FBC Wrightwood 9 Dec 90; Zarka Church, Amman 9 Dec 01; CIC 24 Dec 06 Dr. Rick Griffith

CIC again 15 Dec 13; Jalan Imbi Chapel KL15 Dec 19 NIV & NLT

Single Message 40 Minutes

**Worship Irony**

Title

*Matthew 2:1-12*

**Topic:** Christmas

**Subject:** Worship Christ this Christmas

**Complement:** —don’t oppose Him, be disturbed about Him, or ignore Him.

**Purpose:** The listeners will truly worship Christ this Christmas.

**Attribute:** We worship our All-Sufficient God

# Introduction

### [The world ignores the real Christmas.]

#### Small Groups (with no introduction):

King OK?

##### Matthew presents Christ as King of Israel. Do you think people today have a hard time thinking of Christ as King? Why or why not?

##### [Group debrief]

Monarchies

#### An interesting thing is happening: Monarchies are disappearing (explain).

#### The First Preslyterian Church of Elvis the Divine makes it a point to worship “The King” of Rock and Roll.” Wrong king!

Elvis

### It's that time of the year again when we focus on the Newborn King. The interesting thing is that your speaker today comes from a country that began in rebellion to the idea of kingship and continues to today.

Newborn King

#### You'll never hear the phrase, "The Kingdom of America"!

#### The USA has no streets that I've ever seen with these names: Kings Road, Queen Street, and Coronation Road. They just don’t exist in America.

#### Americans still laugh at all the gossip about Prince Charles, Queen Elizabeth, and the whole royal family.

#### Unfortunately, America's rebellion towards the idea of kings affects how we look at Christmas. We have a hard time thinking anyone can be king.

### Actually this can be a problem no matter where you live. Despite the great significance of Jesus being King, attitudes toward Him as King are still mixed today. In fact, they’ve always been mixed even since the first century.

Candles Meaning

#### Personally, I love Christmastime. I like the lights, the trees, candles, and reading Christmas cards and getting everyone’s updated pictures!

#### But for others, Christmas for others is an excuse to get drunk, get something, give a little, leave work, get out of school, spend money, or overeat…

### Today we’ll look at some of the responses to the first Christmas in Matthew 2, so I invite you to turn over there. The question we want to answer today is, "How did each of the people noted in this story respond to the birth of this new King?” As we do so we’ll see what we can we learn from how they reacted.

Responses

### The first people noted in this chapter reveal a very interesting truth…

# I. Magi whom we wouldn't expect to worship Christ worshipped Him as King (2:1-2).

MP

1-2

 **Gentiles who knew very little about Christ gave Him the royal honor He was due.**

## Let's ask and answer some important questions about the magi.

### First of all, who were the magi?

Who were Magi?

#### They were wise men from the east, probably from Babylon.

#### Church tradition claims there were three of them: Balthasar from Arabia, Melchior from Persia, and Gasper (or Casper—the Friendly Wiseman! ☺)

Names

#### Daniel refers to them in his Old Testament book, calling them "magicians" (see Dan 1:20). They were an elite group, a priestly caste who may have been Medes that enjoyed special power to interpret dreams.

From east

#### "In later centuries down to NT times, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future and the like" (EBC).

Babylon stars

#### Marco Polo even claimed to have visited their tombs a thousand years after Christ in Iran: "In Persia is the city of Saba, from which the Three Magi set out and in this city they are buried, in three very large and beautiful monuments, side by side. And above them there is a square building, beautifully kept. The bodies are still entire, with hair and beard remaining" (Book i).

Marco Polo

#### Apparently they were specialists in astronomy or astrology, depending on whom you read. They were learned men, Gentile men.

### But how did they know about the birth of Christ?

Light of Christmas

#### Evidently, they got a hold of some Old Testament manuscripts, probably from migrating Jewish scholars.

#### Through their studies they became aware that the King of the Jews would be born in the land of Israel.

## What kind of star was it? (EBC)

Star?

### Some say it wasn’t actually a star but a configuration of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in a straight line.

Planets

#### The major problem with this is that planets aren't stars—and there is no evidence that ancient people referred to planets as "stars."

#### Also, further astrological evidence points out that Jupiter and Saturn at closest could be one degree apart—about twice the moon's diameter—so they couldn't have been seen as one image.

#### Finally, the star moved south to Bethlehem—8 kilometers south of Jerusalem (v. 9). Planets naturally travel east to west across the heavens, not north to south.

### Others claim that what the wise men saw was a comet, a supernova or other planetary conjunctions with Mars or Venus, etc. But the text is clear that it was a star!

Comet?

### I think the text teaches that it was not a normal star but a miraculous star.

Miraculous

#### This star led them so specifically that they came to two particular cities, Jerusalem and Bethlehem—and not only to cities, but the star led the magi to the very house where Christ was staying (v. 9)!

• Led to house

#### Apparently the magi were the only ones who saw it. Otherwise, the whole region would have been in turmoil!

• Only magi saw it

#### That the star was a miraculous one is supported in that this star wasn't always visible to the magi because verse 10 indicates that it reappeared to them.

• Reappear

(Let's not miss the forest through the trees with too many details about the magi and the star. The idea here is that…)

## Pagan scholars were worshipping the King.

Bethlehem Star

### God specially designed a particular star to guide people who were seeking Him—even though they were Gentiles.

### Interesting that Jesus was King of the Jews yet those most open to Him have been those who wouldn’t have expected—Gentiles like you and me.

### God appointed a special star in their case—What has He been doing in your life to get your attention?

Your attention?

#### Has He been showing you truth in His Word to help you turn to Christ?

• Word

#### Has He brought some Christians into your life to help you understand what Christianity is all about—that it is a personal relationship with Christ?

• Respond

• Christians

#### Have you responded to His guidance? What further evidence do you need?

(Verses 1-2 tell us that those whom you would never expect to worship Christ ended up looking for Him to worship Him. That's a bit surprising. But you know what's even more surprising than seeing pagans seeking to worship Christ? Observing how those who *should* worship Him fail to do so! That's what we find in verses 3-8…)

MPI

# II. Those whom you would expect to worship Christ rejected Him (2:3-8).

MP

#  The very people who should have given Jesus homage turned him down.

## Herod rejected Him (2:3a).

Herod Close Up

### Why? Jealousy!

#### He wasn't the rightful king since he wasn't even a Jew, but an Idumean.

#### Herod felt threatened that his rule would have to be forfeited, and jealousy in the hands of a man with great power has disastrous results.

Herod

### Actually many people over the years have rejected Christ’s birth out of jealousy.

#### This cartoon spoke to me where three kids sit outside the principal’s office. The first says, “I said the S-H word,” the second, “I said the F- word,” and the third, “I said ‘Christmas.’” Yep, some are even trying to outlaw mention of Christmas in the public sector.

Cartoon

#### Today some countries prohibit celebration of Christmas lest it take away devotion to the government or majority religion.

Orchard Road

#### Many companies rely on 25% of their gross sales in December—that’s so much pressure that jealousy for sales can result in rejecting Christ.

#### Then, of course, many replace Christ with Santa—who, when you think about him, though he could be seen threatening, is a really cool guy—one who can do amazing things—though not even near to being God like Christ!

Magi & Herod

Santa
4 slides

(So feeling threatened can move us to reject others and Herod was no exception. But…)

## Jerusalem was also disturbed about Him (2:3b).

Jerusalem

### Why? They knew that even the *possibility* of another king could result in more cruelty from Herod. He had already executed his own wife Mariamne after she bore him five children (27 BC)—and she was his favorite wife! Herod's paranoia led him to murder his two sons, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and many others.

Mariamne

### For whatever reason, these people in Jerusalem, Jews who were supposed to be anxiously awaiting the coming of their Savior, were upset that He had finally come!

