

LESSONS IN WORSHIP

Thursday, December 21

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2:2 *"Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him."*

Our nativity scenes are usually wrong. We have our three kings standing with the shepherds at the manger. In fact, the Bible never says how many wise men there were, only that they brought three gifts. And Magi are not kings. They are advisors who study the stars (a mixture of astronomy and astrology) to predict the future. And they did not visit the Christ Child at the manger. Matthew records that the family is in a house and Jesus is not a baby but a 'young child.' They arrive on the scene at least 40 days after Jesus' birth as Luke records the family's visit to the Temple where they meet old Simeon. The actions of Herod imply that up to two years may have passed.

The arrival of the large entourage (Magi, servants, guards, camels etc) from across the border ¹ did not faze the people as much as their question, "Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews?" This would greatly disturb the paranoid King Herod and when Herod was disturbed the whole city shuddered at what he might do.

Having received information from Herod, the Magi head to Bethlehem. The star that had announced Jesus' birth now guides them to the very house where the family is staying. These noble dignitaries bow before the Child in worship and present Him with expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. "He Called Together the Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law." Herod asks the religious leaders where Messiah would be born and they have the correct answer. They quote Micah 5:2 to show He would be born in Bethlehem. Sadly, though they know where to find the Christ Child, they apparently do not care to go and worship Him themselves. They were too tied up in their rituals and routines to see the Savior. Many people in the world are just like them. They celebrate Christmas. They may even acknowledge that 'Jesus is the reason for the season.' But they have no time for Jesus in their lives. They are too wrapped up in their own plans and ideas to worship the Savior. A relationship with God is NOT about knowing the facts, but about worshipping the Savior. It is not about what you know, but WHO you know.
2. "They Bowed Down and Worshipped Him." Notice several things about the Magi's worship. (1) It brought great joy (2:10) when they saw the star and knew their quest was almost complete. (2) They bowed down (2:11). This expresses an old Persian custom when you greeted someone who was your superior. You would fall prostrate on the ground ('bow down') while at the same time 'throwing' kisses toward them (the meaning behind the word 'worship'). The Magi are acknowledging the greatness of the Christ Child and their own humble position in comparison. (3) They presented Him with gifts (2:11). These were not dollar store gifts. They gave the best they had! Do we worship Christ with great joy and humility? Do we give Him our best or our leftovers?

¹ The Magi were probably from Parthia (present day Iraq). Israel was a buffer between their empire and Rome's. The Parthians had taken over Jerusalem by force some 30-40 years previously and set up their own king. Backed by Rome, Herod drove them out and became king of the Jews. No wonder these Magi asking about a new king would distress the already paranoid king.