

# Bowed Down in Worship

Matthew 2:1-12

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Pastor Jim Rademaker

What are you willing to do to worship God? For some of us, getting to Sunday worship can be a bit of a challenge. Maybe we didn't get a lot of sleep last night. Some mornings, it can be just hard to get going. It's cold outside. You've got to get the whole household ready and out the door.

The visitors that day couldn't wait to get to worship! And nothing would stop them from getting to church. And it was a long way to church. And we're not talking about minutes, or even hours, but days, weeks even! And they had no car, no bus, no airplane. It was slow going. And they had to pack their bags and take all their camping equipment, for it was a long, tiring journey that lay ahead for them.

Why go through all that trouble? Would you? Was it worth it? Apparently so, or they wouldn't have made the trip.

A star had suddenly appeared in the sky. And somehow, they knew. It was a sign. A sign, that a king had recently been born. The king of the Jews. And they went to worship this foreign king. Honor. Show respect. But worship?

After many, many days of travel, they finally arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. They arrive with one thing on their minds. To worship the newly-born king. And they arrived with one question on their minds. The star had led them to Jerusalem. But where in Jerusalem? They asked, *"Where is he, who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose, and have come, to worship him."*

And no one seemed to have an answer for them. No one seemed to know. Odd. No one know what the magi were talking about. A newborn king? Not even the reigning king knew.

*When Herod the king heard this, he was ecstatic, and rejoiced greatly at the good news of a newborn king! Not exactly. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.*

Herod knew. Somehow, he knew. This wasn't just *any* king. This was the Messiah, the Christ who had been born! Of course, being the Roman-appointed King over the Jews, Herod knew about their history, and their prophecies, and their ultimate hope of a Messiah. And it scared him to death! He, who always felt threatened, enough to have his wife murdered, and his three sons, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and whomever else threatened his throne. Scared of being overthrown. Scared of losing what he held so tightly to - the Jewish throne.

*And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.* Herod, not caring himself one bit for the faith of the Jews, didn't have a clue. But he knew who would. The religious leaders would know.

*They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea ..." How did they know that? God had told them, through the prophets. Specifically, the prophet Micah. "... for so it is written by the prophet: "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"*

Remember 2 Samuel 7, God's promise to king David? *"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*

The newborn king is in Bethlehem, five miles away. Herod knew what he must do. He hadn't stayed in power this long by accident. *Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.* Why did he ask about the timing of the star? He had a plan. *And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."*

*After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

They come to worship the king. They came a long, long way. Nothing was going to stop them from worshipping this newborn king! They come with a question. Where can we go to worship Him? And God answers their question through His WORD (Micah 5:2 ... *in Bethlehem*). He answered their question through a SIGN (like the apostle John records about Jesus' miracles as being "signs" pointing to Him). Seeing the star, they rejoiced with an exceedingly great joy; a mega joy! And they bow down and worship and bring honoring gifts.

This newborn king was a big deal! God had spoken of Him through Moses and ALL of the prophets. God spoke through the sign, the King's star. A star that shone on one home in particular. The Scriptures pointed to the town. The star pointed to the particular home. God spoke about this King through His Word. Through His star. And through a dream. Warning the Magi to avoid Herod, they obey, and take another route home.

The Scriptures. The star. The dream. God must have wanted the magi to know. He must have wanted everyone to know; for you to know. To us a child is born, a Son is given. Who for us, and all mankind, came down from heaven, and was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. Lived the life you never could. Died, bearing the weight of your sin. Rose, triumphing over death; over your death, to bring Life, now and forever!

