

THREE? WISEMEN, TWO KINGS, AND A STAR

Matthew 2: 1- 12; text: Matthew 2: 1- 3

December 27, 2020

I. The Three? Wisemen (Magi)

A. Matthew doesn't tell us how many wisemen there were-- only that there were more than one

1. The number three comes from the number of gifts that were given.
2. Some believe that each of the men gave one gift, but nowhere in the text do we read that.
3. All we know is that they came from the east and that they gave three gifts.

B. Matthew does not call them kings.

1. That idea comes from prophecies like Isaiah 60:3.

Isaiah 60:3 (NIV) Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

2. Although some kings did come to faith in Jesus, that does not mean that these wisemen were kings.

C. Those who visited Jesus are called wisemen in the King James Version, or magi in the NIV and other newer translations.

1. In that day, magi were those who could perform feats of magic, interpret dreams and visions, proclaim prophecy, and interpret the stars.
2. The magicians in the book of Daniel were magi.
3. Yet, we don't know if these magi were from Babylon.
 - a. Some think they were from Persia.
 - b. Some think they were from India.

D. They were a sign to God's people that the long-awaited Messiah had come.

Matthew 2:1-2 (NIV) After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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."

1. These pagan foreigners came to worship the newborn king.
2. This was predicted by prophecies in the Old Testament, including the scripture from Isaiah which we cited earlier.
3. It's also a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that from his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
4. For many years the God had revealed himself in a special way to only one people, the Children of Israel.
5. But, after the Messiah came, he called all people everywhere to repent and believe. (Acts 17: 30)

John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Questions:

- 1) In my opinion, why does Matthew leave out so many details about the magi?
- 2) Is it right for Christians to dabble in astrology, spiritism, and other magic arts? If not, why do I think God would choose to reveal the special message to such people? What should that tell me, as I witness to others.
- 3) The magi were a sign to God's people that the Messiah had come? What signs do I see today that he is here among us through the Holy Spirit? What signs do I see that he is coming again?
- 4) How did the fact that God sent these pagan foreigners to worship the new king challenge some of their long-held ideas that they were the only people God cared about? When has God challenged some long-held ideas of mine?

II. The Two Kings

A. King Herod

1. King Herod, whose palace was in Jerusalem, had worked hard to gain his throne.
 - a. Skillfully maneuvering through Roman politics, first supporting one rival to the throne, Marc Antony, and then betraying him and supporting Augustus, when the later became more powerful.
 - b. Although he was part-Edomite by birth, he married into the ruling family and then later executed his wife.
 - c. He also killed two of his sons, whom he suspected might be plotting against him.
 - d. He, nonetheless, was an able administrator, whose building projects, including a full remodeling of the temple, were the envy of many governors and kings throughout the empire.
2. So, when he heard these magi coming from the east saying that there was new king in Judah, he was alarmed.

Matthew 2:3 (NIV) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

- a. He suspected the king may be the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament.
- b. Otherwise, why would he have asked the religious leaders about where the Messiah would be born.
- c. But that didn't stop him from even taking on God, if necessary, to keep his throne.

3. The people in Jerusalem may not have liked Herod as king, but they really weren't much different than he was.

Matthew 2:3 (NIV) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

- a. Certainly, one reason the people of Jerusalem were shaken along with Herod was that they were afraid what he might do.
 - i. He had already executed his own sons to hold on to this throne, and Matthew 2 later reveals that he would murder again to do so.
 - ii. Yet, in their fears over this, they apparently forgot that God was in control, not Herod.
- b. The people were also troubled because they were a lot like King Herod.
 - i. None of the religious leaders went to Bethlehem to check things out, nor did any of the people
 - ii. And it was these same religious leaders who later brought King Jesus to Pilate to be executed, because they believed he was challenging their rule and power.
 - iii. And the troubled people of Jerusalem when given a choice between Jesus and a murdering revolutionary named Barabbas, chose Barabbas, and called for King Jesus to be crucified.
 - iv. They didn't like Rome, but they didn't want their comfortable lives upset either.

