

Worshiping the King

Mt 2:1-12 (text)

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 25 December 2019, 10:00

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Much has been speculated about the magi of our text – who they possibly were, and where exactly they came from.¹

But I want to avoid that this morning, and just focus on their devotion to King Jesus!

Here are three points...

- Searching the King
- Persevering in the Search
- Worshiping the King

Searching (the King)

Well, these wise men from the east came to *Jerusalem* – not directly to Bethlehem, and they asked (in v.3), “*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east (or: in its rising)² and have come to worship him.*”

Now, there’s been a lot of speculation about what this star could have been.

Some people have thought it could have been a comet whose tail gave guidance to these magi during their travels. Others have come up with lots of theories of super nova stars or clusters of stars and constellations.³

¹ In a previous sermon on this passage, I wrote the following as part of the introduction:

“Through the ages, many speculations have arisen about this magi-account – an account only found in the Gospel of Matthew.

Although our text clearly calls these visitors from the east, “magi,” speculation has changed them into kings¹ - and even *three!*

This number seems to have been based upon the fact that our text mentions three gifts that these magi brought for Christ.

Well, lots of things are *not* said in our text. So, we should not allow our curiosity to drive us to assumptions and speculations.

The persons who came from the east¹ – Matthew calls them “magi,” a title used in those days to describe astrologers; yes, people who were into consulting the stars in order to learn the future.

When did these astrologers come to Judea?

Well, looking at verse 3, they came to Judea at the time of Herod the Great. Now, because we know that this Herod died in 4 BC, it means that, at the latest, these astrologers must have arrived in 4 BC. And this must be fairly correct, because we know that historians have placed Christ’s birth sometime between 6 and 4 BC; and because Mt 2:16 says that Herod gave orders to kill all the boys under the age of *two*.

Thus, by the time the magi arrived in Judea, after what could have been a long journey from as far as Persia, the Christ-child could have been just under two years of age, and no longer in the stable where He was born, but in a *house*, as v. 11 of our text indicates.¹ Thus, those pictures that have the shepherds as well as the magi simultaneously worshipping Christ, are wrong!”

² ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ can mean either “in the east,” or “in its rising.”

³ Sproul (ibid) mentions, “Kepler, e.g. argues that there was an unusual conjunction of two planets in the constellation of Pisces in 7 AD that would have given an extremely lustrous magnitude of these two planets in such close proximity.”

But there is also this other possibility – that the star that led these astrologers to Jerusalem and, then to Bethlehem, was a specific creation by God for this particular event.

After all, did not God once allow a special fiery cloud to guide His people through their desert wanderings – a glory-cloud which was the expression of God’s presence – His shekhina?

Now, could it be that, again this time, God created a special light to lead these stargazers to Christ?

You see, if I had to choose from all of the above, then I would choose the latter, because I think it would be very difficult to follow with precision the tail of a comet (or a cluster of stars) to Jerusalem, and then from Jerusalem not just to Bethlehem, but to a specific house/stable in Bethlehem.⁴

So, I believe this was another account of a miraculous act of God to guide & draw these magi to the Christ-child.

Someone might also ask, “But how did these magi know that the king they were looking for was a king born to the Jews and not to some other nation?”

Well, our text does not tell us. But, it is not unlikely that, there in the east where the magi were coming from, the Jews had spread the news of God’s promises of a mighty King that would be born to their people. After all, it was in that very east that for a long time the Jews lived in exile – some even chose to stay in Persia and Babylonia after a remnant of Jews had returned to Jerusalem.⁵

My brother & sister, perhaps all the things which our text does not tell us – all the extra things we’d like to know – God decided not to give them to us so that we can focus on that which is priority, i.e. that the magi came searching and searching so that they could worship the Son of God!⁶

My Brother & Sister, what is point 1 saying to us? What message does the Magi’s searching hold out to you & me?

Well, here’s something you & I must first grasp, i.e. that, about thirty years later, this very King Jesus whom they were searching would say, “No one can come to Me unless My Father in heaven draws him!”⁷

So, what do we see?

Well, that these magi could not have come to (could not have searched for) King Jesus without having been drawn by God the Father! And they obeyed!

How different the priests and scribes of v.4 of our text! I mean, was it not a good prompting from God when suddenly the magi came and asked them, “Where would be born the King of the Jews?”

And these priests & scribes knew the Scriptures so well, they could tell the magi off hand, “He would be born in Bethlehem!” But, my brother & sister, do you think that, by this

Also cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew (*In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.152ff.*); and also cf. the following URL link for a good example of many theories: <http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/star-of-bethlehem.shtml>

⁴ cf. Sproul (ibid)

⁵ For this possibility cf. Hendriksen (ibid:153f.) who says, “Though it is safe to assume that the wise men had been taught by the Jews to expect the coming of a Deliverer, an expectation that was probably rather widely spread in those days and by no means confined to the Jews (cf. John 4:25), their linking of His birth with the appearance of a definite star, called ‘His star,’ remains unexplained.” Also cf. the elaborate exposition given by Hendriksen (ibid:153 fn.161) on the widespread knowledge that the Jews were expecting their promised King.