*The following is taken from a sermon by Pastor James Douthwaite*

*"We Three Kings" Who were these guys? Wisemen is the title most often used. Magi is the biblical word - but what does that mean? Astrologer? Magician? King? Something else? ALL have been suggested. And where did they come from? Babylon? The Orient? From the east is all we're told. And how many were there? Three is the typical answer, assuming each brought one of the three gifts mentioned. But again, we're not told. We just know they are plural - more than one.*

But maybe the mystery is there, because *they* are not really who this story is all about. Just as the other part of the Christmas story is not really about the shepherds and the angels. It's about Jesus. And as Paul writes to the Ephesians, that Jesus came not just for the Jews only, but for all people. That all people be heirs of the kingdom and partakers of the Gospel by grace through faith in Jesus. So God brings Jews and Gentiles - shepherds and wise men - to see and worship Him in His Son. To see in Him, the King and Savior of the world. Your Savior. Your King.

And so really, the Christmas story of the shepherds and the wise men has continued down through the ages, as God has led a countless number of people through the centuries *to fall down and worship Him*. Including you. For you, it wasn't an angel or a star that led you, was it? But it was God's doing, nonetheless. Through other means - His Word, or preaching, the word of a godly parent, a believing coworker, a friend, maybe even a stranger.

But you are here, just as they were. And you see Him, by faith, just as they did. For they didn't see a baby that was spectacular - who was glowing, or had a halo around His head, or that miraculously didn't cry or dirty a diaper - they saw a baby boy just like every other baby boy. But a baby boy that *by faith* they believed was different than every other baby boy. For this baby boy was not just Mary's son, but God's Son. Their King. Their Savior. And they fell down and worshipped Him.

You've probably heard the line "Wise men still seek Him." But *real* wise men know that the most important thing in the Christmas story is that God has come to seek us. It was God, who came to Adam and Eve after they hid from Him after they sinned. It was God, who sent His prophets to call His people to repentance. It was God who sent the

star to lead the wise men to Jesus. And it's God who comes to you. That you not just know the story, but that you too, *fall down and worship Him*, and receive from Him the gifts He comes to bring you. A child has been born. A Son is given – to you, for you.

So what you've brought here today with you are not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but your sins of thought, word, and deed. *Not very good gifts!* the world would say. But, oh, they are! They're exactly what your Savior wants. For He has come to bear them for you and take them away from you. He wants you to cling to Him and not to them, and receive from Him, His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

For really, everything *else* you have is *His* anyway. He's the one who gave it to you. And He doesn't really need anything else you can give Him. Not even the offering you give each week. You give it, not because He needs it, but because you need to give it. You need to let go of it, and everything on this earth, *and fall down and worship Him*.

An article was published entitled, "*How can I live longer?*" It's based on a study out of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

A New Year with its fresh blank slate beckons. This will be the year we go to the gym regularly, become vegetarian, stop smoking or drinking, we say, resolutions that may or may not stick. However, what if the path to a longer, healthier life does not lie at the gym or in the fridge at all, but in a higher calling?

People with a greater sense of purpose tend to engage in healthier lifestyle behaviors, ranging from eating their veggies, to getting more exercise and even flossing their teeth (a good proxy for other healthy behaviors).

This all sounds pretty good — who doesn't want a painless and inexpensive way to eat healthier and improve dental hygiene. But what, exactly, is purpose? According to Patrick Hill, an assistant professor of psychological and brain sciences at Washington University, purpose is ... the "notion that you have daily activities you find meaningful or engaging and that give you direction for your life, reasons to continue going."

... One researcher suggests searching for your purpose can be as simple as "looking outside, in [your] neighborhood, gardens, places of worship, grocery stores or in front of [your] house." In other words, purpose does not have to be a world-changing, epic desire to fix or soothe the ills of humanity, but rather something that fulfills you on a personal level, in your own community.

... If you still haven't found your purpose today, it's never too late. So rather than cashing in on a new gym membership, consider a little quiet time, tuning in to the things that make you feel like getting out of the bed in the morning.

Worship, which *means* to receive. Receive from God, His gifts; what He has come to give you. And that is more precious to Him than any gold, frankincense, or myrrh could ever be. Worship that flows out in all your life and in all your decisions. It shapes how you live. How you think. What you do. How you act. How you relate to others. The meaning and purpose of your life.

So next time you see a nativity scene - with Mary and Joseph and Jesus, angels and shepherd and the magi - know where you are: with the magi, bowed down in worship.