4. Yet, because they didn't accept the Messiah both King Herod and the people died in tragic ways.

- a. Only a few years after this, Herod died in Jericho, after an excruciatingly painful, putrefying illness of uncertain cause, known to posterity as "Herod's Evil".
- b. And less than 100 years after this Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, because in Jesus' words, "they did not recognize the time of their visitation. (Luke 19:24 NASB)

5. That should be a warning to all of us as we think about the day our Lord will return.

Luke 17:26-27 (NIV) "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

B. King Jesus

1. He wasn't born in the capital, but in the birthplace of that great king of Israel, David, where the prophet Micah said he would be born.

Micah 5:2 (NIV) "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

2. His origins are from of old, from ancient times.

a. King Herod ruled for only a few short years, but King Jesus reigns forever.

b. More to the point, way before he made the world God chose Jesus to the Messiah king who would rule from David's line.

3. Herod reigned for his own glory and benefit; Jesus reigned for the good of his people.

a. In citing Micah's prophecy, the religious leaders didn't quote Micah verbatim.

Matthew 2:6 (NIV) "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."

b. Their words are a reminder of what Isaiah 40 says of the Lord, the king.

Isaiah 40:11 (NIV) He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

c. And when we as believers hear that prophecy, we should be reminded of what King Jesus said about himself.

John 10:11 (NIV) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

d. "He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)

4. Today our king calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. (Matthew 16:24)

a. We do it by living as he lived.

b. We do it by our loving sacrifice for others.

c. We do it by obediently sacrificing everything for him.

5. Just as the people in Jerusalem followed King Herod and shared in his fate, so we who follow our king will share in his eternal reign.

2 Timothy 2:11-12a (NIV) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.

Questions:

- 1) When have I been tempted to be like Herod and stubbornly and firmly hold on to what I have when King Jesus has called me to give it up for the good of his kingdom? What happened?
- 2) What have I sacrificed for Christ? When has King Jesus ever called me out of my comfortable lifestyle? How did I respond?
- 3) The religious leaders who rejected Jesus, like Herod, held onto their positions of power for their own glory and financial gain. Have I ever done anything for the Lord, with such motives in mind? When? Did I ever confess this sin and ask God for forgiveness? How is believing the hope that I will reign with Christ different from doing what I do for him from a selfish motive?
- 4) Herod may have died a painful death, but there are others like him who died rather peacefully, and there are Christians who died painful deaths. How do I make sense of this? (read Psalm 73)
- 5) Do I live everyday with the understanding that Jesus could return at any time? Why or why not? Even if he does not return in my lifetime, why should I concern myself with this thought?

III. The Star

A. There have been many theories about the star the magi followed.

1. Some say it was Halley's Comet.

2. Some say it was two planets coming together in the sky.

3. Some say it was a natural star, but don't know which one.

4. Others it was a miraculous star especially made visible by God.

5. All Matthew says was that God caused the magi to see some star in the sky that led them to worship the new born king.

B. God used what the magi understood to call them the Bethlehem.

1. They studied the stars, but they weren't astronomers, who study them to gain scientific knowledge of the universe.

2. Astrologers studied the stars, because they believed they affected, if not controlled, human affairs and human history

3. Not only does modern science reject such notions, so does the Bible.

4. Nonetheless, God met the magi, where they were.

C. The same God who uses the stars to call people to worship the newborn king uses us as his stars to do the same.

Philippians 2:14-16 (NIV) Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

Questions:

- 1) What do I think the star of Bethlehem was and why?
- 2) Even though God does not want his people to practice astrology or other magic arts, he used a star to call these astrologer magi to Bethlehem. What other scriptural examples can I site of God doing something like this? How did the Apostle Paul use such a strategy when he proclaimed the gospel in Athens? (see Acts 17.) When has the Lord stooped to meet me in my weakness? How could I use such a strategy to reach others?
- 3) How am "shining like a star" for Jesus in this crooked generation? How well am I shining like a star? How brightly is our church shining? How could we shine brighter? From where does our light come? When I do shine, who is getting the glory?

In this dark world, our king says to us, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16 (NRSV) "Christ, be our light. Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness.

Christ be our light. Shine through your church gathered today.