

Week of December 18, 2011

Respond to God's Gift

Passage Outline:

1. **Seeking the Gift** (Matt. 2:1-6)
2. **Rejecting the Gift** (Matt. 2:7-8,16)
3. **Worshiping the Gift** (Matt. 2:9-12)

What This Study About?

It is about the varied responses to the birth of Jesus by the wise men and by King Herod.

How Can this Study Impact Your Life?

This lesson will help you value worship and service as responses to the gift of God.

Matthew 2:1-6

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 in the east 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 Christ 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 be the shepherd of my people Israel."

1. **Seeking the Gift** - Matt. 2:1-6

- A. While both Matthew and Luke recorded events surrounding the birth of the Savior, only Matthew records the visit by the **wise men**.
- B. How much time passed between Jesus' birth and the visit of the Wise Men? We cannot be sure. But since they came **from the east**, we do know it was not soon.
- C. These **wise men** were on a mission, to find the **King born of the Jews?"** Their question was a loaded one that implied several things:
 - i. It assumed the child's birth had already taken place.
 - ii. It implied they were seeking the true heir to the throne of God's chosen people rather than one who fulfilled that role now, namely King Herod.
 - iii. The object of their search was no mere infant, but a child of royalty.
- D. They had come in search of this child because of **His star in the east**. What was this star?
 - i. Was it a natural phenomena, some historical records cited are:
 - There was a planetary conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 7 B.C.
 - There was a multi-planet conjunction between 2-5 B.C.
 - ii. Was it a miraculous act of God specifically created to set in motion His plan of Salvation? Bottom line is **we really don't know what this was**.

What motivates you to “seek the gift” of Jesus?

The wise men were motivated by a sincere desire to find a new king in Jerusalem to worship. What is your motive for worshiping Christ this Christmas? The Christian community itself is torn between proper and improper motivations. Some seek the Savior for what they can get from Him, while others are more interested in what they can give to Him. The former motive is born of selfishness. The latter stems from a godly desire to give back to One who gave us so much.

This week evaluate everything you do to celebrate Christmas and ask why you do them? For yourself? Or for Jesus? Or maybe both?

- E. After King Herod heard the news of these visitors, **he was deeply disturbed**. What do we know about King Herod?
- i. Herod was appointed king in 40 B.C.
 - ii. He was from Idumea, only half-Jewish, and not descended from the great King David.
 - iii. He most-likely was threatened by word of any potential king with rightful credentials.
 - iv. And because Herod was such a ruthless ruler, **all Jerusalem** was disturbed as well.
- F. How did Herod respond? Herod called together the chief priests and scribes and thinking the “King of the Jews” meant **the Messiah**, Herod wanted to know where the child **would be born**.
- G. The religious leaders answered him based on the Old Testament prophecy of Micah 5:2. God’s Messiah would be born in **Bethlehem, in the land of Judah**. Matthew may also have in mind 2 Samuel 5:2, which said that the Messiah would be a “godly leader and shepherd of God’s people, roles Jesus fulfilled.
- H. Unlike the wise men, Herod’s motives were to seek out and destroy this newborn King. Matthew would later record, Herod’s aim was to wipe out any competitor rather than worship.

Matthew 2:7-8, 16

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 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." ...¹⁶ 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.

2. Rejecting the Gift - Matt. 2:7-8,16

- A. Since Herod was an illegitimate king over Judea, he was extremely paranoid about losing his throne, even to the rightful heir. Herod was very nasty:

- i. Herod murdered his favorite wife, sons, and other potential competitors, leading to the well-known saying it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son.
 - ii. His desire to "find the newborn King" had evil intent.
 - iii. His effort to eliminate any challenger to his throne was evidence of his rejection of God's gift.
- B. Therefore, Herod **secretly summoned the wise men** acting deceitfully, and murderously.
- C. Herod told the Wise Men that after finding Him, they were to **report back** so Herod could **go and worship Him** too. Herod's pretended desire to worship the infant King was not genuine, but evidence of how deceitful he could be in rejecting the gift of God's Son.

How do you see God's Gift most frequently rejected today?

Many people today reject God's gift in various ways, including through deceit similar to that which Herod exemplified. Another way people neglect Jesus is through sheer apathy. Unlike Herod, who had real interest in finding the newborn King, many simply ignore the greatest gift ever given. Every Christmas season, the rejection of Jesus through neglect is visible as we get caught up in less-important but more-emphasized elements of the holiday. We shop, celebrate, and travel without giving serious thought to the real reason for the season. These activities are not necessarily bad, but can overshadow an earnest, genuine time of thankfulness for and worship of Jesus and celebration of His birth.

- D. When the wise men did not report back, Herod **flew into a rage**. He orders the **massacre all the male children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under**.
- E. Herod's final act of desperation to wipe out a threat to his throne is powerful evidence of his rejecting God's gift.

Matthew 2:9-12

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

3. Worshipping the Gift - Matt. 2:9-12

- A. After the wise men received this information, **the star they had seen in the east led** them exactly to the place where the child was. Matthew's description of the star made clear it was no ordinary star.
- B. They entered a **house** and **saw the child** with **His mother**, indicating some time had passed since Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

How does God's gift of Jesus resonant in you?

“Worshipping the Gift” of Jesus takes many forms with joy, in humility and through gift-giving. We should be reminded that God cares more about the genuineness of our worship of Him rather than the style of our worship. Scripture places two over-arching qualifications on Christian worship: it must be “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Whether it has been many years or just a short time, does your gratitude to God for His Gift of Jesus resonant as strongly within you as it did when you first believed? How does that gratitude move you to worship and service today?

C. Their reaction was threefold:

- i. They fell **to their knees**, taking the posture of humility before a small child who was royalty.
- ii. **They worshiped Him.** It may seem odd to imagine grown men giving worship to a 2-year-old child, but we must keep in mind they *knew* this particular child was special.
- iii. They gave Him **gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.** Nowhere does the Bible mention the number of wise men venturing to find the King of the Jews. Our tradition that there were three almost certainly comes from the three gifts presented to Jesus.
 - Gold was a beautiful, precious metal fit for royalty.
 - Frankincense was a resin used ceremonially in prayer in the Old Testament temple.
 - Myrrh was used in the making of perfume to cover a dead body.

Biblical Truths from Our Study

1. Believers must make it our goal to seek, with proper motives, God's gift of His Son in our everyday lives.
2. We must always be on guard against rejecting God's gift through either our apathy or outright disobedience against God's will.
3. Jesus, the greatest gift given to humankind, should be our primary object of desire and genuine worship.
4. We can and should express our devotion through giving our time, talents, and resources for the purpose of furthering God's kingdom.