

Matthew 2:1-18 The Visit of the Magi

v1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem v2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." v3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. v4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. v5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: v6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." v7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. v8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." v9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. v10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. v11 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 and of incense and of myrrh. v12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. v13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." v14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, v15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." v16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. v17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: v18 "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Why the Magi are considered WISE

We often imagine the Magi kneeling beside a wooden manger on the night Jesus was born, gold, frankincense, and myrrh laid beside shepherds and animals.

It is a familiar and beautiful image. But it is not that close to what happened according to the scriptures.

1. The Magi are considered WISE because their learning made them inquisitive.

The Magi did not come from nearby fields like the shepherds. They were learned men, likely court scholars or astrologer-priests, from the East, possibly Persia or Babylon.

2. The Magi are considered WISE because they searched for truth until they found it/HIM.

Their journey would have taken months, more likely one to two years, depending on distance, travel conditions, and political realities.

Matthew tells us something else that is often overlooked, "Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared." (Matthew 2:7) Herod's response reveals that the star was not new. It had appeared long before the Magi arrived in Judea. This explains Herod's horrifying command, "...he killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men." (Matthew 2:16) Herod did not just make a wild guess. He calculated.

3. The Magi are considered WISE because they asked the right people the right question.

v2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." v3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. v4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. v5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: v6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

The Magi went to the obvious place to ask the obvious question.

4. The Magi are considered WISE because they recognised what they saw when they found Jesus.

Jesus was no longer a newborn. He is called "paidion", a young child, not a baby. Mary and Joseph were no longer sheltering temporarily but living in a house. Time had passed. God did not hurry the Magi. The sign was given, but the journey required endurance, interpretation, sacrifice, and risk. They crossed borders, entered hostile political spaces, and even stood before a paranoid king. They followed revelation slowly, faithfully, and at great cost. And when they finally arrived, they did not find a throne or a palace. They found a child.

5. The Magi are considered WISE because they surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus.

And Matthew says: "They fell down and worshiped him." (Matthew 2:11) Not because He looked powerful. Not because He was impressive. But because they recognized who He was.

There is something deeply theological here.

The first recorded worshipers of Jesus outside Israel were Gentiles. Outsiders. Foreigners. Men who did not have the Law or the Prophets in full, but who responded to the light they were given.

6. The Magi are considered WISE because they came ready to honour a KING.

WHY WOULD THE WISE MEN HAVE BROUGHT THE GIFTS THEY DID TO JESUS

These valuable items were standard gifts to honour a king or deity in the ancient world: gold as a precious metal, frankincense as perfume or incense, and myrrh as anointing oil. In fact, these same three items were apparently among the gifts, recorded in ancient inscriptions, that King Seleucus II Callinicus offered to the god Apollo at the temple in Miletus in 243 B.C.E.

The Book of Isaiah, when describing Jerusalem's glorious restoration, tells of nations and kings who will come

Isaiah 60:1-6 The Glory of Zion

v1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

v2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. v3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. v4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. v5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. **v6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.**

7. The Magi are considered WISE because they followed the leading of God.

v12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The wise men were smarter than the religious and POLITICAL leaders of Israel.

CONCLUSION

They travelled years for a glimpse. The Magi crossed deserts and empires to find Christ. They searched the skies, studied signs, and risked their lives for one encounter.

While we, we are invited to meet Him daily.

We have Scripture in our language.

We have prayer without distance.

We have access without danger.

And yet, we still sometimes have the audacity to say we are too busy.

Too tired.

Too distracted.

Too occupied.

The Magi remind us that Jesus is worth the journey, no matter the cost.

And they quietly confront us with a sobering question.

If they travelled years to worship Him once, what excuse do we have for neglecting Him when He is always near?

We do not need to read the stars or travel far for so long anymore. The Messiah has already been found.

The question is no longer how far must we travel, but why do we still hesitate to come?