

Remnant Life Church
December 9, 2018
Visiting Strangers – The Magi
Matthew 2:1-12

- Two weeks ago – the innkeeper – not mentioned in the Bible but someone had to tell Mary and Joseph there was no room for them
- Last week – the shepherds who received the first announcement
- This morning – the men who, like the shepherds, also received a very special announcement – the Magi

READ – [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

What do we know about the Magi?

- Not very much – only a few verses and only in Matthew
- The majority of what we accept today is from later writers, historical information and cultural sources

Here is what the Bible says

- They came from the east ([Matt 2:1](#))
 - It was the Parthian Empire centered in Persia that occupied nearly the entire area east of Judea – today modern Iran and Iraq
 - This was the land of the Babylonians, Assyria, Elam, and the Midianites
 - While there were many religions associated with that region the most dominant was Zoroastrianism
 - A religion originating in that same region from a prophet named Zoroaster
 - Lived around the time of 1500 -1000 BC
 - He would have been a contemporary of Moses and Joshua or possibly Samuel if closer to 1000
 - A religion deeply steeped in Astronomy and the study of celestial bodies
 - Taught a philosophy of dualism meaning good v evil and darkness v light
 - This is what so keenly drew their attention to the unusual star in the sky and why they would have been curious enough to travel the estimated 800 miles or so taking between 2 to 3 months to cover the distance by caravan
- They are called Magi ([2:1](#))
 - Magi is the plural of Magus (may-ges) which translates to sorcerer
 - The Magi were a product of the Zoroastrian priestly caste
 - While they were eventually absorbed into other religions of the time and region, particularly the Greeks, their influence remained
 - Words today of magic and magician are rooted in the word magi
 - They may or may not have been royalty – probably not (scientists and/or priests)
 - Their being called kings is a reference to the Old Testament writings which tell of the Messiah being worshipped by kings
 - [Isaiah 60:3](#); [Psalms 68:29](#)

- In particular [Psa 72:11](#) - *May all kings bow down to him...*
 - Admittedly a bit of a stretch to positively identify the Magi as those kings
 - It was Tertullian, an early church father and Christian philosopher from Carthage about 175 years after Jesus, who subscribed to and promoted their being called kings
 - They are unnamed in the Bible
 - In the early sixth century, from writings of Greek origin possibly from Alexandria, that the names Melchior, Balthazar, and Caspar are given (among other variations)
 - An Armenian tradition places Balthazar as being from Arabia, Melchior from Persia and Caspar from India
 - Parts of these nations were all conquered by and a part of the Persian empire at one time
 - The Bible does not give the number
 - It is assumed by the number of gifts given
 - There may have been many more as a part of a caravan of priests
- There are those who believe the Magi were not astronomers at all, as some Bibles translate the word Magi (somewhat weak argument)
 - First, would God use a practice which is pagan and condemned in His Word to bring people to Jesus? ([Duet 4:19](#))
 - God used the ungodly throughout His word, in particular the OT, to accomplish His will
 - Second, the word “magi” would also be used to describe Daniel, and his friends, who were clearly not pagan
 - [Daniel 1:17](#) - *To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.*
 - Even though they lived in the Babylonian culture and their names were changed, however, they did not forsake God.
 - A person absorbed into a culture did not necessarily mean they abandoned who they were – (also Joseph)
 - Third, these men came to Jerusalem with specific, Biblical knowledge about Jesus, not a mystical curiosity divined through the satanic means of witchcraft and sorcery.
 - [Matt 2:2](#) – *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.*
 - [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) - *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*
 - All of which suggests they may have been either descendants of Daniel or of that same class of court official, who had been waiting for the Messiah since the

Babylonian captivity, with the recorded vision of Daniel and the OT prophets to help guide them!

- What about the gifts?
 - Gold, frankincense, myrrh
 - These gifts, as many of you know, relate to the life and ministry of Jesus to come

Gold - gold was a gift of great value; the best of what could be brought

- It signified Jesus' Kingly role
- What gift is more appropriate for a king than gold?
- If Jesus is the king of your life this morning are you willing to give Him your best in all things?

Frankincense – an ingredient used by priests in temple worship to be blended with the burnt offerings

- This was to acknowledge Jesus' priestly role
- Yes, Jesus was the King of the Jews, but He is also The Great High Priest ([Heb 2:17](#))
- To offer our lives to Him as a sacrifice (*...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God...– Rom 12:1*)
- That sacrifice of our lives is shown through our relationship with Him

Myrrh – a spice used primarily in the embalming of the dead

- What a bizarre gift to bring to a child
- It signifies the coming death of Jesus
- Jesus was born to die (not will dies as we all do, but offering Himself to die in your and my place for the forgiveness of our sins)
- [Heb 10:10](#) - *...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.*

But what do we take with us from the wisdom of these travelers who came to see Jesus?

1. They were wise because they followed the leadership of the Lord God and were obedient.
 - a. We are not told specifically how but God spoke to them
 - b. But they came to Jerusalem to find the Christ-child ([2:1-2](#))
 - c. Are we being wise to follow God's direction for our lives?
 - i. Notice that following God's direction may not always show us what we expected to find?
 - ii. We read that they found the child with his mother ([2:11](#))
 1. The nativity scenes we all know so well are probably not accurate
 2. Jesus is called a child, not a baby or an infant
 3. He was most likely between 1 and 2 years old
 4. It is why Herod's command was to kill all the male children of Bethlehem age 2 and under
 - d. The wise men did not stop obeying God after they arrived
 - e. God spoke to them in a dream to go home a different way so as not to report what they saw to Herod ([2:12](#))

2. The wise men were wise because they sought Jesus for the right reasons
 - a. They did not search Jesus out for their own wealth, fame, and power
 - b. Caution today of following ministries just because they are large, famous, or financially successful
 - i. Olsteen interview
 - ii. Interviewer asked - Do you believe that only those who are Christians go to heaven?
 - iii. Hemmed and hawed and finally answered it was not up to him to determine who goes to heaven – that was up to God to decide
 - iv. He already did!
 1. *Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)*
 2. To be wise to never shrink back from speaking the truth of God's Word
 3. Book sales, church attendance, and offering amounts can NEVER be what determines our life in God!
3. The wise men were wise because they gave Jesus the best of themselves and what they had
 - a. Notice the order of what they did
 - i. They did not send the gifts on ahead like Jacob did when he was about to be reunited with Esau ([Gen 32:13-21](#))
 - ii. They did not announce their arrival with expensive gifts
 - b. They gave themselves first in worship and bowing down in servitude before the Christ-child
 - c. Then they presented the gifts
 - i. Their gifts were not just a token of what they had
 - ii. It was the best of what they had

What are you giving of yourself to Jesus this Christmas?