

December 23, 2001 by Steve Brandon



# The Worship of Jesus Christ

## Matthew 2:1-11

Please open your Bibles to the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 2. It is appropriate for us tonight to look at this passage of Scripture. This is the last Sunday of this year before the church across the world celebrates the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like all yearly celebrations, there is a danger. The danger is that the wonder of it all will get lost as we repeat the story year after year after year. My aim this evening, is to renew in your heart and mind the wonder of the coming of Jesus to earth.

Last week we marveled at the infinite wisdom of God in bringing forth His Son in such a miraculous way: born of a virgin. The birth of our Lord was not only miraculous in the physical event itself, but it also was miraculous in that it was in accordance with the Sovereign working of God, who planned it all from long ago. Jesus' birth fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 , "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL" (1:23).

This week, likewise, as we begin our exposition of chapter 2, we will again see God's Sovereignty at work in the early days of Jesus Christ, when but a child. We will see two themes developed in chapter 2:

- (1) God's miraculous hand at work in the early years of His Son
- (2) The fulfillment of prophecy concerning His Son

In chapter 2, we will see God miraculously protecting and providing for His Son through His sovereign orchestration of events from long ago. We will see God protecting His Son by means of angelic visions. We will see God providing a guiding star for the magi, who come to worship Him. Additionally, we will see Scripture fulfilled in the childhood of Jesus. It is one thing for Jesus to fulfill prophecy concerning Himself, when He could fulfill it through His actions. For instance, when He entered Jerusalem during His triumphal entry, Jesus took great care to see that He came "gentle, and mounted on a donkey" (Matt. 21:5) in accordance with Zech. 9:9). But it is quite another, when Jesus was a helpless infant to be born in the right place, to travel to the right place, and to grow up in the right place. All of these events demonstrate the sovereign hand of God in all of the circumstances surrounding the early childhood of Jesus.

I trust that your heart will again be renewed in wonder and awe at Who our Savior is that we worship this Christmas season.

Let me read the text for us this evening, ...

### Matthew 2

(1) Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, (2) "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." (3) And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he [began] to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. (5) And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, (6) 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" (7) Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found [Him,] report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." (9). And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. (10) And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. (11) And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. (12) And having been warned [by God] in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.

(13). Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." (14) And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; (15) and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "OUT OF EGYPT DID I CALL MY SON."

(16). Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi. (17) Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, (18) "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."

(19) But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord \*appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, (20) "Arise

and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." (21) And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. (22) But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned [by God] in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, (23) and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

This text breaks up nicely into four sections....

- (1) The Worship of the Magi (verses 1-12), when men from the east come to Bethlehem to worship Jesus as "the King of the Jews"
- (2) The Flight to Egypt (verses 13-15), when Joseph and his family fled to Egypt for protection from Herod, the King, who wanted to murder Jesus.
- (3) The Slaying of Children by Herod (verses 16-18), when Herod sought to murder Jesus by putting to death all of the children in Bethlehem two years old and under.
- (4) The Return to Nazareth (verses 19-23), when Joseph and his family returned to Israel to live in Nazareth.

In each of these sections, we will find that prophecy is fulfilled....

- Micah said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (verse 5-6)
- Isaiah said that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt (verse 15)
- Jeremiah said that there would be weeping in Ramah (verses 17-18)
- the prophets said that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene (verse 23).

Additionally, scattered throughout this text, we will see the providence of God at work regarding His Son. Last week, in 1:20, we saw an angel of the Lord appear to Joseph and told him that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. This action protected the home of Jesus. This week, we will find a miraculous star guiding the magi in 2:2,9. In 2:12, the Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, for he would have come and murdered Jesus. In 2:13, an angel of the Lord will appear again to Joseph, warning him to flee to Egypt to escape from Herod. In 2:19-20, an angel of the Lord will bring Joseph back to Israel. In 2:22, Joseph will be warned in a dream not to reside in Bethlehem.

And so we see these two themes working in this text:

- (1) God's miraculous hand at work in the early years of His Son
- (2) The fulfillment of prophecy concerning His Son

Though I have introduced the whole chapter for you, we will have time only to look at the first 11 verses. I have no outline tonight, we are simply going to walk through these verses together, pausing to reflect when appropriate. Let's begin in **verse 1**, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem."

