

12-03-17 – Wise Men – Matt. 2:1-12

The famous poem penned by an Englishman named William Chatterton Dix poses a question we will try to answer in this series of the same name as the inquiry... **What Child is this?**

Although the wise men were never mentioned in the song per se, the lyrics of verse three mention their notable actions of worship and generosity...

“So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh...”

The wise men make their appearance in Matthew’s gospel account in chapter 2. In this gospel message we learn some things about these wise men and their origins and intentions. Let’s look at their lives as a reflection of some of the attributes of Jesus’ life.

READ: Matt. 2:1-12 NLT

Mt. 2:1-2 - Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and we have come to worship him.”

According to the text – these wise men came from the East. This would most likely point to Arabia and its surroundings. These were Gentiles from Arabia coming to worship Jesus. To the Jews, this was the land on the East side of the Jordan River. The Arabian deserts and Arabian Peninsula include areas such as modern day Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, and Jordan.

The gifts they brought also lend to an idea of their place of origin...

Mt. 2:11 - They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These men probably carried this gold from the place it was mined. This would be in southern Arabia commonly. We can find references in 1 Kings 9:28; 10:2; 1 Chron. 29:3-4; Job 28:16.

The gifts of Frankincense and Myrrh also have their origin in Arabia since the trees that bore these fragrant spices were prevalent in Southern Arabia at this time.

There is also a prophetic future glory of Israel that gets fulfilled in the person of Jesus...

Is. 60:1-6 - Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the LORD rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the LORD rises and appears over you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance. “Look and see, for everyone is coming home!”

Your sons are coming from distant lands; your little daughters will be carried home. Your eyes will shine, and your heart will thrill with joy, for merchants from around the world will come to you. They will bring you the wealth of many lands. Vast caravans of camels will converge on you, the camels of Midian and Ephah. The people of Sheba will bring gold and frankincense and will come worshiping the LORD.

The gifts mentioned in Isaiah are consistent with the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus mentioned in Matthew's gospel. These gifts were carried from their origin in Arabia. So, other creditable writers in the first and second century AD confirm the story that the wise men came from Arabia bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Why is the origin of the wise men significant to the question, **what child is this?** Both the wise men and Jesus came a long distance to be in Bethlehem at that time. The wise men traveled far from their home in Arabia and Jesus traveled far from His home in Heaven to be at this place and at this time. None of this was by accident. The child in the manger is the one who, like the wise men, made an arrival in Bethlehem from some distance. John opens his gospel story by telling us of the great distance Jesus came to be with us...

John 1:1-2, 9-12, 14 - In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

"When considering the Christmas story, it is important that Jesus came not only to seek and save Jewish working class shepherds who did not always have much money but also came for Gentile Arabs who were wealthy and came bearing gifts to the Messiah. This mention of wealth and gifts brings us to the second comparison between the wise men and Jesus. Just as it is inferred that the wise men were from a position of wealth, likewise, Jesus came from a place of means. He is the God who stepped out from the riches of heaven and into the poverty of a lowly manger in a Bethlehem stable." (Skit Guys – Wise Men sermon notes).

As we read in Revelation especially, we can see that Jesus was in a place of wealth, glory, and power before He came to us. He is currently back in that place of wealth, glory and power in heaven and He will continue in that place for all eternity. Listen to the Psalmist's words...

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."
Ps. 24:1

"For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills." Ps. 50:10

As we sang – Jesus came to the earth He created out of His high place in Heaven, and He came to be with us in lowly esteem to save us and rescue us from our sin condition. He is the One who created and owns all wealth. This child and the wise men came from a place of means and have access to wealth.

We start to see a glimpse of who this child really is. He is full of generosity and a good giver of gifts. **What child is this?** He is the One who would give the ultimate gift. He was born to give His life as a ransom for many. While the wise men were generous and givers of good gifts, they are only a sample of the return gift that Jesus would give to all humanity – Gentile and Jew.

Let's look at some Scripture about the gifts Jesus came to give us ...

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen – Gal. 1:3-5

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. 1 John 3:16

Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. – John 14:27

I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. – Phil. 4:13

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. – Mk. 10:45

The list of gifts Jesus gave us is long. He has the heart of His Heavenly Father...

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

What child is this? – He is the One who gives and is generous in ways that we see the wise men echo as they gave their gifts. They found Him because of the guidance of a star.

These wise men studied many teachings including philosophies and cultures of their surroundings. They knew the stories and prophecies surrounding the coming Messiah for Israel. They studied and knew the celestial bodies and the stars of the sky. It is no wonder that they recognized a new, bright star in the sky and followed it to the place of Jesus' dwelling. ***N.T. scholar N.T. Wright said, "When something important was happening on earth you could expect to see it reflected in the heavens."*** And visa versa.

When these wise men from the East saw the star rising in the sky, they took it as a sign that something significant had happened on earth. And so it did.

The wise men knew the stories of the coming Messiah from the Jews who were exiled back when. Even after the exile, many Jews stayed back in Babylon and other places instead of returning home to Israel. They had wives and families to care for now. These wise men had heard the expectancy stories of the One who was to come according to the prophets. This was not new information that they grasped onto when they saw the star in the sky. They simply followed the teachings they had learned – something the Jews should have done more of. They were taught the stories of the diverse cultures as part of their educational process. Now they sought out the One to be called King of the Jews and were led by a star to Bethlehem of Judah.

So, the wise men came to seek something just as Jesus came to earth to seek something...

Lk. 19:10 – *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*

What child is this? His is the One who, like the wise men, came to seek something – US. The wise men found who they were seeking and were overwhelmed in His presence. This was God with Us – Emmanuel – Jesus – the Messiah and Savior of the world.

The emotions of the wise men were running high as we see in Matthew’s gospel...

Mt. 2:9-11 – *And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

Some time had transpired between the time Jesus was born in a manger and when the wise men finally arrived in Bethlehem. The verse mentions that they entered the house and found the child and his mother. By the time they arrived, Jesus was no longer an infant, but a child; they entered a house not the barn birth place. Regardless, they fell with their faces to the ground and worshipped this child and offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These Gentile wise men recognized this Jewish child for who he is – King of kings – who came as the promised Messiah – Savior – God. He came for Jews and Gentiles alike to save the world.

Simeon said it in **Luke 2:30-32 – “... for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”**

Simeon said it – actually prophesied it – this child is the King who is worthy of worship for the Gentiles and Jews. He was the One who offered salvation for all peoples of all nations. He would tell his disciples and all believers after he was raised from the dead...

Mt. 28:18-20 – *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

The wise men were the first Gentiles to worship Jesus. It was what Simeon said; it was what the wise men experienced.

What child is this? – He is the One who is worthy of worship by all people. He is the One True Savior of the entire world that is worthy to seek and to worship. He is the One not impeded by distance to be born as the One to give His life that we may receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of everlasting life. May we do as the wise men did? May we seek Him, bow before Him, worship Him, and give Him the gifts of our lives as we go and tell others about Him.

Video – the Forth wise man...

Prayer.