Pharisees

### We also can get disturbed about Christmas, can’t we?

Shopping

#### Our “To-Do” list gets longer—so many cards to write, presents to buy, on and on…

Woman Stressed

#### A Bible teacher who lives in Israel wrote me this email (in 2006):

Keep Calm

##### “In Israel this month, the kids get a week off of school for Hanukkah but return to regular classes on Christmas Eve.  Christmas is a regular day for businesses and students throughout the Jewish state.  This lack of notice is not unlike the situation 2,000 years ago when the Messiah was born: apart from a few shepherds in the field, there was little fanfare.

Hanukkah

##### “In some parts of the world today, Christmas is celebrated as big business and… not centered on the One whose birthday it is.  The strategy seems to be that if you can't get them to ignore it, at least get them to distort it” (Todd Bolen, BiblePlaces Newsletter, Vol. 5, #5, 5 Dec 06). And so we end up being disturbed about the birth of the One we really need!

Women OK

#### Women seem to handle the stress better than men—and some men handle it well—but a British psychologist said in 1998 that Christmas shopping is so disturbing for men that they shouldn’t do it. The December 4 *Straits Times* article read, “Christmas shopping ‘Bad for Men.’” This is why online shopping has increased. Even Santa does it.

Online
3 slides

Man Clock

Men OK

(The magi were seeking Christ, Herod was opposing Christ, Jerusalem was disturbed about Christ. But what about the Jewish leaders?)

## The Jewish leaders ignored Him (2:4-6).

Leaders Ignored

### The Jewish leaders were sought out for their advice (2:4).

### These leaders knew that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (2:5-6).

Micah 5:2

#### The leaders paraphrased Micah 5:2 that gives the exact city where the Messiah would be born—in Bethlehem, which was also called "Ephrath" (cf. Gen 35:19).

#### Incidentally, "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." How fitting of a place for the very Bread of Life to make His entrance into the world!

“House of Bread”

### They knew the place but these leaders never went to see Him themselves!

Map

#### Only 8 kilometers from the very Son of God and they did not go to see Him!?

Close up Map

#### Yet the Gentile magi were hundreds of kilometers away and searched diligently until they found Him to worship Him!

• Jews
• Gentiles

## Herod **pretended** he wanted to worship Christ (2:7-8).

Herod pretended

### Why did Herod want to know the exact time the star had appeared? He had an evil plan up his sleeve and needed to know how old the child was at that time.

Why time of Star

### The best we can tell, the star appeared to the magi the night Christ was born, but it took them several months to leave the east and make the long trek to Jerusalem.

### Did Herod want to worship Jesus? Hardly! He wanted others to do the dirty work for him of wandering around town, then when he knew the place he would destroy him.

(It's interesting that we have found in this passage those whom you *wouldn't* expect to worship Christ worship Him while the ones we *would* expect to be anxiously awaiting his arrival rejected Him. In our final section today we'll see the culmination of the wise men's search…)

Herod & Magi

# III. Those whom you wouldn't expect worshipped Christ (2:9-12).

MP

#  The pagan astrologers finally made it to the Christ Child and worshipped Him.

9-10

## God honored the magi's commitment to worship Christ with further guidance (2:9-10).

### Luke records how the least likely candidates as witnesses—shepherds—witnessed the night of the birth.

Gabriel to Shepherds

### Now Matthew shows how God made the star reappear to direct other unlikely candidates to the exact location (2:9).

Star Reappears

### The worshippers were elated when they spotted the star (2:10).

#### The Greek text here says literally, "They rejoiced a joy great exceedingly"!

#### What a thrill it is to have the Lord confirm your steps!

(Finally the magi's many month journey was fulfilled in verse 11 where it says that…)

## The magi worshipped Christ (2:11).

Worship of Magi

### They worshipped with reverent bowing (2:11a).

#### Notice that they worshipped Christ in a house, not the manger—a good lesson on not developing your theology from Christmas cards!

Typical Nativity

#### Actually, he was more like a toddler up to two years old. Notice also that they worshipped the baby, not the mother. How tragic that some give Mary the worship that is due to Christ!

2 yr. old

### They worshipped by giving gifts (2:11b).

Gift Giving

#### Bringing gifts was a very important practice in the ancient East when approaching a superior (EBC). Imagine that! The magi recognized that this tiny baby was their superior so they opened up their treasure-boxes (or coffers) and gave the King of Kings gifts!

#### The gifts were expensive, but the normal gifts for royalty with great symbolism:

Gifts

##### Gold is the most precious metal, fit for a King.

Gold

Gold represents royalty (some say deity or purity).

##### Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees. It was used as incense.

• Rule

Incense

Since priests burned incense in the temple, frankincense likely portrays Christ as our High Priest.

• Priest

##### Myrrh exudes from a tree in Arabia and was a valuable spice and perfume—and especially an embalming fluid.

Myrrh

Myrrh suggests that Christ would die a sacrificial death (since it was used to wrap bodies after death). It reminds us that Jesus is our Savior.

• Savior

#### I wonder if the magi thought in these terms. However, it does makes sense to see these as gold depicting Christ as Ruling King, frankincense showing him as High Priest, and myrrh for his work on the cross as Redeeming Savior.

• Gold

• Myrrh

• Incense

#### But at the very least, God provided these expensive gifts for Joseph and Mary to finance their soon-to-occur unexpected trip out of the country to Egypt.

Trip money

(What an amazing thing to see these Gentile men obey the Lord's direction all the way to Bethlehem! God gave them a final way to obey, though…)

## The magi obeyed God by not reporting back to Herod (2:12).

Return

# Conclusion

### As I studied the responses to Christ’s birth in this passage, the most amazing thing to me was that

Jews

Light

 the Jews,

 those whom you would **expect** to worship the infant king,

 never did worship Him

 while the Gentiles,

• Gentiles

 the ones with far less of God's Word than the Jews,

 ended up giving Christ his rightful homage!

• Worship Irony!

What a worship irony!

### The magi sought the King while Herod opposed the King, Jerusalem was disturbed about the King, and the Jewish leaders ignored the King!

• Lead

• Jeru.

Magi

• Herod

### Main Idea: Jews ignored Him while Gentiles worshipped Him—how about you?

MI

### Christmas is filled with paradoxes—like Jews continuing to reject their Messiah while many secret believers embrace Him!

### What will be your response to the King this Christmas? Wise men still seek Him!

Wise Men Seek Him

#### Will you **oppose** the King like Herod—by allowing hindered relationships to fester in your family over the holiday season?

Responses

#### Will you be **disturbed** about the King—by looking at Christmas as the last big hassle you'll have to put up with this year?

#### Will you **ignore** the King—by celebrating a Christmas void of spiritual depth, a secular Christmas. This is easy since Satan has created so many distractions!

### I have no doubt that most of us here want to really **worship** the King as the magi did. How do we do it, though? Two suggestions…

Advent

#### Practice family traditions centered around the person of Christ.

Joseph focus

#### Worship Him by giving to someone who cannot respond with a gift to give back to you—as Jesus, Joseph and Mary could never reciprocate to the wise men for their generous gifts.

Give

### Some time ago several people gathered at the home of a wealthy couple to celebrate the christening of their newborn baby. The friends mingled, talked, laughed, drank and enjoyed all the refreshments for some time in the company of family and friends.

Black
(Optional)

 In a passing conversation someone mentioned that he had not yet seen the baby.

 "The baby!" the mother exclaimed and rushed into the bedroom, only to see that the baby, which had been left on the huge bed, had been buried under the pile of coats.

 The baby had suffocated under the heavy weight and laid dead on the bed.

 The one for whom those people came to celebrate suffocated due to their selfish neglect (WORSHIP neglected and replaced with distractions).

### Prayer

Christmas Orphan Story

From: gracewce@gracebap.org.sg

Date: Wed, 29 Apr 98 16:13:37 +0800

cc: Subject: touching story

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments and a large orphanage. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage. They relate the following story in their own words:

"It was nearing the holiday season, 1994, time for our orphans to hear-for the first time-the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat -- he looked to be about 6 years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately--until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, "And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, "If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?'" And Jesus told me, "If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me." "So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him -- for always."

