

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Wise And Foolish Men

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Introduction: We must first look at some historical facts about Herod and the Magi. Herod spent several years fighting the Jewish uprising to his rule. He was a clever and capable warrior. He was a great orator. But Herod was cruel and merciless. He was jealous and afraid of losing his power. Magi, or wise men as mentioned by Matthew, are little known. They are only mentioned here in Scripture. We don't know their names, number or their means of transportation. The fact they are mentioned as coming from the East assumes they were known as priestly political class of the Parthians, who lived east of Palestine. Often known as "magicians" because of their wise ways, many were heavily influenced by Judaism over the years.

We are not told how God revealed to the magi to know that the King of the Jews had been born, only He gave them the sign of His star in the East. Some say it was the formation of Jupiter and Saturn, which formed a sign of the fish, which was used to secretly identify Christians in the early days of the church. We cannot be dogmatic about the identification of the star (in fact, it may not have even been a physical star), but it may have been the **glory** of the **Lord**, the **same glory shown around the birth of Jesus** in Luke 2:9 "**And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.**" Remember God guided the children of Israel through the wilderness by "**a pillar of cloud by day...and in a pillar of fire by night.**" And in Exodus 24:17 "**And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.**" Peter, James and John witnessed this as Jesus was transfigured before them, Paul was surrounded by a light from heaven.

A couple of other introductory notes...the magi weren't following a star initially, they only saw it, and once they inquired it appeared again and led them to Christ (vs. 9). They came to **worship**. Let's be clear, worship has a variety of different interpreted meanings. However, the truth within itself means they were **truly seekers** of **God**. When He spoke to them, in whatever way it was, **they heard and responded**. Whatever limited knowledge they had of the Messiah, they **immediately recognized God's light**.

Point 1 - Herod And His Agitation (Vs. 3-8). The **king** was **troubled**. And it's not hard to understand he was sitting upon a **religious** and **political powder keg**. He had driven the Parthians out of Palestine, was fighting Jewish zealots who wanted their country free of Roman occupation. The magi were either Parthian or closely related to them, thus causing

The Gospel of Matthew

even more concern for Herod. All of Jerusalem was concerned too, Herod was ruling on Rome's behalf and many thought the **magi** would **come** and **rule** on the **Parthians behalf**.

Herod's fear meant bloodshed and fear among the people. Many who were perceived as a threat to his rule, were often killed. His fear of conquest was **exacerbated** when he **slew** all **male children** under **two years old** in the town of Bethlehem. Many today are like Herod when they **hear the gospel** and **conviction** comes upon them. No, they aren't rulers of a secular kingdom, **but they are rulers of their world**. And **Jesus presents** a **threat** to their **personal, prideful throne**. Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling." Proverbs 29:23 "A man's pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor."

Point 2 - The Chief Priests. In some ways the priests were like the magi, they had considerable political and religious power. According to OT law, there was to be **one chief priest**, appointed for a **lifetime**, whose special and unique duty was to enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. But priests were removed by differing leaders and many were living at one time, and had been appointed to different positions to oversee. Some were treasurers, overseers of priests, groups of men who had arresting powers. By this time the group of chief priests had become nothing more than a group of **corrupt, religiously oriented politicians**.

Point 3 - The Scribes. They were primarily **Pharisees**, authorities on **Jewish law, scriptural and traditional**, and were **referred to as lawyers**. They were **conservative theologically**, held a **literalistic view of Scripture**, but were **legalistic in regard to ceremonial and moral law**. Herod called together all the religious leaders to inquire of His birth. They shared what the Scripture said, **but they showed no belief or special interest in the announcement of the magi**. In fact, in discussions about who Jesus is we find this in John 7:40-42 "Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, This certainly is the Prophet. **41** Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? **42** Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" **According to Scripture Jesus would shepherd and be the ruler and King of Israel. This alarmed Herod, and frankly, alarmed the religious leaders as well.**

The unbelieving, politicized, self-serving Jewish **leaders recognized** from **God's word** a coming **King, yet they did not accept or believe it**. These leaders offer an example of what many are like today. 2 Timothy 3:7 "Always learning and never able to come to the **knowledge of the truth**." What the **chief priests** and **scribes** wanted **was a god that was like**

The Gospel of Matthew

them. One that conformed to their view. Many today are religious, put scripture on social media, believe in God, acknowledge He is the creator and seem committed to the church, but when it comes to holiness, sin, and righteousness, they have their own version and want God to accept it rather than be conformed to Him. Here is the plea from Isaiah 55:6-9 and it's very fitting for today, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Point 4 - The Worship Of The Magi. There was no way to know Herod's wicked intent. The Lord gave them a divine direction to Jesus. The star appeared again, but it doesn't seem to be a star in the sky as we know it. A physical star as we know it cannot appear directly over the child. They were so overwhelmed that this star reappeared, it's almost as if Matthew is at a loss for words to describe their joy as he uses the emphatic expression to describe joy "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Joseph and Mary were no longer in a stable but in a house. When the magi found Him they worshipped. In His wonderful grace God led them to the Savior. They saw Him. They rejoiced. Charles Wesley in his Christmas hymn wrote, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity; pleases as man with men to dwell; Jesus our Immanuel!"

The magi worshipped the child, as Matthew makes clear, not the mother. Cornelius tried to worship Peter, and the crowd attempted to worship Paul and Barnabas. They worshipped only Jesus. Their giving was an expression of worship, much like we do today. We give today as an act of worship not an investment. Some have said gold was for His royalty, frankincense was for His deity, and myrrh for His humanity.

There's no doubt God uses special communication to warn them of Herod's wicked intentions, and it could have been in a dream as we see God communicating in the OT and here as a way to do such. We have His word today to hear from Him. However, we see the divine working of God in accomplishing His will in this text.

Concluding thoughts: Are you like Herod? Wanting to keep your kingdom for yourself and not allow another ruler to rule you? Are you like the priests and scribes, who want a Jesus to your liking? Or are you like the magi, seeking to worship and serve God?