ deity. “The most natural meaning of [‘to worship him’] in the historical setting (with reference to a king) is ‘to pay homage to him.’ ‘To worship him’ may also be used in the looser sense, referring to the divinity claimed by ancient monarchs. But Matthew’s readers know the real meaning of what the magi have come to do better than the magi themselves knew, namely ‘worship’ in its proper sense. That is, Jesus is the manifestation of God’s presence (1:23), the son of God (2:15) in a unique sense, and thus one to be worshiped” (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, v. 33A, *Matthew 1-13*, 28).

v. 3 *disturbed* Better yet, “alarmed” (cf. the NET Bible). “Herod knows he is not the rightful heir to the Davidic kingdom; he has usurped the throne by aligning himself with Rome. So with the Magi’s announcement that they are seeking the one born king of the Jews, he probably perceives that invading forces from the east may perhaps join forces within Israel to oust him and place a king on the throne who is from the true line of the expected Messiah” (Wilkins, 97).

v. 4 *all Jerusalem* A figure of speech [metonymy] used to refer to the political and religious leaders there. “Verse 4 refers to the two key groups of religious leaders in Jerusalem. The ‘chief priests’ headed the twenty-four main orders of priests who lived in and around the city. The scribes (‘teachers of the law’) had inherited the ancient profession of copying Scripture, but they had evolved into a class of teachers well trained in interpreting and applying the Old Testament as well” (Blomberg, 63). “They have aligned themselves politically with Herod, and if his power base is threatened so is theirs” (Wilkins, 97).

v. 11 *gold . . .* “The gifts used to honor the new king were typically associated with royalty. All three gifts honor the Christ child as King. Gold, then as now, was a precious metal prized for its beauty and value, an appropriate regal gift. Frankincense and myrrh were fragrant spices and perfumes equally appropriate for such adoration and worship . . . The Magi appear as Balaam’s successors to witness the fulfillment of Num 24:17” (Blomberg, 66).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Advent is a time to celebrate the birth of the one born King of the Jews by worshiping him and giving ourselves to him.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I've always wished that God would use a blinking neon sign to point me in the right direction. A bright green "This Way" with a giant arrow would be super helpful on my spiritual journey. I've always envied the Magi for their supernatural star. What was it like following a giant moving star? How far away was "the east"? Why didn't others see this same star and follow it, too? The whole story causes me to wonder, to ponder in my heart. Our spiritual journey is one that will span our entire lifetime. We'll never "arrive" at our destination until we're face-to-face with Jesus. So, without a giant star or neon sign, how do we know the direction God is calling us? Clear direction and the resulting spiritual growth have a direct relationship to the One we are following. We can't possibly expect to distinctly hear His still, small voice over the noise of daily life if we don't settle our hearts before Him in prayer and meditation. We can't grow closer to Him if we don't open His Word and actively seek Him. Our journey is a one-way relationship without inviting God to participate. Interestingly, the Magi returned home a different way after presenting Jesus with gifts. Our journey toward holiness will not allow us to take the same route by which we came. Our kids need to witness this journey. We are the beacon of light that points them to Jesus. They are firsthand witnesses to God's calling in our lives. How are you inviting them on this journey with you?

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

1. What did the Magi see that caused them to search for Jesus?
2. What did the Magi do when they saw Jesus?
3. What gifts did the Magi give to Jesus?

What Do You Think?

Why would King Herod be disturbed about Jesus' birth?

What Do You Do?

Go stargazing one night this week. Read Psalm 19:1 and discuss how the stars and sky display God's glory.

CORE COMPETENCY: Worship

I celebrate God for who He is and what He has done for me.

MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- I completed my Bible Study
- I memorized this week's verse
- I brought my Bible to church
- I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME _____

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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