

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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.” ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ 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. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶” “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.” ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. **This is God’s Word for God’s People.**

Dear Friends,

Biblical scholars like to talk about the wise men from Matthew chapter two. They like to try and figure out exactly where they came from and whether their group contained only three wise men or were there a few more than three. Some want to know about the star. Was it a natural occurring phenomenon or was it really a special star created just for the purpose of leading the wise men? And what about the gifts they brought. A lot of symbolism has been attached to these gifts, but are people reading more into the gifts than God intended? Today we want to take a closer look at this portion of scripture and try to determine what God is trying to tell us by including these events in the Bible.

As we consider this portion of scripture let’s, **“Follow in the Wise Men’s Footsteps.”** As we follow in their footsteps we are going to see that they had to, **“Overcome the Obstacles of Worship,” “They Felt the Joy of Giving,”** and **“They Took all this Home with Them.”**

I. You might have been surprised by the first point that the magi had to overcome obstacles of worship. But remember, the magi said, **“We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”** That was their whole purpose in making the trip – to honor and worship God’s Son. In order to do that they had to travel about 600 miles, spend a couple of months to make the trip to and from, and spend a considerable amount of money to make the trip. They had a lot of obstacles to overcome as they made plans to worship.

They came from the East, not the Far East but a more likely location was from Babylon where hundreds of years earlier Daniel had been in charge of a caste of magi or wise men.

When the magi got to Jerusalem, they ran into another obstacle. They asked where they might find the new “King of the Jews.” No one knew. The birth had been announced by the angels to the shepherds who had gone from town to town proclaiming the birth of the Savior. Simeon and Anna told everyone in the temple who would listen, that they had seen the Messiah when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to bring their sacrifice of thanksgiving. But apparently no one was paying any attention.

Eventually the inquiries of the wise men reached Herod and he was troubled. Not because he had missed the announcement but because here was a threat to his throne. He thought he had killed all those who might inherit his throne and now these magi were looking for this new King. The people were troubled by these inquiries also. Not because they had missed their opportunity to worship the Messiah but because they were afraid that King Herod would get so upset he would take it out on them.

King Herod got the answer for the magi as where to look. He inquired of the chief priests and teachers of the Law and they knew where to look, **“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶”** **“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.”** Go to Bethlehem, he told them and let me know where you find him.

The magi went to Bethlehem and were filled with joy that the star once again appeared and guided them on their journey. I’m not sure what they were expecting. My wife has about 180 nativities and those that have magi all show them coming to the manger, but the Bible tells us that they came to a house where they saw Mary and Jesus. It wasn’t a fancy house befitting a king. It was just an ordinary house in Bethlehem, befitting the humility of our Savior. The lowliness of the surroundings did not stop them from bowing down and worshipping the Savior of the world – their Savior and ours.

Sometimes we think that we have a lot of obstacles to overcome when it comes to our worship lives. Maybe it’s the weather or the roads. Maybe we don’t like the songs or hymns or liturgy. Maybe we like to go out late Saturday night and it’s hard to get up Sunday morning. Maybe the kids keep you from getting a lot out of the service. There can be a lot of obstacles to our worship plans. They may not be the same obstacles the Magi had but they are there nonetheless.

But just as the Magi overcame their obstacles to worship – and remember theirs were pretty huge – so we too can overcome ours. The Magi made the worship of Jesus their number one priority and so can we. And God will help us in our efforts, even when our worship isn’t perfect – for whatever reason – there is always something positive we can take away from worship.

Healing for our sins, a favorite song or hymn that proclaims God’s love, a prayer for a friend or family member or strength or encouragement as we begin a new week. I would hope and pray that your desire for worship would be as great as the Magi’s as you look forward to hearing God’s Word every week.

II. Not only were the magi able to worship Jesus, but they also had the Joy of bringing him gifts. They were able to honor their king with gifts that showed honor and glory – that gave Jesus due reverence for what he had come into this world to do. These weren’t cheap gifts – they were only the best gifts – what we might consider the first fruits.

Gold that denotes royalty and is a very fitting gift for a king. Frankincense that was an important part of worship reminding us that magi came to worship Jesus and myrrh. An expensive perfume. A lot of times used to prepare a body for burial but also could be mixed with water and used as an anesthetic. This was what was offered to Jesus as he was crucified and so the myrrh reminds us of the suffering and death of our Savior even though the magi probably did not have that in mind when they brought this gift.

What gifts do we bring our Savior? Do we bring the first fruits – the best we have to offer? Bringing our offerings to God is a part of our worship because it shows our reverence for our God, our thankfulness for our salvation, and our trust that God will continue to provide for us.

Giving to our God is a joyful privilege we have as God's Children and yet it is easy to fall into the trap of not giving or looking at it as another bill to pay. We just finished Christmas and it was wonderful watching my children and grandchildren open their presents – the gifts we had given them. They took joy in receiving them because they knew they came from a loving heart. Giving gifts to my God is a joyful part of my worship as well. I want to thank God for the blessings he has given me and I want to show my love for him. I give, not because he needs it but because I know my giving brings joy to God. I would hope that you also are able to feel the joy of giving as you bring your offerings to God – that your giving is an act of love towards your God and Savior.

Finally it was time for the wise men to leave and God had some final instructions for them, **“And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”** they probably didn't know a lot about King Herod, but God came to them in a dream and sent them home by another route. They didn't question this – they just followed the directions they received.

III. I'm sure they took the Savior home with them – not physically but spiritually. They were there to represent a group of magi and were eager to report what had transpired and how they had been able to worship their Lord and Savior. We don't hear about the magi again in scripture but we know this is a perfect example of what Simeon sang about in the temple when he said Jesus would be a light for the Gentiles.

Jesus came into the world to save all people – Jews and Gentiles alike. He came in to the world to save us. The star that led the magi reminds us that Jesus is the light of salvation for you and for me and that he leads us through life also. He has removed the darkness of sin by showing us how he paid for our sins on the cross and he brings us the gift of salvation through faith in him as our Savior.

As we start a new year, let's continue to walk in the footsteps of the magi. Let's overcome or ignore the obstacles that try and keep us from worship and look for every opportunity to thank Jesus for all that he has done for us. Let's joyfully bring our thank offerings to our Lord recognizing that this is a privilege we have as God's Children and it is part of our worship. And let's take our Savior home with us as and let him live in us because he is the most important part of our lives. Amen.