As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him -- FOR ALWAYS.

Sarceda Family (Thailand)

The schoolteacher asked her students to tell what their families do on Christmas Eve.

Patrick Murphy, "Tell me Patrick what do you do at Christmas time?" she asked.

Patrick addressed the class, "Well Ms. Jones, me and my twelve brothers and sisters go to the midnight Mass and we sing hymns, then we come home very late and we put mince pies by the back door and hang up our stockings. Then all excited we go to bed and wait for Father Christmas to come with all our toys.”

"Very nice Patrick", she said "Now, Jimmy Brown what do you do at Christmas?"

"Well, Ms. Jones, me and my sister also go to Church with Mum and Dad and we sing carols and we get home ever so late. We put cookies and milk by the chimney and we hang up our stockings. We hardly sleep, waiting for Santa Claus to bring our presents."

Realizing there was a Jewish boy in the class and not wanting to leave him out of the discussion, she asked, "Now, Isaac Cohen, what do you do at Christmas?"

Isaac said, "Well, it's the same thing every year. Dad comes home from the office. We all pile into the Rolls Royce, then we drive to his toy factory. When we get inside, we look at all the empty shelves and begin to sing; 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus'. Then we all go to the Bahamas. "

Grace Baptist Church (SEC only) Dr. Rick Griffith

NIV 20 Dec 98

Single Message 35 Minutes

**Worship for a King**

*Matthew 2:1-12*

**Topic:** Christmas

**Subject:** Worship Christ this Christmas

**Complement:** —don’t oppose Him, be disturbed about Him, or ignore Him.

**Purpose:** The listeners will truly worship Christ this Christmas.

# Introduction

### It's that time of the year again when we focus on the Newborn King. The interesting thing is that your speaker today comes from a country that began in rebellion to the idea of kingship and continues to today.

#### You'll never hear the phrase, "The Kingdom of America"!

#### The USA has no streets that I've ever seen with these names: Kings Road, Queen Street, and Coronation Road. They just don’t exist in America.

#### Americans still laugh at all the gossip about Prince Charles, Queen Elizabeth, Fergie, and the whole royal family.

#### Unfortunately, America's rebellion towards the idea of kings affects how we look at Christmas. We have a hard time thinking anyone can be king.

### Actually this can be a problem no matter where you live. Despite the great significance of Jesus being King, attitudes toward Him as King are still mixed today. In fact, they’ve always been mixed even since the first century.

#### Christmas is a depressing time for many people. The director of the California Department of Mental Hygiene, says, “The Christmas season is marked by greater emotional stress and more acts of violence than any other time of the year” (CHRISTMAS depressing… by J. M. Stubblebein).

#### Christmas for others is an excuse to get drunk, get something, give a little, leave work, get out of school, spend money, or overeat…

### Today we’ll look at some of the responses to the first Christmas in Matthew 2, so I invite you to turn over there. The question we want to answer today is, "How did each of the people noted in this story respond to the birth of this new King?” As we do so we’ll see what we can we learn from how they reacted.

### The first people noted in this chapter reveal an very interesting truth…

# I. Magi whom we wouldn't expect to worship Christ worshipped Him as King (2:1-2).

 **Gentiles who knew very little about Christ gave Him the royal honor He was due.**

## Let's ask and answer some important questions about the magi.

### First of all, who were the magi?

#### They were wise men from the east, probably from Babylon—though maybe Persia or even Arabia.

#### Daniel refers to them in his Old Testament book, calling them "magicians" (see Dan 1:20). They were an elite group, a priestly caste of Medes who enjoyed special power to interpret dreams.

#### "In later centuries down to NT times, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future and the like" (EBC).

#### Anyway, apparently they were specialists in astronomy or astrology, depending on whom you read. They were learned men, Gentile men.

### But how did they know about the birth of Christ?

#### Apparently they had Old Testament manuscripts, probably from migrating Jewish scholars (BKC) and through their studies they became aware that the King of the Jews would be born in the land of Israel.

#### Some feel they responded to Numbers 24:17 which says that a "star" would "come out of Jacob," or Israel.

#### Others say they had copies of Daniel's book since it was written in Babylon, their area. Daniel 9:25 records how the Messiah would be associated with Jerusalem.

#### Anyway, when it comes down to it, somehow they knew the King of the Jews was born so they headed out towards Israel following a star.

(Speaking of the star…)

## What kind of star was it? (EBC)

### Some say it wasn’t actually a star but a configuration of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in a straight line.

#### The major problem with this is that planets aren't stars—and there is no evidence that ancient people referred to planets as "stars."

#### Also, further astrological evidence points out that Jupiter and Saturn at closest could be one degree apart—about twice the moon's diameter—so they couldn't have been seen as one image.

#### Finally, the star moved south to Bethlehem—8 kilometers south of Jerusalem (v. 9). Planets naturally travel east to west across the heavens, not north to south.

### Others claim that what the wise men saw was a comet, a supernova or other planetary conjunctions with Mars or Venus, etc. But the text is clear that it was a star!

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#### This star led them so specifically that they came to two particular cities, Jerusalem and Bethlehem—and not only to cities, but the star led the magi to the very house where Christ was staying (v. 9)!

#### Apparently the magi were the only ones who saw it. Otherwise, the whole region would have been in turmoil!

#### That the star was a miraculous one is supported in that this star wasn't always visible to the magi because verse 10 indicates that it reappeared to them.

(Let's not miss the forest through the trees with too many details about the magi and the star. The idea here is that…)

## Pagan scholars were worshipping the King.

### God specially designed a particular star to guide people who were seeking Him—even though they were Gentiles.

### Interesting that Jesus was King of the Jews yet those most open to Him have been those who wouldn’t have expected—Gentiles like you and me.

### God appointed a special star in their case—What has He been doing in your life to get your attention?

#### Has He been showing you truth in His Word to help you turn to Christ?

#### Has He brought some Christians into your life to help you understand what Christianity is all about—that it is a personal relationship with Christ?

#### Have you responded to His guidance? What further evidence do you need?

(Verses 1-2 tell us that those whom you would never expect to worship Christ ended up looking for Him to worship Him. That's a bit surprising. But you know what's even more surprising than seeing pagans seeking to worship Christ? Observing how those who *should* worship Him fail to do so! That's what we find in verses 3-8…)

# II. Those whom you would expect to worship Christ rejected Him (2:3-8).

#  Jesus was turned down by the very people who should have given him homage.

## Herod rejected Him (2:3a).

### Why? Jealousy!

#### He wasn't the rightful king since he wasn't even a Jew, but an Idumean.

#### Herod felt threatened that his rule would have to be forfeited, and jealousy in the hands of a man with great power has disastrous results.

### Actually many people over the years have rejected Christ’s birth out of jealousy.

#### Even today some countries prohibit celebration of Christmas lest it take away devotion to the government or majority religion.

#### Many companies rely on 25% of their gross sales in December—that’s so much pressure that jealousy for sales can result in rejecting Christ.

#### Then, of course, the focus on Santa has caused some to so reject Christ that this Christmas story reads like this… [read CHRISTMAS (Luke 2:16-18) Santa replacing poem].

(So feeling threatened can make us quite disturbed and Herod was no exception. But…)

## Jerusalem was also disturbed about Him (2:3b).

### Why? (EBC)

#### Certainly not because they would have been sorry to see Herod replaced,

#### or because they were reluctant to see the coming of King Messiah,

#### but because they knew that even the *possibility* of another king could result in more cruelty from Herod. You see, Herod's paranoia had already led him to murder his favorite wife and two sons, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and many others.

### For whatever reason, these people in Jerusalem, Jews who were supposed to be anxiously awaiting the coming of their Savior, were upset that He had finally come!