We are introduced here to several geographical and chronological facts, which emphasize for us that this all occurred in time-space history. This story wasn't made up. It actually happened.

1. The place of Jesus' birth is Bethlehem.

Matthew is silent on the circumstances surrounding this birth. Jesus was born during the white space between 1:25 and 2:1. But Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, but had come to Bethlehem (about ~70 miles south of Nazareth) in order to register for the census which Caesar Augustus had decreed. This was because Joseph was from the house and family of David, so he returned to David's city, Bethlehem for this registration. It was during this time, when they were there in Bethlehem, that Mary gave birth to Jesus, exactly like Matthew here says (Luke 2:1-7).

2. Bethlehem is described as "Bethlehem in Judea."

This fact is given to clarify that the Bethlehem spoken about wasn't "Bethlehem in Galilee," a town about 7 miles northwest of Nazareth. Bethlehem in Judea was David's city, near Jerusalem. Jesus was born in this city of Bethlehem.

3. These things happened in the days of Herod the king.

This refers to Herod the Great, who conquered Jerusalem in 37 B. C. He ruled for 34 years as King of Judea and died in 4 B. C., just after the birth of Jesus.

We are also introduced to several people in this verse: Herod the king and magi from the east. First of all, I would like to introduce you to the magi. After this I would like to give a little pertinent background to Herod. Then, the text will simply open up for us this evening.

## The Magi

When we think of the Magi, we normally think of three little figurines which decorate a manger scene during the Christmas time, along with angels, shepherds, and other animals. Each of these figurines have a crown upon their head, because they are thought to be kings. Each of these figurines bring a different gift to offer to the baby Jesus. One brings gold. One brings frankincense. One brings myrrh. We even have a song to reinforce these thoughts,

"We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar.  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star."

However, much of this is myth, that is, legend. Much of this is not true.

- They weren't "kings."
- We don't know that there were three. Some say that there were many (even up to 1000 people)! We have no data on how many came. But we do know that when people traveled in those days, they traveled in large companies for protection. So we could probably guess that there were more than three.
- According to Matthew 2:11, they came to the house where the Child was living, not the stable where the Child was born.

Let's look at what we do know about these individuals. It says here that these magi came "from the east." We know from the book of Daniel a little about these magi. Their ancestors are mentioned in this book. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Daniel.

Daniel is a book that was written during the Babylonian captivity (about 500 B.C.), when many Jews were exiled to the land of Babylon, which is in the east. Nebuchadnezzar, the king at that time, planned in training some of the best and brightest of the land to enter into his personal service: "The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah" (Daniel 1:5-6).

When the training was complete, these three Jewish boys stood out above the rest, "Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service" (Daniel 1:18-19).

Now, we come to the verse I would like for you to see, "And as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, **he found them ten times better than all the magicians** and conjurers who were in all his realm" (Daniel 1:20). These magicians, are the fore-runners to the "magi" who came looking for the "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1). Here in Daniel, they are described as experts in counseling the king with respect to "every matter of wisdom and understanding" (1:20).

These people come up several other times in the book of Daniel. For instance, turn over to Daniel, chapter 2. In verse 1 it says that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, which troubled him greatly. As a result of this dream, he couldn't sleep, so he sent for those who could help him with understanding his dream. So, if you look in Daniel 2:2, it says, "the king gave orders to call in **the magicians**, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans, to tell the king his dreams." Somehow, along with the conjurers (one who practices magic arts), and sorcerers (one who controls evil spirits), these magicians supposedly possessed the ability to interpret dreams. In this case, it was only Daniel who could interpret the dream (2:19).

We find the same thing in Daniel 4:7, Nebuchadnezzar said, "**the magicians**, the conjurers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners came in, and I related the dream to them; but they could not make its interpretation known to me." In Daniel 4:19, we see Daniel interpreting the dream for Nebuchadnezzar.

So, when thinking about these magi, we need to think of men, who were wise and understanding, and able to give counsel to the king of Babylon. You might think of them as equivalent to our cabinet members, who council the president of the United States. They were intelligent, wise men, who understood the political situation of the day and could counsel the King. But, we also need to think of them as more than mere wise men. We need to think of them as dabbling in the spiritual realm. They were interested in spiritual things. They were called upon to interpret dreams, because of the spiritual abilities as well.

