

**Christ the King**  
**Matthew 2:9-12**  
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You know, as I was listening to that last number, as Dusty and the choir were singing together the really familiar words from the old carol, I was thinking that that really summarizes what Christmas is all about. Those words, “Come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn king.” That’s really the heart of Christmas. In fact, let this really sink down into your heart tonight. What we celebrate, when we celebrate Christmas, is the birth of your rightful king.

As Americans, we’re not really used to the concept of having a king, and so, it falls to some very unlikely characters to teach us what it means to respond rightly to the birth of our king. Those men are the Magi. They were members of a Persian priestly caste. They were recognized as teachers and as those involved in science and religion. In science, they taught mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy. Their religion was Zoroastrianism. They were pagan idolaters. They were involved in things the Old Testament forbids like astrology and divination. But they were also powerful leaders. In fact, our word “magistrate” comes from Magi. Specifically, they were king makers. One of their chief tasks, in their own country, was to appoint the next king who would sit upon the throne.

So, how did these pagan idolaters come to be part of the Christmas story? How did they come to know anything about the true God? It’s really a remarkable story of providence. It started 600 years earlier because for 600 years, devout Jews had lived among the people of Babylon, ever since the Jews have been taken captive. They had lived there, and they had told the people of Babylon about their God and about the coming Messiah. Chief among them, of course, was Daniel who was appointed as the one over all of the wise men of Babylon. He undoubtedly taught them about the true God. And God had miraculously informed these men, living at the time of the birth of Christ, that the Messiah had been born.

And so, these pagan idolaters traveled to Jerusalem and, according to Matthew 2, they began asking this: “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” Well, there was no answer immediately ready. And so, Herod,

after seeking a consult with the scholars of his day, told the Magi that in fact the Old Testament Scriptures prophesied, in Micah, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Matthew writes, “After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.” As they headed those 6 miles south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star, probably not something in the sky, probably the *shekinah*, the glory cloud that led Israel through the wilderness, led them those 6 miles and eventually came to rest over the house where the child was. And, by the way, it was not a stable as on the night of his birth. Instead, they found Jesus, Matthew says, in a house with his mother. I hate to rain on your nativity set or on your favorite carols, but the Magi were not there the night of Jesus’ birth. It was at least 40 days after His birth and less than two years when they arrived.

But God uses these unusual characters to show us all how it is we ought to respond to the birth of our king. Their reactions should be our reactions. How did they respond? Well, first of all, they responded with joy, with joy. Matthew says, “When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” I love the way, sometimes in the Greek language, there’s an emphasis given that we lose in the English. Here’s how it literally reads in the Greek text: They rejoiced a mega joy extremely. They were overwhelmed with joy, not because they saw the star, but because the star was directing them to the divine Messiah, the king, the one that Daniel had taught their people would make an end of sin. They were filled with joy. And as you and I contemplate the birth of our king, it should fill our hearts with joy.

There was a second reaction from these men. It was submission. “After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him.” They fell to the ground and worshipped this child who was less than two years old. Every other time Matthew uses this word “worship”, in reference to Jesus, it’s a true biblical worship. So, this was not merely **the** normal respect for an earthly monarch. These men had already said that this child was the King of Israel. He was the rightful king. He was the divine Messiah. And so, this is the response of genuine faith. And, by the way, the response of genuine faith is always submission to Jesus Christ. When they bowed before Jesus, they were acknowledging His authority, His right to rule, and His right to rule them. This was their acknowledgement that this

child was Lord, and He was their Lord. That's the response that each of us should have to the birth of our king.

There was a third response of these men and we can call it honor, because they came bearing gifts. "Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." It was common to bring gifts to a king whenever you entered into his presence. It was a way to honor him. Historically, as you know, these three gifts that they brought have been given significant and very specific meanings. And the reason I'd been given those meanings is because of how these words are used in the Old Testament.