### We also can get disturbed about Christmas, can’t we?

#### Our “To-Do” list gets longer—so many cards to write, so many presents to buy, on and on…

#### A British psychologist recently said that Christmas shopping is so disturbing for men that they shouldn’t do it. The December 4 *Straits Times* articles reads, “Christmas shopping ‘Bad for Men.’” [read it]

(The magi were seeking Christ, Herod was opposing Christ, Jerusalem was disturbed about Christ. But what about the Jewish leaders?)

## The Jewish leaders ignored Him (2:4-6).

### The Jewish leaders were sought out for their advice (2:4).

#### The chief priests were the religious leaders of Israel (mostly Sadducees).

#### The teachers of the law spent their *lives* studying the OT scrolls (mostly Pharisees).

#### Surely they would know where the Messiah would be born! Did they? Yes!

### These leaders knew that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (2:5-6).

#### The leaders paraphrased Micah 5:2 here which cites the exact city where the Messiah would be born—the Bethlehem, which was also called "Ephrath" (cf. Gen 35:19).

#### Bethlehem was a small but significant city—the same city on whose rolling hills David was born and tended lambs centuries earlier. Throughout the Old Testament Bethlehem was associated with David who was a type of Christ, the final Lamb of God who would suffer and die for man's sin and rise again.

#### Incidentally, "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." How fitting of a place for the very Bread of Life to make His entrance into the world!

### But these leaders never went to see Him themselves!

#### Only 8 kilometers from the very Son of God and they did not go to see Him!?

#### Yet the Gentile magi were hundreds of kilometers away and searched diligently until they found Him to worship Him!

(Of course…)

## Herod **pretended** he wanted to worship Christ (2:7-8).

### Why did Herod want to know the exact time the star had appeared? He had an evil plan up his sleeve and needed to know how old the child was at that time.

### The best we can tell, the star appeared to the magi the night Christ was born, but it had taken them several months to leave the east and make the long trek to Jerusalem.

### Did Herod want to go worship Jesus? Hardly! He wanted others to do the dirty work for him of wandering around town, then when he knew the place he was going to destroy him.

(It's interesting that we have found in this passage those whom you *wouldn't* expect to worship Christ seek Him out while the ones we *would* expect to be anxiously awaiting his arrival were disturbed at the prospect of Him being born. In our final section today we'll see the culmination of the wise men's search…)

# III. Those whom you wouldn't expect to worship Christ did in fact end up worshipping Him (2:9-12).

#  The pagan astrologers finally made it to the Christ Child and worshipped Him

## Notice how God honored the magi's commitment to worship Christ with further guidance (2:9-10).

### God made the star reappear to direct them to the exact location (2:9).

#### Apparently the star lead them to the exact house where the baby was—probably a few months after His birth.

#### The star may have hovered over Bethlehem and then they found their own way to the house—which wouldn't have been too difficult since the shepherds spread the word about Christ far and wide, so others may have known which house the babe was in after being removed from the manger (cf. Luke 2:17-8; EBC).

### The worshippers were elated when they spotted the star (2:10).

#### The Greek text here says literally, "They rejoiced a joy great exceedingly"!

#### What a thrill it is to have the Lord confirm your steps!

(Finally the magi's many month journey was fulfilled in verse 11 where it says that…)

## The magi worshipped Christ (2:11).

### They worshipped with reverent bowing (2:11a).

#### Notice that they worshipped Christ in a house, not the manger—a good lesson on not developing your theology from Christmas cards!

#### Notice that they worshipped the baby, not the mother. What a tragedy that some have given Mary the worship which is due to Christ!

### They worshipped by giving gifts (2:11b).

#### Bringing gifts was a very important practice in the ancient East when approaching a superior (EBC). Imagine that! The magi recognized that this tiny baby was their superior so they opened up their treasure-boxes (or coffers) and gave the King of Kings gifts!

#### The gifts were expensive, but common gifts with great symbolism:

##### Gold is the most precious metal, fit for a King.

Gold represents royalty (kingship, or deity, or purity).

##### Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees. It was used as an incense.

Since priests burned incense in the temple, frankincense likely portrays Christ as our High Priest.

##### Myrrh exudes from a tree in Arabia and was a valuable spice and perfume—and especially an embalming fluid.

Myrrh suggests that Christ would die a sacrificial death (since it was used to wrap bodies after death). It reminds us that Jesus is our Savior.

#### Perhaps attaching this symbolism is going too far since it's doubtful the magi thought in these terms.

#### But at the very least, God provided these expensive gifts for Joseph and Mary to finance their soon-to-occur unexpected trip out of the country to Egypt.

(What an amazing thing to see these Gentile men obey the Lord's direction all the way to Bethlehem! God gave them a final way to obey, though…)

## The magi obeyed God by not reporting back to Herod (2:12).

# Conclusion

### As I studied this passage, the most amazing thing to me was that

 the Jews,

 those whom you would **expect** to worship the infant king,

 never did worship Him

 while the Gentiles,

 the ones with far less of God's Word than the Jews,

 ended up giving Christ his rightful homage!

### The magi were seeking the King, Herod was opposing the King, Jerusalem was disturbed about the King, and the Jewish leaders were ignoring the King!

### What will be your response be to the King this Christmas?

#### Will you **oppose** the King—by allowing hindered relationships to fester in your family over the holiday season?

#### Will you be **disturbed** about the King—by looking at Christmas as the last big hassle you'll have to put up with this year?

#### Will you simply **ignore** the King—by celebrating a Christmas void of spiritual depth, a secular Christmas. This is easy since Satan has created so many distractions!

### I have no doubt that most of us here want to really **worship** the King as the magi did. How do we do it, though? Two suggestions…

#### Be diligent to practice family traditions centered around the person of Christ (ILL: *Let's Make a Memory* book by Gloria Gaither and Shirley Dobson).

#### Worship Him by giving to someone who cannot respond with a gift to give back to you—as Jesus, Joseph and Mary could never reciprocate to the wise men for their generous gifts.

### Some time ago several people gathered at the home of a wealthy couple to celebrate the christening of their newborn baby. The friends mingled, talked, laughed, drank and enjoyed all the refreshments for some time in the company of family and friends.

 In a passing conversation someone mentioned that he had not yet seen the baby.

 "The baby!" the mother exclaimed and rushed into the bedroom, only to discover that the baby, which had been left on the huge bed, had been buried under the pile of coats.

 The baby had suffocated under the heavy weight and laid dead on the bed.

 The one for whom those people came to celebrate suffocated due to their selfish neglect (WORSHIP neglected and replaced with distractions).

### "Our Father in heaven, around us are so many distractions which tend to get us all caught up in tinsel and wrapping and lights and parties and even fellowship, yes, even Christian fellowship. God, thank you for all these wonderful, beautiful things associated with Christmas. But Lord, please help us to see beyond these things to the babe that so often gets suffocated by these good things. Enable us to worship Him in purity and unselfish giving which has been modeled by the wise men. We love you, Lord, and thank you for Jesus—His birth, life, death and resurrection—all for us. Give us a sensitivity to those who do not yet personally know Him—the greatest and first Christmas gift of all. In His name, Amen."

First Baptist Wrightwood Rick Griffith

NIV 9 December 90

Single Message 25 Minutes

**Worship for a King**

*Matthew 2:1-12*

**Subject:** When it became known that the baby Messiah was in Bethlehem

**Complement:** those expected to worship Him did not worship Him

 while those not expected to worship Him gave Him worship.

**Purpose:** To motivate the congregation to truly worship Christ this Christmas

**Introduction**

1. CHRISTMAS incarnation = world’s greatest invasion

2. Despite the great significance of this invasion, attitudes toward it remain mixed even to today. In fact, they’ve always been mixed even since the first century. Today we’ll look at some of these responses to Jesus in Matthew 2, so I invite you to turn over there. The question we want to answer today is, "What does the Lord want to tell us here in these first 12 verses of Matthew 2? Why is this story in our Bible?"