Though it was their job to influence Daniel and his Jewish brethren who were exiled to Babylon, Daniel and the Jewish brethren influenced them also. They saw what Daniel could do. They saw that Daniel was able to interpret these dreams, when they couldn't. They saw what Daniel's God was like. As a result, they certainly began to inquire into the truth of the Scriptures, which Daniel brought to Babylon. Anybody who dabbles in the spiritual realm is looking for results and will do what it takes to get the results. The magicians in Babylon saw that Daniel had results, and certainly would have inquired into this Jewish God whom Daniel followed.

In some sense, they were certainly like Simon, who was also a magician in the time of the early church, as recorded for us in Acts, "when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 8:18-19). Simon wanted the spiritual power which came from Peter. Peter rebuked him for it. I think that these magi were no different. The magi in the east were exposed to Daniel's God. They saw the power that He gave to Daniel. Certainly they would have sought this power.

Turn back to Matthew. If you have a New American Standard Version of the Bible, you will find that in the footnote, the magi are described as "a caste of wise men specializing in astrology, medicine and natural science." This is a good understanding of them. They were brought to Jerusalem through a vague understanding of Scripture. They understood of the Messianic hope of the Jews, which was first introduced to them through Daniel and his brethren. Furthermore, even at this time, there was a great Jewish population in Babylon, who had never returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity. These magi knew from these Jews that that Jerusalem was a special city for their God. So, when they saw "His star in the east," they came to Jerusalem, looking for this king.

This star appeared to them, and they knew enough of the Scripture to give them reason to travel to Jerusalem to inquire of the matter. Here was the providential hand of God working hundreds of years before Jesus came to prepare these people to come and worship this Child. There are the magi. Now, let me introduce you to ...

## Herod the king

### 1. He was an oppressive ruler.

You might think of him as an ancient Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler. He exacted large taxes from the people, which he used to fortify his military, to build his palaces for his pleasure and to build-up the cities he governed. He had extensive building programs in the cities of Samaria and Caesarea. Though he was an oppressive ruler, the Jews experienced relative peace for 34 years under his reign. No foreign nations attacked them during his reign.

### 2. He possessed great political savvy.

Herod the Great knew how to keep his power. For instance, a few years after his reign began, there was a famine in the land. So, he took the gold and silver ornaments in his palace and purchased food from Egypt for the people, which helped to win his favor. Additionally, to win the favor of the Jews, he started work on the rebuilding the temple in 20 B. C., which would take over 46 years to complete. He also demonstrated his political savvy in that he seemed to know how far he could push people without an uprising.

When needed, he thought nothing of executing those stirring up trouble and many were executed in his reign. For instance, in taking control of Judea, he murdered 45 of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin and limited their power only to religious matters.

Not only could he manage those within his own authority, but he also could pacify those over him. During Herod's reign, he wasn't the sovereign king of the whole Roman Empire. He was simply a representative given jurisdiction over the region of Judea. So, he constantly had to answer to the emperor of the Roman Empire, Antony, and later Octavian (renamed Augustus).

### 3. He was a paranoid King.

This is perhaps most important for understanding his actions in Matthew 2. He was always afraid of rebellion against his reign. If anyone was a threat to his power, he would have them killed -- even his own wife, Miriam, and two of his sons, Alexander and Aristobulus.

He built several fortresses for himself. Near the Dead Sea, he built a fortress called, Masada, which stands 1200 feet above the sea. It is on a natural plateau. The only way you can approach it is to climb up along two paths which lead up it. Just south of Bethlehem, he built a fortress called, the Herodium, which was a circular fortress built high upon a hill. As a defensive measure, they contained catapults and large boulders to injure or kill those who sought to approach them. Both of these fortresses were stocked with enough food and water to last many months and years. **The idea of both of these fortresses was that he could retreat there for personal protection in the case of rebellion against his reign.** They were places of refuge for him and for his family. You might think of them as similar to the compound which David Koresh built for himself in Waco, Texas a few years back. They were entirely defensive fortresses.

