

Reflections on the Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12

1. They Didn't Come Empty-Headed Vs. 1-3

1. *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem,*
2. *saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."*
3. *When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*

In Persia resided a class of people that we call the Wise Men, or Magi. They were academic scholars and religious seekers. Assuming they had Zoroastrian roots, they believed in one God, disapproved of idolatry, and had moral values.

Their heritage included astrology and sorcery, but apparently, in their studies, they had come across portions of the Scriptures. Because they responded to the light God gave them, they were supernaturally guided in their studies. Special revelations were given as they sought the truth.

They were a small band of searchers, like an island in a sea of paganism. They were a counterculture who sifted through the strands of evidence, ever sorting through their collected insights.

In this period of world history, there was the expectation of a powerful king. The Latin writers Tacitus and Suetonius record the sense of expectation. Apparently, the sense was in the east as well.

Clearly, the Magi had a copy of Numbers 24:17 and the prophecy made by Balaam – albeit given unwillingly, it accurately forecast:

*I see Him but not now
I behold Him but not near
A star shall come out of Jacob
A scepter shall rise out of Israel*

Somehow, they knew what the Jewish writings all said – that this passage spoke of the Messiah.

And then, there appeared a new star in the night sky. How they knew to tie this star to this prophecy, we are not told. A special revelation... an angel... a dream? But somehow, they knew!

A king had been born to the Jews. And where else would you look for a king of the Jews except in the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem? And here is the irony of it – Jerusalem was clueless!

Here are some men who decided to obey the Great Commandment... loving God *with all their minds*.

2. They Didn't Come Empty-Handed

Vs. 11 "Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

Some assume from the number of gifts that this is the number of Magi present, but we don't know how many Wise Men came to see Jesus.

- Gold was a gift for a king.
- Frankincense was a gift for a priest.
- Myrrh was a gift for someone who was going to die. It was used in embalming.

They understood the basic principle of worship: If you come empty-handed, you are nothing but a taker. And worship that costs nothing means nothing.

3. They Didn't Come Empty-Hearted

Vs. 10 "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure."

Vs. 11 "Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him."

- Even though this baby was unrecognized by others.
- Even though this young family was unimpressive in their modest home – not in a palace they had, at first, expected.
- Worshipped: "Among the Orientals, esp. the Persians, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence" – Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

- Even though these men were men of training and insight – they fell face down on the floor – prostrate – before the King – and worshipped...

4. They Didn't Come without Help

The King is not in the capital city as they had anticipated. No one there seems to know anything about this.

They had seen the star while they were still in the east. This was a new star, and they knew what it meant! Apparently, to this point, the star had not been moving or leading them. But now, they are getting close. How among all the villages, and all the little homes in the villages, do you know which is the right village or the right home?

Herod, in his plot to kill off any rivals, calls in the Bible scholars and ascertains the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem. Now isn't this crazy! The scholars know the answer, the town is abuzz with the talk about the Magi's coming, but no one goes to Bethlehem to check.

Herod gives the Wise Men this new piece of information with the request they come back to inform him of the location of the new king that he may also go and worship Him. Now we read:

After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. Matt 2:9 (HCSB)

When someone wants to do God's will, God will not allow them to miss it!

And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route. Matt 2:12 (HCSB)

These men were wise, but they were still dependent on the grace of God. The Magi weren't from Israel. They had not been trained in all the Scriptures. They didn't know the place or the people. It would have been easy to mess up. But God protects them.