3. EI: Here's what I believe is the point of Matthew 2: Gentiles recognized the king of Israel but the Jews missed Him! Christ was worshipped by those whom you wouldn't expect to worship Him, but despised by those who you would count on to recognize his kingship.

**I. Magi whom we wouldn't expect to worship Christ sought to worship Him (2:1-2).**

 **Gentiles who knew very little about Christ gave Him the honor He was due.**

A. Let's ask and answer some important questions about the magi.

1. First of all, who were the magi?

a) They were wise men from the east, probably from Babylon.

b) Daniel refers to them in his Old Testament book, calling them "magicians" (Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7). They were an elite group, a priestly caste of Medes who enjoyed special power to interpret dreams.

c) "In later centuries down to NT times, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future and the like" (EBC).

d) Anyway, apparently they were specialists in astronomy or astrology, depending on whom you read. They were learned men, Gentile men.

2. How did they know about the birth of Christ?

a) Apparently they got ahold of some Old Testament manuscripts, probably from migrating Jewish scholars (BKC) and through their studies they became aware that the King of the Jews would be born in the land of Israel.

b) Some feel that they were looking at Numbers 24:17 which says that a "star" would "come out of Jacob," or Israel.

c) Others say they had copies of Daniel's book since it was written in Babylon, their area. Daniel 9 records how the Messiah would be associated with Jerusalem.

d) Anyway, when it comes down to it, somehow they knew the King of the Jews was born so they headed out towards Israel following a star.

(Speaking of the star…)

B. What kind of star was it? (cf. EBC)

1. Some say it wasn’t actually a star but a configuration of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in a straight line.

a) The major problem with this is that planets aren't stars—and there is no evidence that ancient people referred to planets as "stars."

b) Also, further astrological evidence points out that Jupiter and Saturn at closest could be one degree apart—about twice the moon's diameter—so they couldn't have been seen as one image.

c) Finally, the star moved south to Bethlehem—8 kilometers south of Jerusalem (v. 9). Planets naturally travel east to west across the heavens, not north to south.

2. Others claim that what the wise men saw was a comet, a supernova or other planetary conjunctions with Mars or Venus, etc. But the text is clear that it was a star!

3. I think the text teaches that it was not a normal star but a miraculous star.

a) This star led them so specifically that they came to two particular cities, Jerusalem and Bethlehem—and not only to cities, but the star led the magi to the very house where Christ was staying (v. 9)!

b) Apparently the magi were the only ones who saw it. Otherwise, the whole region would have been in turmoil!

c) The star wasn't always visible to the magi because verse 10 indicates that it reappeared to them.

(Let's not miss the forest through the trees with a bunch of details about the magi and the star. The idea here is that…)

C. Pagan scholars were worshipping the King.

1. God specially designed a particular star to guide people who were seeking Him. He did the same in the wilderness for Israel by leading them with a pillar of cloud and fire.

2. What has He been doing in your life to get your attention?

a) Has He been showing you truth in His Word to help you turn to Christ?

b) Has He brought some Christians into your life to help you understand what Christianity is all about—that it is a personal relationship with Christ?

c) Have you responded to His guidance? What further evidence do you need?

(Verses 1-2 have told us that those whom you would never expect to worship Christ ended up coming to look for Him to worship Him. That's a bit surprising. But you know what's even more surprising than seeing pagans seeking to worship Christ? Observing how those who *should* worship Him fail to do so. That's what we find in verses 3-8…)

**II. Those whom you would expect to worship Christ rejected Him (2:3-8).**

 **Jesus was turned down by the very people who should have given him homage.**

A. Herod rejected Him (2:3a).

1. Why? He wasn't the rightful king since he wasn't even a Jew, but an Edomite. You'd think that Herod would gladly say, "Well, this baby is from the rightful line of David and should legitimately be the next king." Not so.

2. Herod felt threatened that his rule would have to be forfeited, and jealousy in the hands of a man with great power can have disastrous results.

3. A terribly jealous woman used to submit her husband's shoulder to a full inspection every evening after he came home from work. Even the smallest hair on his coat flew her into a rage. One night, finding nothing, the wife burst into tears and cried, "Even bald women now!" (JEALOUSY does not think the best)

(Feeling threatened can make us quite disturbed and Herod was no exception. But…)

B. Jerusalem was also disturbed about Him (2:3b).

1. Why? (EBC)

a. Certainly not because they would have been sorry to see Herod replaced,

b. or because they were reluctant to see the coming of King Messiah,

c. but because they knew that even the *possibility* of another king could result in more cruelty from Herod. You see, Herod's paranoia had already led him to murder his favorite wife and two sons.

2. For whatever reason, these people in Jerusalem, Jews who were supposed to be anxiously awaiting the coming of their Savior, were upset that He had finally come!

(The magi were seeking Christ, Herod was opposing Christ, Jerusalem was disturbed about Christ. But what about the Jewish leaders?)

C. The Jewish leaders ignored Him (2:4-6).

1. The Jewish leaders were sought out for their advice (2:4).

a. The chief priests were the religious leaders of Israel (mostly Sadducees).

b. The teachers of the law spent their *lives* studying the OT scrolls (mostly Pharisees).

c. Surely they would know where the Messiah would be born! Did they? Yes!

2. These leaders knew that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (2:5-6).

a. The leaders paraphrased Micah 5:2 here which cites the exact city where the Messiah would be born—the Bethlehem, which was also called "Ephrath" (cf. Gen 35:19).

b. Bethlehem was a small, insignificant city—but also the same city on whose rolling hills David was born and tended lambs centuries earlier. Throughout the Old Testament Bethlehem was associated with David who was a type of Christ, the final Lamb of God who would suffer and die for man's sin and rise again.

c. Incidentally, "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." How fitting of a place for the very Bread of Life to make His entrance into the world!

3. These leaders never went to see Him themselves!

a. Only 8 kilometers from the very Son of God and they did not go to see Him!?

b. Yet the Gentile magi were hundreds of kilometers away and searched diligently until they found Him to worship Him!

(Of course…)

D. Herod **pretended** he wanted to worship Christ (2:7-8).

1. Why did Herod want to know the exact time the star had appeared? He had an evil plan up his sleeve and needed to know how old the child was at that time.

2. The best we can tell, the star appeared to the magi the night Christ was born, but it had taken them several months to leave the east and make the long trek to Jerusalem.

3. Did Herod want to go worship Jesus? Hardly! He wanted others to do the dirty work for him of wandering around town, then when he knew the place he was going to destroy him.

(It's interesting that we have found in this passage those whom you **wouldn't** expect to worship Christ seek Him out while the ones we **would** expect to be anxiously awaiting his arrival were disturbed at the prospect of Him being born. In our final verses in today's passage we'll see the culmination of the wise men's search…)

**III. The ones whom you wouldn't expect to worship Christ did in fact end up worshipping Him (2:9-12).**

 **The pagan astrologers finally made it to the Christ Child and worshipped Him**

A. God honored the magi's commitment to worship Christ with further guidance (2:9-10).

1. God made the star reappear to direct them to the exact location (2:9).

a. Apparently the star lead them to the exact house where the baby was.

b. The star may have hovered over Bethlehem and then they found their own way to the house—which wouldn't have been too difficult since the shepherds spread the word about Christ far and wide, so others may have known which house the babe was in after being removed from the manger (cf. Luke 2:17-8; EBC).

2. The worshippers were elated when they spotted the star (2:10).

a. The Greek text here says literally, "They rejoiced a joy great exceedingly."

b. What a thrill it is to have the Lord confirm your steps!

