

The Visit of the Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12

One of the most interesting and wonderfully mysterious parts of the Christmas story has to be the account of the visit of the wise men from the east. Allow me to talk first about what we do not know about their visit. We do not know the exact time of their visit. We do not know how many of them there were. There are three gifts mentioned that were presented to the Lord Jesus, but that does not necessarily speak of the number of wise men.

Allow me to note a few things we do know. They did not come to the manger, for the Bible says in Matthew 2:11, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother..." A Roman historian (Suetonius)

says of this particular time, "There had spread all over the orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time that men coming from Judea would rule the world." The wording "the wise men" comes to us from a phrase in the original languages, "magos" or "magi." This is where we get our word "magician" from. We know throughout the known world these men were highly respected for their intellect, science knowledge of their day, general wisdom and (as another interesting fact) they were also known as "the king makers." In the land of the east, a king was not acknowledged as true in identity and authority until the wise men deemed it so. God used the wise men to tell us that even in the secular world they could not deny the authority that Christ was indeed whom God said He was. II Peter 1:17: "For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." I am confident to say that I believe these wise men were influenced by the witness of the Jews who had been carried away in the numerous dispersions. For instance, Esther became the queen of Ahasuerus who ruled the Persian empire from India to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1). The records in Esther 8:17 state, "And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." Then you have the witness of Daniel and the Hebrew children in Babylon. And remember that Daniel was a prophet and was not only considered part of the group called the wise men, but the outstanding leader of the group. To say that Daniel and his friends impressed Nebuchadnezzar would be quite an understatement as told in Daniel 1:20, "And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." Daniel was the leader as noted in Daniel 2:48: "Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief

of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.” Remember Daniel was a prophet and he, no doubt, whetted the appetite of future wise men with this prophecy from the Law of God as recorded in Numbers 24:17 and 19, which says, “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.” Then we see that Daniel definitely had the wise men “looking up” when he comes to the closing chapter of his prophecy with these words: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

I am glad the visit of the wise men is recorded in Divine Inspiration. There is much wisdom that we can glean from their visit.

I. GOD GOES THE DISTANCE TO ANNOUNCE THE BIRTH OF HIS SON.

Matthew 2:1, 2

Much distance is spanned in getting the wise men to Bethlehem. We have no reason to doubt, especially at the beginning of our story, that the star seen by the Magi is literally a star. Here is a mind-blowing thought: our closest star is Alpha Centauri. It is 4.367 light years from Earth. That's over 25 trillion miles away from Earth – nearly 300,000 times the distance from the Earth to the sun. The space shuttle orbits the Earth at about 5 miles per second (18,000 mph). Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, which is about 37,200 times faster than the shuttle. So the shuttle would need about 37,200 years to go one light-year. Therefore, (if it were possible) traveling at 18,000 mph it would take us after leaving Earth to arrive at our nearest star 162,452.4 years.

There is a common legend about the wise men that says that there were three of them: Melchior, Balthasar, and Gaspar, from three different nations (Babylonia, Persia, and India). One early writer called them three kings. Let's say this is true. From Jerusalem, Bagdad (in modern Iraq, which was ancient Babylon) is 545 miles; Tehran (modern Iran, which was ancient Persia) is 968 miles. From Varanasi, India would be 2,913 miles. One legend has it that the three wise were representatives of the three sons of Noah, from whom the entire population of the world stemmed. This is mere speculation. What is not speculation is that God moved the entire sidereal system and brought the wise men from a great distance just to tell the universe the King of Kings has come! God literally moved Heaven and Earth to make this grand and glorious announcement.

II. NO ONE REMAINS NEUTRAL WITH JESUS

Matthew 2:3

Rome had declared this unauthorized Herod to be the king of the Jews. As a matter of fact, his lineage was Idumeon, which made him, at least from his father's side, an Edomite. He was as cruel a monarch that ever sat on a man-made throne. He was greatly troubled and terrified when he heard the report of the wise men. He knew he was not and his progeny could never be the rightful king of the Jews. He was so full of hatred toward any competition that he murdered his own family members that might pose a threat to his reign. The reason he asked the wise men what time the star appeared (Matthew 2:7, 8), was so he could know how to proceed to plan B if he did not accomplish plan A. His plan A was to murder Jesus if and when found. Plan B was to kill all male babies in the age range in that area if the Messiah was not found. And sadly, this is exactly what happened.

III. FULFILLED PROPHECY REVEALS THE AUTHENTICITY OF JESUS

Matthew 2:5, 6

The priests and scribes knew, according to prophecy exactly where Jesus would be born (Micah 5:2). They knew, yet they would not join the wise men to welcome their King, thus fulfilling John 1:11: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." From hateful Herod to the indifferent religious men of the day we are reminded of the words from one of Jesus' parables: "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." (Luke 19:14).

IV. GOD GIVES MORE LIGHT TO THOSE WHO OBEY THE LIGHT GIVEN TO THEM

Matthew 2:9, 10

We see that the guiding light became more intense after the visit with Herod. The joy of the wise men is quadrupled! The Bible says they "...rejoiced with exceeding great joy." The guidance has now become specified. God's GPS is in perfect working order! People who know they are centered in God's plan are blessed beyond measure! Psalm 89:15: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of Thy countenance." Psalm 36:9b: "... in Thy light shall we see light."

V. ONCE JESUS IS FOUND, EVERYTHING CHANGES

Matthew 2:11, 12

The phrase, "...they departed into their own country another way" (Matthew 2:12c), says it all. They gave to Jesus gold, signifying Christ was not only King, but also Deity. They gave to Jesus frankincense, signifying the act of worship. They

gave to Jesus myrrh, signifying that He had come to die. II Corinthians 8:5 would be most applicable here in light of this phrase, "...fell down and worshipped Him...." If these wise men were familiar with Daniel's prophecy, they were aware of Daniel 9:24 and 26, which tell of the death of Messiah, the Prince, not for Himself, but for the world he loved. The wise men knew who He was; they knew why He came!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the name.