⁶ Cf. Hendriksen (ibid:155)

⁷ Cf. Jn 6:44, “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.**”

prompting (this gracious “nudge”) from God, these priests & scribes would go *with* the magi and see their King for themselves!?

No!

Like self-righteous people of an empty religion, they only directed these searchers to King Jesus, but they themselves showed no desire to go to Him!

You see there is such a thing as that some people – when God draws them to seeking Jesus, they kick heavily against God’s pricks & goads! I mean, did not King Jesus Himself say to Paul, “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads*”?⁸

And so, my brother & sister (dear young people/children), when God prompts you & me through His Word and Holy Spirit to search King Jesus (either for the first time, or again and again for a closer walk), why will we be like the priests & scribes of our text who ignored the promptings of God!? Yes, why will you & I not make sure to seek King Jesus by making time for personal devotions?

Well, this brings us to point 2 in the sermon...

Persevering (in the Search)

In their search of the King of the Jews, these magi didn’t arrive in Bethlehem, but in Jerusalem.

Gauging by v.3, it seems the magi came with a large enough caravan to attract the city’s attention; they must have assumed that they would find the newborn king in Herod’s palace in Jerusalem.⁹

But, “*When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*”¹⁰

Now, of course, we know why *Herod* was troubled!

I mean, ancient sources sketch a clear picture of Herod’s paranoid fear by which he often used to execute even family members whom he thought might snatch the throne from him.¹¹ Thus, hearing from these “experts” in stargazing that they had come to worship the newly born King of the Jews whose star they had seen from the east, was more than enough to give Herod a heart-attack! Perhaps he thought: “What if this rumour about another king of the Jews stirs up a revolt among some fanatics who hate me and have already caused so much trouble...!?”¹²

So, Herod was troubled and *all Jerusalem* with him.

Why was all Jerusalem troubled with Herod?

Well, because who knows whom mad Herod might suspect of treason? If Herod gets paranoid, he could kill anyone! So, no-one was safe!¹³

⁸ Cf. Acts 26:14

⁹ Keener, C. S. (1997). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, Mt 2:1). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 2:3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹¹ For references to these sources and Herod’s many executions – even of family members, cf. Hendriksen’s commentary on Mat 2:3, especially Hendriksen (ibid:161ff.)

¹² Cf. Hendriksen (ibid:156). Of course, had Herod known at this time that he would die within another year or two, he would not have had any reason to be worried about a king who would replace him, especially when this king was now still only one or two years old.

¹³ “Nor were the inhabitants of Jerusalem merely alarmed from apprehension of the cruelty of Herod, but because, along with him, they anticipated a conflict and a judgment of a spiritual character” (cf. Lange, J. P., & Schaff, P. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Matthew* (p. 58). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software).

Well, verse 4 tells us that Herod called the priests and scribes (law-teachers) of the Jewish people to inquire from them where the Messiah/Christ was going to be born.¹⁴

So, the priests & scribes came and answered according to their knowledge of the Old Testament.

And, effectively, this was their answer: “The prophet Micah said that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea – just 10 km down the road from here.”¹⁵

Well, v. 7 tells us how Herod now secretly meets with the magi alone and, in devilishly cunning way and with great hypocrisy, pretended that he would like to hear from them where this King is, once they have found Him!

So, Herod was an instrument in the devil’s hands, just as Rev. 12 describes, i.e. that the “dragon” (which is satan) stood ready to devour the Christ as soon as He was born.¹⁶

Anyhow, vv. 9-10 tell us, “***After they had heard the king, they (the magi) went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east (in its rising) went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.***

So, after a very long journey, probably from ancient Persia (now Iran), and despite their difficulties, hindrances and stumbling blocks, these magi, having the serious desire to find the King, *persevered* in their God-prompted search of Him.

And finally, they reached their destination.

My brother & sister, there’s a lesson for you & me in this too, i.e. to persevere in our daily searching of Christ – yes, in daily turning to Him, clinging to Him, seeking His direction and guidance amidst life’s tough trials and luring temptations! You see, more & more in our day, the Christian finds himself being buffeted/attacked by the secular values of this world; buffeted by atheism, agnosticism and foreign religions; by materialism, immorality and gadgets & gizmos!

But the child of God is the one who perseveres in his/her Christian walk: in Bible studies, devotion and prayer, as he/she stands on the promises of God that He will preserve our faith, yes, as Paul says, we are “...***confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus***” (Phil 1:6).

Worshipping the King

Verse 11 tells us, “***On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.***”¹⁷

See?

The Sovereign God had so ruled that even these non-Jewish people would come to glorify the Son of God!