(Finally the magi's many month journey saw its purpose fulfilled in verse 11 where it says that…)

B. The magi worshipped Christ (2:11).

1. They worshipped with reverent bowing (2:11a).

a. Notice that they worshipped Christ in a house, not the manger—a good lesson on not developing your theology from Christmas cards!

b. Notice that they worshipped the baby, not the mother. What a tragedy that some have given Mary the worship which is due to Christ!

2. They worshipped with the giving of gifts (2:11b).

a. Bringing gifts was a very important practice in the ancient East when approaching a superior (EBC). Imagine that! The magi recognized that this tiny baby was their superior so they opened up their treasure-boxes (or coffers) and gave the King of Kings gifts!

b. The gifts were expensive, but common gifts with great symbolism:

1) Gold is the most precious metal, fit for a king.

 Gold represents royalty (kingship, or deity, or purity).

2) Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees. It was used as an incense.

 Frankincense may represent the fragrance of his life.

3) Myrrh exudes from a tree in Arabia and was a valuable spice and perfume—and especially an embalming fluid.

 Myrrh suggests that Christ would die a sacrificial death (crucifixion and burial).

c. Perhaps attaching this symbolism is going too far since it's doubtful the magi thought in these terms.

d. At the very least, God provided these expensive gifts for Joseph and Mary to finance their soon-to-occur unexpected trip out of the country to Egypt.

(What an amazing thing to see these Gentile men obey the Lord's direction all the way to Bethlehem! God gave them a final way to obey, though…)

C. The magi obeyed God by not reporting back to Herod (2:12).

**Conclusion**

1. As I studied this passage,

 the most amazing thing to me was that the Jews,

 those whom you would **expect** to worship the infant king,

 never did worship Him

 while the Gentiles,

 the ones who had much less of God's Word than the Jews,

 ended up being those who gave Christ his rightful homage!

2. The magi were seeking the King, Herod was opposing the King, Jerusalem was disturbed about the King, and the Jewish leaders were ignoring the King!

3. What will be your response be to the King this Christmas?

a. Will you **oppose** the King—by allowing hindered relationships to fester in your family over the holiday season?

b. Will you be **disturbed** about the King—by looking at Christmas as the last big hassle you'll have to put up with this year?

c. Will you simply **ignore** the King—by celebrating a Christmas void of spiritual depth, a secular Christmas. This is easy since Satan has created so many distractions!

4. I have no doubt that most of us here want to really worship the King as the magi did. How do we do it, though? Two suggestions…

a. Be diligent to practice family traditions centered around the person of Christ (ILL: *Let's Make a Memory* book by Gloria Gaither and Shirley Dobson).

b. Worship Him by giving to someone who cannot respond with a gift to give back to you —as Jesus, Joseph and Mary could never reciprocate to the wise men for their generous gifts.

5. Some time ago several people gathered at the home of a wealthy couple to celebrate the christening of their newborn baby. The friends mingled, talked, laughed, drank and enjoyed all the refreshments for some time in the company of family and friends.

 In a passing conversation someone mentioned that he had not yet seen the baby.

 "The baby!" the mother exclaimed and rushed into the bedroom, only to discover that the baby, which had been left on the huge bed, had been buried under the pile of coats.

 The baby had suffocated under the heavy weight and laid dead on the bed.

 The one for whom those people came to celebrate suffocated due to their selfish neglect.

 (WORSHIP neglected and replaced with distractions)

6. "Our Father in heaven, around us are so many distractions which tend to get us all caught up in tinsel and wrapping and lights and parties and even fellowship, yes, even Christian fellowship. God, thank you for all these wonderful, beautiful things associated with Christmas. But Lord, please help us to see beyond these things to the babe that so often gets suffocated by these good things. Enable us to worship Him in purity and unselfish giving which has been modeled by the wise men. We love you, Lord, and thank you for Jesus—His birth, life, death and resurrection—all for us. Give us a sensitivity to those who do not yet personally know Him—the greatest and first Christmas gift of all. In His name, Amen."

Grace Fellowship Church (long version) Rick Griffith

NIV December 9, 1990

Single Message 40 Minutes

**Worship for a King**

*Matthew 2:1-12*

**Subject:** When it became known that the baby Messiah was in Bethlehem

**Complement:** those expected to worship Him did not worship Him

 while those not expected to worship Him gave Him worship.

**Purpose:** To motivate the congregation to truly worship Christ this Christmas

**Introduction**

1. You'll remember from last week that my three Christmas messages this year are based in Matthew 1-2. This morning's text will be the first part of Matthew 2 but I first want to invite you to turn to Luke 2.

2. Last week we left off at the end of Matthew 1 which simply mentioned that Christ was born. In the second chapter of Luke's gospel he fills in many details between chapters 1 and 2 in Matthew, chronicling the details of the story of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, visit by the shepherds, circumcision in the temple, and blessing by Simeon and Anna.

3. But before we get to Matthew's account I want to direct your attention to something I never saw until this week in the 39th verse of Luke 2. After Christ's birth and presentation in the temple, Luke 2:39 says, "When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth."

4. Now turn to Matthew 2:1. Where do we find **these** events taking place? Bethlehem! Luke has the family going back to Nazareth when Jesus was only about 2 months old (after the purification period for Mary; cf. Lev 12:4), but then soon after this we see them again in Bethlehem!

5. Why? God knew that **some special visitors** would be coming to see the Messiah, so, for some reason a short time later Joseph and Mary came back to Bethlehem with their baby boy! Perhaps they came to visit relatives, check on property, pay taxes or do something else (cf. Cheney, p. 239; Bailey's class notes).

6. So who were these special visitors? That's where Matthew 2 comes in, so I invite you to turn over there. The question we want to answer today is, "What does the Lord want to tell us here in these first 12 verses of Matthew 2? Why is this story in our Bible?"

7. Here's what I believe is the point of Matthew 2: Gentiles recognized the king of Israel but the Jews missed Him! Christ was worshipped by those whom you wouldn't expect to worship Him, but despised by those who you would count on to recognize his kingship.

**I. Those whom you wouldn't expect to worship Christ sought to worship Him (2:1-2).**

 **Gentiles who knew very little about Christ gave Him the honor He was due.**

A. The time of these events was in 4 B. C. (2:1a).

1. Why 4 B. C.? How do we know when these events took place? Because the Roman records penned by Josephus pinpoint the reign of King Herod from 37 BC until his death in March or April, 4 BC. Since Herod is mentioned in this chapter as king when Christ was born, Jesus had to have been born before 4 BC The best we can tell, Christ was born in 5 or 6 B. C. (*ZPEB*, Vol. 1, p. 818).

2. That Christ was **not** a newborn baby when this took place is also indicated by the use of a different word for "baby" in verse 11. Luke wrote that the angel told the shepherds, "You will find a **baby** wrapped in strips of cloth…" (cf. Luke 2:12) but the word used in verse 11 is not "baby" but "**child**," a word not used of a newborn infant.

3. Perhaps you're wondering how Christ could be born in 5 BC, or 5 years before Christ. Well, it's not easy! For that matter, is December 25th the real date? There are at least three reasons why its impossible to determine the exact date of Christ's birth (*ZPEB*, 1:816):

a. Secular historians in the first century didn't care too much for Christianity so they seldom mentioned dates related to the church.

b. There was no single system of regularly-numbered years since the Jews used a lunar calendar and the Romans used a solar calendar or measured years based upon the time the emperors came into office.

c. Also, people rounded off a lot since they weren't too concerned with chronology.

4. When all is said and done, the actual date of Christ's birth isn't too important. The important matter is that He was born! Agreed?

(Not only was Jesus born in Bethlehem but look and see who came to worship Him--some of those whom you would never expect!)

B. Magi sought Christ to worship Him (2:1b-2).

1. Let's ask and answer some important questions about the magi.

a. First of all, how do you say the word?

1) Almost everyone I know pronounces it *ma-jai.*

2) The NASB column reference says they're pronounced *may-ji*.

