

## Session 5

December 29, 2024

### LOOKING FORWARD IN WORSHIP

Matthew 2:1-11, 16-18

The shepherds were simple people. Their world consisted of tending sheep in the great outdoors. They lived simply, were dressed simply, were impressed simply. But the angel's pronouncement was "good news of great joy that will be for *all people*" (Lk 2:10). In this week's lesson, we see another class of people—the scholarly—who also came searching for the Lord. But to understand the full impact of Christ's incarnation, we must also understand that not everyone saw Him as the long-awaited Savior. While the simple and the scholarly rejoiced over Christ, the scheming rejected Him.

**The wise sought to worship Him (vv. 1-9).** Although Luke was the historian, Matthew included a time marker in his narrative as well. Everyone knew of Herod the Great. So named because of his consolidation of power and massive construction projects (including the temple in Jerusalem), Herod was nevertheless known as a scrupulous and tyrannical king. From the biblical perspective, he wasn't so great (and neither was his son Antipas, who presided over the crucifixion of Christ some thirty years later!). The time marker (v. 1) places Christ's birth around 4-6 BC, once the Christian calendar was instituted and adjusted (between 1200 and 1500 AD). The word translated "wise men" is the Greek *magi*. Although the word was synonymous with *magician*, the concept connoted wisdom rather than sorcery. These were the intellectuals of the day: philosophers, mathematicians, scientists, and astronomers. First, notice their *inquiry*: what brought them to Jerusalem was the appearance of a certain star. The so called "Star of Bethlehem" has been the topic of much debate. Some have attempted to explain it as a brighter, more noticeable appearance of an existing star. Others see it as a "new" star that appeared that may still exist. Others suggest it was a miraculous phenomenon for the singular purpose of that day. This latter view is best supported by verse 9. By all indications, the star must have been moving, visible even in the daylight, stopped over the precise location, and then seemingly vanished. Historians tell us that legends of antiquity suggest that the birth of new kings was heralded by such heavenly appearances. Obviously, such a rare spectacle would have caught (and kept) the magi's attention. Second, notice their *intention*: "we have come to worship Him" (v. 2). The basic term means "to bend the knee." In this case, think to *revere* or *pay homage to*. This they did, both honoring the newborn king in their posture and in their presents. Gold is well known as the appropriate gift for nobility; frankincense was a fragrant resin burned in worship; and myrrh was a spice used in embalming and burial. Whether intentional or not, the magi's gifts were as prophetic for the Suffering Servant as they were appropriate for the King of Kings. For reflection: *What truths about the wisemen can be drawn from the text? What myths and legends have been added to the story? Does it really matter? Why or why not?*

**The wicked king sought to kill Him (vv. 7-8; 16-18).** It seems ironic that the Son of God was born to die, yet that was God's divine plan from the beginning (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4 et al). But not just any death would do. And although the Jewish leaders were ultimately responsible for securing His death, King Herod made the initial attempt thirty years before. The first two hints of Herod's instability are found in verse 3. The news of a new Jewish king "disturbed" him. The

word means to agitate, irritate, or stir up. And the verb tense indicates the magi's announcement was the reason for his unrest. That all Jerusalem was troubled added to the tension. But the city's disturbance was not because of Jesus. Rather, it was because their unstable king was capable of anything! The third indication of Herod's instability was his scheming in verses 7-8. His secrecy and lies about his devotion demonstrate just how worried Herod had become. Finally, his rage at the magi for giving him the slip (v. 16) and subsequent order to kill all the male children in the region remove all doubt about what kind of man Herod the Great really was. Herod may have been the first who sought to kill Him, but he wouldn't be the last (see John 5:18 for instance). For reflection: *What do you think was the real reason King Herod wanted Jesus dead? How about the Jewish leaders thirty years later? What parallels do you see?*