What a promising sample they were of the gentiles who would soon be included in God’s blessings through Abraham & David’s offspring!

¹⁴ And we must note that Herod’s question to them straightaway linked this baby (this little King) with the long-promised Messiah of the Jews, for Messiah had been eagerly expected for quite some time already.

¹⁵ Cf. Mt 2:5-6, ***They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”*** (Reference to Micah 5:2).

¹⁶ Rev 12:3-4 ***And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.***

¹⁷ *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* (1984). (Mt 2:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Well, next thing, these magi opened their *treasure chests*¹⁸ and presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Now, biblical scholars have seen a certain symbolism contained in the particular gifts that were offered:¹⁹

- The first gift was the gift of gold. And in the ancient world it was taught that the only gift which was fitting to give to a king, was the gift of gold. Gold was the metal of *royalty*. So, the magi worshiped Baby Jesus as *King*.
- Secondly, they gave Him incense. Now, the Jewish priest used to burn incense on the incense altar! And such burnt incense symbolised the sweet aroma and fragrance which the prayers of God's people are to Him. And so, scholars look at this incense gift and say it pointed to Jesus' priestly role as our Intercessor with the Father! And indeed, which Christian can ever forget Christ's high-priestly prayer for us in John 17, "...*I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one...*"²⁰
- The third gift which the magi presented is myrrh. And the main use of myrrh among ancient people was for anointing the dead at their burial. We remember when Jesus died how Nicodemus came that night with about a 40kg-mixture of aloes and myrrh.²¹ Then, they they took the body of Jesus and wrapped it, with aloe and myrrh, in linen cloths.²²

So, the gifts were gold, frankincense & myrrh – three gifts that indicate the esteem with which the Magi revered & honoured the child Jesus as king of the Jews.²³

Thus, we can say that these magi came and worshiped Christ the King with their generous *financial* offerings – and very appropriately so!

But look, does not v.11 tell us, that apart from giving *financially*, these magi gave *themselves* to Christ also in their posture as they ***fell down before Him***, i.e. humbling themselves before Him!

And does not v.11 also tell us that they praised Him with their lips, for look how v.11 says they ***worshiped Him!***

So, truly, the kind of worship which our Lord adores, is worship coming from a heart filled with love & joy for Him! And such worship is comprehensive – it includes the heart, mind, mouth, possessions and money of the worshipper!

It is an absolutely generous giving of our whole selves!

Yes, it's like Frances Havergal's hymn says...

- Take my *life*, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee...

¹⁸ Verse 11, τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν (their treasure chests): from *thēsauros* (**θησαυρός**), 'treasure box.' ἀνοίξαντες τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα 'they opened their treasure boxes and offered him presents' Mt 2:11. A 'treasure box' may be referred to as 'a box with valuable objects' or 'a box with objects costing a great deal of money' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, pp. 69–70). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁹ I'm giving here the symbolism as described by Sproul (ibid).

²⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Jn 17:15). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

²¹ Cf. Jn 19:39 ***Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.***

²² Cf. Jn 19:40 ***Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.***

²³ More than the Magi knew or intended, these gifts were likely used to providentially support Jesus and His parents in their flight to and stay in Egypt (Cf. Wilkins, M. J. (2004). [Matthew](#) (pp. 91–109). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

- Take my moments and my days...
- Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love...
- Take my feet...
- Take my voice...; my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee...
- Take my silver & my gold...; my intellect...
- Take my will...; my heart...
- Take my love...
- Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee...

My brother & sister, what will move your & my heart to worship the Lord our God in such all-encompassing manner – and with generous & self-sacrificial giving of ourselves? What will move us to such action?

Well only if we are stunned by God’s generous & self-sacrificial giving to us!

Remember Rm 5:8, “***But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***”²⁴

Yes, remember 2 Cor 8:9, “***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.***”

Children, do you worship God by giving yourself totally and self-sacrificially for Him – also in the way you treat your brother/sister at home? Or are you always trying to take the best for yourselves?

Husbands & wives, do you worship King Jesus in your marriage by giving yourselves self-sacrificially for one another? Yes, husbands, are you kindly contemplating, “How can I fulfill in this/that need of my wife?” Or are you mostly thinking about what you can just get for yourself? Are you worshiping Christ by loving your wives after the example Christ set for us when He loved the church and gave Himself up for her?²⁵

The same with you wives. Do you worship Christ by the way you self-sacrificially give to your husband?

See?

Worshiping Christ the King is not just by way of financial giving, but in giving every area of your life!

How will you & I get *anywhere near* doing that?

Only when we’re awestruck by God’s generous giving to us!

Yes, only when you & I are fundamentally transformed in our lives as we experience God’s giving, so graphically displayed in the little Infant in Bethlehem!

AMEN (2,298 words excluding footnotes)

²⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 5:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁵ Cf. Eph 5:25-27, ***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.***