3) As my dad always said, "When in doubt, go to the dictionary." So I did, and the dictionary says *may-jai .*

4) I don't know how to say it so I'll go the traditional route with *ma-jai*, but anyway, they were a bunch of wise guys. Seriously!

b. Who were the magi?

1) They were wise men from the east, probably from Babylon.

2) Daniel refers to them in his Old Testament book, calling them "magicians" (Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7). They were an elite group, a priestly caste of Medes who enjoyed special power to interpret dreams.

3) "In later centuries down to NT times, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future and the like" (EBC).

4) Anyway, apparently they were specialists in astronomy or astrology, depending on whom you read. They were learned men, Gentile men.

c. How many magi were there?

1) We don't know since the Bible doesn't say.

2) Some have assumed that there were 3 since verse 11 reports that 3 gifts were given to Christ. By the end of the sixth century, the three wise men were even named: Melkon (later Melchior), Balthasar, and Gasper (EBC). That's not "Casper" like the ghost, but Gasper, the wise guy.

3) However many there were, verse 3 indicates that there were enough of them to trouble the entire city!

d. How did they know about the birth of Christ?

1) Apparently they got ahold of some Old Testament manuscripts, probably from migrating Jewish scholars (*BKC* ) and through their studies they became aware that the King of the Jews would be born in the land of Israel.

2) Some feel that they were looking at Numbers 24:17 which says that a "star" would "come out of Jacob," or Israel.

3) Others say that they had copies of Daniel's book since it was written in Babylon, their area. Daniel 9 records some ways that the Messiah would be associated with Jerusalem.

4) Anyway, when it comes down to it, somehow they knew the King of the Jews was born so they headed out towards Israel.

e. But why did they come to worship a king in a different country?

1) I think they had heard about the God of Israel and were impressed, especially since their Old Testament manuscripts said that the Messiah would eventually rule the world.

2) Perhaps God gave them a revelation. He certainly did through the star.

(Speaking of the star…)

2. Let's ask and answer some important questions about the star.

a. Where was it?

1) Apparently it was over Israel since it was seen from the east.

2) Specifically, it went over Jerusalem since that's where the magi went.

b. What kind of star was it? (cf. EBC)

1) Some say it was bright because it wasn't actually a star but a configuration of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in a straight line.

a) The major problem with this is that planets aren't stars--and there is no evidence that ancient people referred to planets as "stars."

b) Also, further astrological evidence points out that Jupiter and Saturn at closest could be one degree apart--about twice the moon's diameter--so they couldn't have been seen as one image.

c) Finally, Bethlehem was to the south of Jerusalem. Planets naturally travel from east to west across the heavens, not from north to south.

2) Others claim that what the wise men saw was a comet, a supernova or other planetary conjunctions with Mars or Venus, etc.

3) I think the text teaches that it was not a normal star but a miraculous star.

a) This star led them so specifically that they came to two particular cities, Jerusalem and Bethlehem--and not only to cities, but the star led the magi to the very **house** where Christ was staying (v. 9)!

b) Apparently the magi were the only ones who saw it. Otherwise, the whole region would have been in turmoil!

c) The star wasn't always visible to the magi because verse 10 indicates that it reappeared to them.

d) There's a difference here in the Greek between "the east" in verse 1 and the "the east" in verse 2 and 9. A marginal reading in the NIV for "in the east" is "when it arose"--an alternate translation in verses 2 and 9. This is because the word *anatole* here can mean either "rising" or "east." What I'm saying is that "when it arose" may be the best translation in verses 2 and 9! That may not be too surprising since the stars seem to rise in the east as the earth turns, but when the same star arose to the south to guide the men to Bethlehem that's **some** star! Imagine the astronomers gazing through their looking glasses and this miraculous star rising up in their sight!

(Let's not miss the forest through the trees with a bunch of details about the magi and the star. The idea here is that…)

3. Pagan scholars were worshipping the King.

a. Do you think you're too intelligent to believe these things from the Bible?

1) Warren Wiersbe writes, "No scholarly person who follows the light God gives him can miss worshipping at the feet of Jesus. In Jesus Christ 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3). In Him dwells 'all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (2:9)" (p. 19).

2) The wisest persons in the world are those who take God at His word. Don't let a pseudo-intellectualism keep you from missing the greatest Christmas gift you can ever receive!

3) The great knowledge of the magi didn't stand as a barrier from them placing their faith in Christ. Don't let it happen to you either.

b. God specially designed a particular star to guide people who were seeking Him. He did the same in the wilderness for Israel by leading them with a pillar of cloud and fire. What has he been doing in your life to get your attention?

1) Has He been showing you the truth of His Word to help you see your need to turn to Christ?

2) Has He brought some Christians into your life to help you understand what Christianity is all about--that it is a personal relationship with Christ?

3) Have you responded to His guidance? What further evidence do you need?

(Verses 1-2 have told us that those whom you would never expect to worship Christ ended up coming to look for Him to worship Him. That's a bit surprising. It's almost like seeing an atheist get all thrilled about Easter as a celebration of the resurrection of Christ. But you know what's even more surprising than seeing pagans seeking to worship Christ? Observing how those who **should** worship Him fail to do so. That's what we find in verses 3-8…)

**II. Those whom you would expect to worship Christ rejected Him (2:3-8).**

 **Jesus was turned down by the very people who should have given him homage.**

A. Herod rejected Him (2:3a).

1. Why? He wasn't the rightful king since he wasn't even a Jew, but an Edomite. You'd think that Herod would gladly say, "Well, this baby is from the rightful line of David and should legitimately be the next king." Not so.

2. Herod felt threatened that his rule would have to be forfeited, and jealousy in the hands of a man with great power can have disastrous results.

3. A terribly jealous woman used to submit her husband's shoulder to a full inspection every evening after he came home from work. Even the smallest hair on his coat flew her into a rage. Obviously, we all get various colors of hairs on our coats occasionally. One night, finding nothing, the wife burst into tears and cried, "Even bald women now!" (JEALOUSY does not think the best)

(Feeling threatened can make us quite disturbed and Herod was no exception. But…)

B. Jerusalem was also disturbed about Him (2:3b).

1. Why? (EBC)

a. Certainly not because they would have been sorry to see Herod replaced,

b. or because they were reluctant to see the coming of King Messiah,

c. but because they knew that even the **possibility** of another king could result in more cruelty from Herod. You see, Herod's paranoia had already led him to murder his favorite wife and two sons.

2. For whatever reason, these people in Jerusalem, Jews who were supposed to be anxiously awaiting the coming of their Savior, were upset that He had finally come!

(The magi were seeking Christ, Herod was opposing Christ, Jerusalem was disturbed about Christ. But what about the Jewish leaders?)

C. The Jewish leaders ignored Him (2:4-6).

1. The Jewish leaders were sought out for their advice (2:4).

a. The chief priests were the religious leaders of Israel (mostly Sadducees).

b. The teachers of the law spent their entire lives studying the Old Testament scrolls (mostly Pharisees).

c. Surely they would know where the Messiah would be born! Did they? Yes!

2. These leaders knew that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (2:5-6).

a. The leaders paraphrased Micah 5:2 here which cites the exact city where the Messiah would be born--the Bethlehem, which was also called "Ephrath" (cf. Gen 35:19).

b. Bethlehem was a small, insignificant city--but also the same city on whose rolling hills David was born and tended lambs centuries earlier. Throughout the Old Testament Bethlehem was associated with David who was a type of Christ, the final Lamb of God who would suffer and die for man's sin and rise again.

c. Incidentally, "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." How fitting of a place for the very Bread of Life to make His entrance into the world!

3. These leaders never went to see Him themselves!

a. They were only 5 miles from the very Son of God and they did not go to see Him!

b. Yet the Gentile magi were hundreds of miles away and searched diligently until they found Him to worship Him!

(Of course…)

D. Herod **pretended** he wanted to worship Christ (2:7-8).

1. Why did Herod want to know the exact time the star had appeared? He had an evil plan up his sleeve and needed to know how old the child was at that time.