Especially toward the end of his life, his paranoia grew and grew. As he was approaching 70 years of age, his health was failing, and he was become older and weaker. He knew that he was hated, and that his death would be a welcome sight for many. So he ordered notable Jews from all regions to gather in Caesarea. Once there, he captured them all in the hippodrome (a stadium he built in Caesarea).. He ordered that all of these Jews be killed the moment he died so that there would be mourning, rather than rejoicing during the time of his death. (After his death, they were released by his sister, Salome, and her husband, Alexas). Even five days before he died, he executed Antipater, one of his sons, and changed his will so that another one of his sons, Archelaus (mentioned in verse 22), could reign after his death instead.

We are now at a point to understand **verse 2**. This verse takes place near the end of Herod's reign. He is increasingly worried about a rebellion to his reign in the weakness of his old age. These magi come into town (with a large group travelling with them) and begin to inquire, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"

Herod had killed many others who had attempted to usurp his authority. To hear of another king in town would certainly have aroused his suspicion, jealousy, and paranoia. In **verse 3**, we see that "when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled." Like water that is stirred, (John 5:4,7), this old man was very concerned that some would come and rebel against him. He was troubled that he might lose his power.

Verse 3 continues, "and all Jerusalem with him." Now understand that Jerusalem wasn't troubled by the news. In fact, Jerusalem would normally be elated by such news that the Messiah had been born. They had long awaited the news of the promised Messiah, the King of the Jews, who would come and free them from Roman rule. This news should have been thrilling to the Jews. **But those in Jerusalem were troubled because Herod was troubled.** Herod had gained a reputation that he would take drastic measures to squash any type of rebellion.

Their fear was appropriate. Those in Jerusalem had witnessed how Herod had reigned over their nation for the previous 30 years. We will see in verse 16, next time, that Herod used drastic measures to attempt to destroy this newborn king. He had every male child two and under killed. Jerusalem had every reason to be troubled, because they didn't know that this paranoid king would do next.

In **verse 4**, we find Herod on a fact finding mission, "And gathering together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born." Herod understood enough of the Jewish Messianic hope that when the magi came to town looking for a King, he knew that they were talking about the Messiah, the Christ. But he didn't understand enough of the intricacies of what was predicted of him. So, he called together all of the religious leaders, the chief priests and the scribes, who would most certainly be able to help him.

For these religious leaders, this question was somewhat of a no brainer. These religious leaders didn't have to say, "Now that's a good question, we have never thought of that before! Give us some time. Let us go back and study the scriptures." No. These religious leaders responded quickly and quoted from the Old Testament with little difficulty. In **verses 5-6**, Matthew records, "And they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

They quoted from Micah chapter 5, which prophesied of the Messiah to come. Micah, the prophet, was prophesying of a time of distress upon the nation. He was prophesying of a time in which one would come to deliver them. Of course, this ruler was the Messiah. This Messiah would come from a small and insignificant town, 5 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It might be equivalent to the Messiah being born in a small town like Monroe Center, just south of Rockford a few miles -- a town, which is essentially a few houses at an intersection of several country roads.

At this point, I would like for us to pause and look at the differing responses of the three groups of leaders.

## The Response of the Religious Leaders

This is the last we hear of the religious leaders until they come to be baptized by John the Baptist in chapter 3. They certainly knew of the magi coming to Jerusalem, looking for the King of the Jews, because all Jerusalem was terrified when these people came (verse 3). They certainly knew of where the Messiah was to be born -- they were the ones with all of the religious knowledge, who could answer quickly to such a question. **Yet, what did they do? Nothing. Absolutely Nothing.** All the evidence was before them that Messiah was here and they failed to believe. They failed to travel five miles to check it out.

We are in danger of being like these religious leaders. For the most part, we, here at Rock Valley Bible Church, know our Bibles. We read them. We hear God's word taught with great regularity. We have surrounded ourselves with the truth of His word. and yet, so many times, we are like the religious leaders. We fail to act, because we fail to believe what God has said in His word. The lack of action on the part of the religious leaders simply demonstrated their lack of belief.

Are there things in your life right now that you are failing to do, simply because of your unbelief? Are you more comfortable with keeping the status quo, trusting that God will overlook your offense? My dear friends, as we encounter these religious leaders, in months and years to come in our exposition of Matthew, will we be like them? Will truth be presented before our eyes, only have us fail to believe it?

May God have mercy to be like the Psalmist, who prayed, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart" (Psalm 119:33-4). The Psalmist had a heart that said, "God, teach me from your word, that I may understand, believe, and obey!"