Gold, for example, was rarely used by individuals in those days; rarely owned **by** normal men and women. It was reserved for the richest of people and, specifically, it was the metal of kings. It is always associated with royalty. Seneca, the Roman orator, wrote of Persia, the place where these men had come from, that "it was the custom there that no one approached a king without a gift and that the most appropriate gifts for a king was the king of metals - gold."

They also came bringing frankincense. That word comes from the Old English "frank incense". Frank meaning pure or sincere, incense. Frankincense is an aromatic resin that comes from trees in Arabia and India. When this word occurs in the Old Testament, it's used almost exclusively in reference to the worship of God. In fact, it was incense that was burned in the temple, as an expression of worship to God. So, in Scripture then, gold is appropriate for kings and incense is appropriate for God.

The third gift they brought was myrrh. Myrrh is a reddish-brown resin, again, the dried sap of the tree that's found in Arabia. It was so valuable in the first century that it was worth more than its weight in gold. It was used for three purposes primarily. It was used as a perfume to make life more pleasant. It was used as a pain killer to make pain less intense. And it was used as an embalming fragrance to make death less repulsive. The irony of myrrh is that it was used in all three ways during the life of our Lord. At His birth, it was a perfume. At His death, He was offered myrrh as a way to stem the pain, which He refused. And in His death, it was used to embalm His body.

And so, these gifts were perfectly appropriate. Gold, because He was the King of kings and Lord of lords. Frankincense, because he is God with us, God in the flesh. And myrrh, because the reason He came was to die, to suffer and to die for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in Him. This morning, we sang that carol that we enjoy so much - the Getty's recently wrote. The words say, "Gifts of men from distant lands, prophesy the story. Gold, a king is born today. Incense, God is with us. Myrrh, His death will make a way. And by His blood, He'll win us." All three of these gifts were extremely rare and therefore they were incredibly valuable. They were expressions from these men of their honor and adoration of Jesus Christ. You see, the Magi modeled for us the only right response to the birth of our king, to the birth of your king. And that is unrestrained worship - finding your chief joy in Him, submitting your life to Him as your rightful king, and honoring Him with the most valuable gift you have, your very life.

So, the story of the wise men, then, is really a story of redemption. It's a story of divine grace, of sovereign grace. Ultimately, it's not the story of the wise men seeking Jesus, it's the story of a gracious God seeking them. God sent these men to find their rightful king and He did so, in order to accomplish their spiritual rescue. It's really amazing because, in Matthew 1, the angel tells Joseph: Call the name of the baby, "Jesus" because He will save His people from their sins. And in the very next paragraph, in chapter 2, we meet some most unlikely candidates for that spiritual rescue. God sovereignly reached down into the paganism of the former Babylonian empire, and He rescued these men for Himself.

But this story is also an invitation. It's an invitation to everyone who hears it. It's a reminder that, in fact, God has sent His long-promised Messiah into the world. He actually entered time and space. He was born in a place you can visit. And He was more than a human king; He was deserving of worship. He is the rightful king of every human being. He is your rightful king. The question is: How have you responded to him? Have you responded, as these Magi did? With joy? Is He your chief joy in life? Have you responded with submission by submitting your will to His, acknowledging His right to rule you? And have you responded by honoring Him with the best gift you have - your very self? As you celebrate Christmas this year, I hope you

will remember that this is the essence of what we celebrate. Your rightful king has come, and He deserves, in fact He demands, your submission.

Let's pray together.

Our Father we thank You for this amazing account. We thank You for the picture of Your grace lived out in the lives of these pagan idolaters, that didn't really come seeking Christ but came because You were seeking them. And You rescued them and made them true worshipers of Your Son. Father, thank You, for those of us here whom You have sought out in grace and made Your own. May we, this Christmas season, celebrate our Lord. May we find our joy in Him. May we again reaffirm our submission to Him. And may we honor Him with the best gifts we have - our very lives. And Father I pray for those who are undoubtedly here tonight, who have not yet acknowledged their rightful king. May this be the season when they, as the wise men, all down before Him and worship. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!