

Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-12

January 9 & 10, 2022

Perhaps, you have seen some of those funny statements online that talk about the wisemen: *"If three wise women had visited Jesus, they'd have brought more useful gifts like diapers, formula, and some casseroles for the family."* Even though it is funny, because it might be true that those three gifts might have been more practical for the family of Joseph. The only problem is this: they would miss the point. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves: *How do the wisemen or magi fit into the whole picture of Christmas?*

I think that we all have images in our minds as to what the first Christmas looked like for Jesus' birth. Often in those nativity scenes, we see the magi in them. First of all, we are not even completely certain what the stable looked like. It may have been a structure; it may not have been a structure. It might have been a small cave carved out of the hillside. Some people even would keep their animals in the lower level of their home to keep them safe. Secondly, we don't know when the magi even found Jesus. They don't show up a couple of hours after the shepherds from the fields, or even a couple days or weeks. Their visit comes months, perhaps as many as two years later. By that time, they are still in a house, perhaps, even with relatives.

In fact, when you start to look at this account, there are more questions than answers. These magi are only spoken about in these 12 verses of Matthew. The other three Gospel writers don't even mention them. We don't know how many there were. The Bible talks about the three gifts, not the number of men. They are often pictured as "kings," partly because of the song: *"We three Kings of Orient are."* When the Bible speaks about "magi," it denotes great men of learning in philosophy and astronomy, not royalty. It is likely that these men were Babylonian astrologers, priests of great wealth, privilege and standing. Often when the Bible speaks about magi, or magicians or astrologers, they were not spoken about in the most complimentary way.

So, how do these men find out about Jesus? To find an answer to that question, you might have to step back about 600 years in time. If they came from Babylon, which is likely, then the "magi" of Babylon in the past would have had access to the prophet, Daniel. When the Babylonians had captured the children of Israel, nearly six centuries before Jesus' birth, they would take the cream of the crop back to Babylon. One of those men was Daniel. Daniel would later be placed in a position of a magi. He would then become a leader in the magi order. Daniel's prophecies would give a timeline for the Messiah's birth.

Other prophecies in the Old Testament would speak about this coming king. For instance, Psalm 72 describes the future reign of the messianic king. He will rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. His reign would be **"from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."** (Ps. 72:8) The prophet Haggai speaks about this coming King that God will give: **"I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty."** (Hag 2:7-9) And finally, Isaiah: **"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."** (Isaiah 60:1-3)

How would these magi mentioned in Matthew be able to put all these pieces together? The answer is that they couldn't by themselves. It was something that God would have had to reveal to them. We don't know exactly how God did that, but they would put together the prophecies of Daniel and the other references of the Old Testament that Daniel may have brought to the Babylonians and connect it to the star in the sky. When God revealed this to them, they wanted to go and worship this king and travel hundreds of miles from the East to see him. God was pulling them to come and see this "King" who he was giving to this world. He wanted them to see the plans that he had for the world. If you want to know what God's plans are, you must go to where God had revealed it. That meant traveling to Jerusalem and eventually to Bethlehem.

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “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.”

God has revealed this to you and me. Even though these magi had all the information they needed, someone needed to put all the pieces together for them. That someone is God. It was God who revealed his plan to the world. When they came and found Jesus: **“They were overjoyed. On 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, frankincense and myrrh.”** Isn't that why we are here today? We have come to worship the King. Just as Satan tried to use Herod to pull people away from this King, his plan would fail. Satan will try to do the same thing with us. He will move us to come up with all kinds of different excuses as to why it isn't important to worship this King.

One of the saddest things about this whole text is that no one came with the magi. We can understand why Herod didn't go, but what about those **“chief priests and teachers of the law?”** It's almost shocking to see how much indifference they had in God's promises. God had put all the pieces together for them as well, and they choose to ignore it or believe it. Isn't it possible for us to have the same apathy at times in our lives? When that happens, God's arms are open and wants to welcome us back. When those magi gave Jesus their gifts, they were giving to him much more than some valuable commodity, they were giving him their hearts. They had come to worship this child because of who he is. This is God's gift to the world. There in that child is the Light of the world. There in that child is the one who will remove the darkness of sin. You see that's the whole point of Epiphany. Amen.