The religious leaders responded in unbelief. **They responded with no worship.** Let's look next at ...  
The Response of the Herod

Herod, as was typical of his character, had a plan as **verses 7-8** indicate. "Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, 'Go and make careful search for the Child; and when have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him.'"

Herod had no desire to worship Him. Herod wanted to kill this child, who was born king. We see in verse 16, that his true motive was uncovered. When he was tricked, he slew all of the children under two, who were in Bethlehem, in an attempt to kill the child. If Herod had not been tricked, he certainly would have found a creative way to kill the child, especially if he felt threatened.

Early in his reign, against his desire, a young, handsome 17 year old man name Aristobulus, was made high priest of the Jews. He officiated his duties for the first time during the feast of Tabernacles in 35 B. C. The people reportedly liked the young man very much. Herod felt threatened.

So, when the feast had ended, he called Aristobulus down to his resort in Jericho. In the heat of the day, he brought him down by the swimming pools, where some others, were playing in the water. Herod encouraged him to go play with them. Aristobulus agreed. As was pre-arranged, those in the swimming pool began playing a bit rough. They held Aristobulus under water until he drowned. The king was pleased.

Herod, in attempts to feign his sorrow, arranged for an elaborate funeral for the young man. Herod's scheme worked. He had gotten away with murder. So, certainly, if Herod would have had the opportunity to see this Child, he would have made similar attempts to kill him.

His response is similar to those who would want to use religion when it benefits them. He was glad to discourse with the Scribes and the Pharisees. He was glad to pretend religious excitement when it would benefit him and his kingdom. He was glad to pretend to want to worship this Child. And yet, church family, we need to realize that God will not be mocked by those who pretend to be religious for their own good. Perhaps these type of people will fool the world. But they will never fool God. These types of people are identified in Matthew 13 as the tares, who grow up within the world undetected. They look like true sons of the kingdom, but are really sons of the evil one. God will bundle them up and throw them into the furnace in the last days (Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43).

I remember having a conversation with another pastor friend of mine who was planting a church. Like us, the church body didn't own a

building. When one family came and had particular difficulties with the pastor, they left the church, "because there isn't a building to fight for." In other words, if their had been a building, with physical resources to help this family, they would have sought to fight for their cause in the church, because the building could ultimately benefit them.

Listen, when we come to God, we come naked and empty and helpless. Jesus Christ forgives us when we find ourselves completely unhelpless to help ourselves. We ought never to have a perspective of using our religion to achieve our great ends. Sure, God greatly blesses those who believe and trust Him. Yet the blessing is for God's glory, not their own. Yet, Herod was seeking His own glory.

**Herod responded with fake worship.** We need to be real in our worship.

Thirdly, let's see ...

The Response of the Magi

**Verse 9** reads, "And having heard the king, they went their way." They went to proceed the course from which they had came. They came from "the east." They may have been travelling for months! They weren't going to let a few miles prevent them from arriving at their destination. Next we see God's hand of providence directing these magi.

Verse 9 continues, "and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was." We saw this star for the first time in verse 2. In my exposition, I didn't comment upon it, because verse 9 gives us insight into what it was in verse 2. If you look closely at the text, it says that this was the same star which they had seen in the east. "lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them" (verse 9). Apparently, this star appeared to them when they were in the east, so they came to Jerusalem. Then, they lost sight of the star, for they had to ask around where the king of the Jews was born. It had disappeared from them while they were inquiring in Jerusalem. It now appeared to them again when they went on their way.

The magi, **verse 10**, "when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Their inquiries into Jerusalem had led to fruition. They knew that they were on the right track. This reminds us of the words of the angel of the Lord, who had appeared to the shepherds in Luke 2:10, "I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people." But this joy was greater. They rejoiced, "exceedingly with great joy" when they saw the star. Look further at how the star is described, it says that the star, "came and stood over where the Child was" (verse 9).

Let me ask you now, "How many stars have you seen, which stood over one person so as to identify him?" All of the stars the I know, stand high in the sky and stand over us all. You can't say, "That star is over this person."

