

Session 6

January 6, 2019

THE WISEMEN'S WORSHIP

Matthew 2:1-11

While the purists among us want no wisemen anywhere near the manger scene, it's pretty hard for me to leave them wrapped up and left in the box. True, some time had passed before their arrival in Bethlehem, but they are so much a part of the Christmas story that I can't help but include them in the crèche.

While the shepherds remind us of Christ's appeal to the humble, the wisemen remind us of His appeal to the learned. Add unstable king Herod to the mix, a star over Bethlehem, and three significant gifts, and the Christmas drama comes to a close.

The wise came to Him (vv. 1-2; 5-6). Who were these late visitors to the incarnation event? The Greek word is *magi*, not magicians or sorcerers, and certainly not kings. Rather, these were learned men, scientists or philosophers or astrologers. Where did they come from? Simply stated, "the east;" most likely from the region of Chaldea or Arabia. When did they arrive? In general, during the reign of Herod the Great (placing Christ's birth around 4 BC). Both the travel time needed by the magi to arrive and the specific use of the words "child" and "house" (vv. 10, 11) indicate that several days (even weeks) had passed since His humble birth. How were they guided? Following the ancient tradition that a new star appeared to mark a significant event, the magi saw a remarkable star appear while they were yet in the east. With the likely knowledge of time, place, and prophecy, they were led to Jerusalem and the long-awaited Jewish messiah. Why did they come? For one reason alone...to worship Him!

The wicked came after Him (vv. 3-7). If you keep in mind that there is really only one sin (pride) then it is not surprising that King Herod ("the Great") would do all he could to prevent a "king of the Jews" from arising to challenge him. Verse 3 is quite telling. The people of Jerusalem were disturbed not at Jesus' birth, but rather at their unstable King's predictable response to it! As shrewd as he was wicked, Herod immediately began to gather the details and formulate a plan. His inquiry with the Jewish religious leaders (vv. 4-6) helped pinpoint the location of this troubling new birth, and his private meeting with the magi (vv. 7-8) established the timeframe and encouraged them to keep him informed of their progress. The idea that Herod wanted to worship this new king was purely a ruse to disguise his true intentions (see v. 16 ff.).

The worshippers bowed before Him (vv. 9-11). The apparent re-appearance of the star, its subsequent guidance to the actual house in which the family was staying, and the magi's delight over it all indicate the star was a miraculous thing appointed specifically for the occasion. Though the star remained high above the child, the magi bowed low before Him. The number of magi is not mentioned, as the idea of three is associated strictly with the number of gifts presented. Two aspects of their encounter are noteworthy. First, they had the *appropriate response* to Christ. Their journey began far away with research, prophecies, and predictions; it ended on their knees. Though there was no halo about His head or signet ring upon His finger, they responded to this child with full assurance that He was indeed a king. Second, they offered *appropriate gifts*. Precious gold was the gift befitting a newborn king. Frankincense and myrrh were extracted from tree resin. Frankincense is delightfully fragrant when heated or burned, and

was used as incense in temple worship (Ex. 30:34); myrrh was used as a burial spice. Whether they understood all the implications of what they were doing or not, their gifts expressed perfectly the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.