- Some have researched the planetary movements near the time of Christ. It is true that Jupiter and Saturn were very close to each other at this time (1 degree -- about double the diameter of the moon). But this would fail to describe the singularity of "the star."
- Some have attempted to explain this phenomenon by describing this star as a low-flying meteor. Any meteor that I have ever seen has simply been a flash in the sky, which certainly didn't "stand" over anybody.
- Some have sought to explain this as a comet. But comets are like stars. They are high in the sky and identify no single person.

The only explanation that I have found satisfactory in understanding this star is that this star was a miraculous appearance of light, which God used to guide the magi to the find Jesus, the Son of God. God has used such extraordinary lights before. When the people of Israel were being led in the wilderness, they were led by a "pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:21,22; 14:24). When Paul was on his way to persecute the Christians in Damascus, Luke records "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3). When Peter was in prison and rescued by an angel, the Bible says, "an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell." (Acts 12:7).

This ought not to surprise us. The entire birth of Jesus Christ is surrounded by the miraculous. He was born of a virgin according to prophecy. Many angelic visions surrounded this entire event. Scripture after scripture was fulfilled. Matthew is seeking to explain the miraculous work of God surrounding the birth of Jesus. I believe that many of the above explanations simply attempt to deny the main point of this passage in seeking a purely natural explanation for this "star." Matthew's burden was to present Jesus in a way that we would marvel at His extraordinary birth and childhood!

So, the magi come and find him. Look at their response in **verse 11**, "And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh." Note several things here...

- The magi came to the house where Jesus was. They didn't come to the stable. When we piece together what Luke wrote concerning the birth of Jesus, we find out that eight days after his birth, he was presented in the temple in Jerusalem. Then, he probably came back here to Bethlehem.
- This may have occurred sometime after Jesus was born, up to two years later. Jesus is described here as a "Child," not an infant. Furthermore, when Herod killed the children in Jerusalem, he had every child, two years of age and under killed. This was probably in accordance with he discovered in his secret conversation with the magi.
- The Child is the center of attention. The magi worship Him!! The magi came and presented their gifts to Him!! Mary is viewed as a bystander. Joseph isn't even mentioned. Perhaps he was out working at the time. It is the Child that they have come to worship. It is the Child to whom they gave their gifts. Whenever Jesus is mentioned here with Mary, Jesus is always first, ...

"They saw the Child with Mary His mother;" (verse 11).  
"Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt" (verse 13).  
"And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt" (verse 14).  
"Arise and take the Child and His mother" (verse 20).  
"And he arose and took the Child and His mother, ... " (verse 21).

That's how it ought to be. The Child is the focus. The gospel of Matthew is written, not about Mary, but about Jesus, the miraculous Son of God, who came to save His people from their sins.

- Note, finally, that the magi presented expensive gifts to Jesus. In the ancient East, when approaching a superior, the bringing of gifts was important. For instance, when Jacob's sons came to meet Joseph, in Egypt, they brought gifts (Gen. 43:11). Also when the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, she brought "spices and very much gold and precious stones" (1 Kings 10:2). For these magi, it was not different.

They had come to worship this child who was born. They recognized His superiority. These magi that came weren't insignificant people. They were upper echelon advisors to the kings! They were like our cabinet members, to whom the king turned to for advice. They were intelligent, powerful, and wealthy men. And what do they do? **They respond in genuine worship.** They prostrate themselves in worship before a Child!

There is discussion in the commentaries as to whether these magi actually worshiped Jesus Christ as deity or whether they simply bowed to him as a King. In either event, they either worshiped Jesus as God, or their actions were better than they knew.

This ought to be our heart as well. We see what a wonder this Child is, even from his early days.

- We see Him born of the right family -- a son of David.
- We see Him born in the right way -- of a virgin.
- We see Him born in the right place -- in Bethlehem.
- We see Him acknowledged as great, by the great ones upon the earth.
- We ought to bow low before Jesus Christ and worship Him. He is the One who has come to save -- such a glorious beginning to His life.

We know so much more than the magi. We know of His sinless life. We know of His sacrifice upon the cross for our sins. We know that He came for the helpless. Our worship of Him ought to be grand and glorious this Christmas season!

The religious leaders responded with no worship.  
Herod responded with fake worship.  
The magi responded with genuine worship.

May the Lord grant us mercy to genuinely worship Jesus Christ, the Babe born in Bethlehem this Christmas season.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 23, 2001 by Steve Brandon.  
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