2. The best we can tell, the star appeared to the magi the night Christ was born, but it had taken them several months to leave the east and make the long trek to Jerusalem.

3. Did Herod want to go worship Jesus? Hardly! He wanted others to do the dirty work for him of wandering around town, then when he knew the place he was going to destroy him.

(It's interesting that we have found in this passage those whom you **wouldn't** expect to worship Christ seek Him out while the ones we **would** expect to be anxiously awaiting his arrival were disturbed at the prospect of Him being born. In our final verses in today's passage we'll see the culmination of the wise men's search…)

**III. The ones whom you wouldn't expect to worship Christ did in fact end up worshipping Him (2:9-12).**

 **The pagan astrologers finally made it to the Christ Child and worshipped Him**

A. God honored the magi's commitment to worship Christ with further guidance (2:9-10).

1. God made the star reappear to direct them to the exact location (2:9).

a. Apparently the star lead them to the exact house where the baby was.

b. The star may have hovered over Bethlehem and then they found their own way to the house--which wouldn't have been too difficult since the shepherds spread the word about Christ far and wide, so others may have known which house the babe was in after being removed from the manger (cf. Luke 2:17-8; EBC).

2. The worshippers were elated when they spotted the star (2:10).

a. The Greek text here says literally, "They rejoiced a joy great exceedingly."

b. What a thrill it is to have the Lord confirm your steps!

(Finally the magi's many month journey saw its purpose fulfilled in verse 11 where it says that…)

B. The magi worshipped Christ (2:11).

1. They worshipped with reverent bowing (2:11a).

a. Notice that they worshipped Christ in a house, not the manger--a good lesson on not developing your theology from Christmas cards!

b. Notice that they worshipped the baby, not the mother. What a tragedy that some have given Mary the worship which is due to Christ!

2. They worshipped with the giving of gifts (2:11b).

a. Bringing gifts was a very important practice in the ancient East when approaching a superior (EBC). Imagine that! The magi recognized that this tiny baby was their superior so they opened up their treasure-boxes (or coffers) and gave the King of Kings gifts!

b. The gifts were expensive, but common gifts:

1) Gold is the most precious metal, fit for a king.

2) Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees. It was used as an incense.

3) Myrrh exudes from a tree in Arabia and was a valuable spice and perfume--and especially an embalming fluid.

c. Different symbolism has been attached to the various gifts:

1) Gold represents royalty (kingship, or deity, or purity).

2) Frankincense represents the fragrance of his life (or that he was put on the alter).

3) Myrrh suggests that Christ would die a sacrificial death (crucifixion and burial).

d. Perhaps attaching this symbolism is going too far since it's doubtful the magi thought in these terms.

e. At the very least, God provided these expensive gifts for Joseph and Mary to finance their soon-to-occur unexpected trip out of the country to Bethlehem.

(What an amazing thing to see these Gentile men obey the Lord's direction all the way to Bethlehem! God gave them a final way to obey, though…)

C. The magi obeyed God by not reporting back to Herod (2:12).

1. Here we see how God protected the worshippers and foiled Herod's evil plan.

2. Which way the men went is unclear--perhaps around the south end of the Dead Sea. Anyway, they by-passed Jerusalem and probably saved their heads doing so.

**Conclusion**

1. As I studied this passage,

 the most amazing thing to me was that the Jews,

 those whom you would **expect** to worship the infant king,

 never did worship Him

 while the Gentiles,

 the ones who had much less of God's Word than the Jews,

 ended up being those who gave Christ his rightful homage!

2. The magi were seeking the King, Herod was opposing the King, Jerusalem was disturbed about the King, and the Jewish leaders were ignoring the King!

3. What will be your response be to the King this Christmas?

a. Will you **oppose** the King--by allowing hindered relationships to fester in your family over the holiday season?

b. Will you be **disturbed** about the King--by looking at Christmas as the last big hassle you'll have to put up with this year?

c. Will you simply **ignore** the King--by celebrating a Christmas void of spiritual depth, a secular Christmas. This is easy since Satan has created so many distractions!

4. The magi received the least amount of light and yet had the most positive response.

5. I have no doubt that most of us here want to really worship the King as the magi did. How do we do it, though? Two suggestions…

a. Be diligent to practice family traditions centered around the person of Christ (ILL: *Let's Make a Memory* book by Gloria Gaither and Shirley Dobson).

b. Worship Him by giving to someone who cannot respond with a gift to give back to you --as Jesus, Joseph and Mary could never reciprocate to the wise men for their generous gifts (ILL: Friends of the Americas Project).

6. Hymn #170 *Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne* vv. 1, 4, 5

7. Some time ago several people gathered at the home of a wealthy couple to celebrate the christening of their newborn baby. The friends mingled, talked, laughed, drank and enjoyed all the refreshments for some time in the company of family and friends.

 In a passing conversation someone mentioned that he had not yet seen the baby.

 "The baby!" the mother exclaimed and rushed into the bedroom, only to discover that the baby, which had been left on the huge bed, had been buried under the pile of coats.

 The baby had suffocated under the heavy weight and laid dead on the bed.

 The one for whom those people came to celebrate suffocated due to their selfish neglect.

 (WORSHIP neglected and replaced with distractions).

8. "Our Father in heaven, around us are so many distractions which tend to get us all caught up in tinsel and wrapping and lights and parties and even fellowship, yes, even Christian fellowship. God, thank you for all these wonderful, beautiful things associated with Christmas. But Lord, please help us to see beyond these things to the babe that so often gets suffocated by these good things. Enable us to worship Him in purity and unselfish giving which has been modeled by the wise men. We love you, Lord, and thank you for Jesus--His birth, life, death and resurrection--all for us. Give us a sensitivity to those who do not yet personally know Him--the greatest and first Christmas gift of all. In His name, Amen."

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context What did the author record just prior to this passage?

# Purpose Why is this passage in the Bible?

# Background What historical context helps us understand this passage?

# Questions

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

Text

# Possible Illustrations

An older intro to the message:

### Many historians note that June 6, 1944 was the greatest invasion in the history of mankind. Over 5000 ships were mustered to hit the beaches of Normandy, France to bring 200,000 men against the might of the Germans occupying France. Hundreds of planes flew overhead bombing, strafing, parachutes and other methods of warfare.

### As significant an invasion as Normandy was, it fails in comparison to the invasion of December 25, 5 BC or thereabouts. When a tiny Babe was born in a small hamlet in Israel, the world experienced its *greatest* invasion—the most wonderful invasion—mankind has ever known (CHRISTMAS incarnation = world’s greatest invasion)

### Despite the great significance of this invasion which we celebrate in the holiday called Christmas, attitudes toward it remain mixed even to today. In fact, they’ve always been mixed even since the first century.

#### Christmas is a depressing time for many people. J. M. Stubblebein, director of the California Department of Mental Hygiene, says, “The Christmas season is marked by greater emotional stress and more acts of violence than any other time of the year” (CHRISTMAS depressing…).

#### Christmas for others is an excuse to get drunk, get something, give a little, leave work, get out of school, spend money, or overeat…

**Title**

***Passage***

**Exegetical Outline**

***Exegetical Idea:***

# I.

# II.

# III.

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Subject:

# I.

# II.

# III.

# Conclusion

###  (M.I.).

Rick Griffith, 24 December 2006

**Worship Irony**

*Matthew 2:1-12*

# Introduction

### The concept of kingship is a hard one to grasp today.

### Today we’ll ask, "How did each of the people in Matthew 2 respond to the birth of this new King?” As we do so we’ll see what we can we learn from how they reacted.

# I. Magi whom we wouldn't expect to worship Christ worshipped \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Him as King (2:1-2).

## The Magi:

## The star:

## The point:

# II. Those whom you would expect to worship Christ rejected \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Him (2:3-8).

## Herod *rejected* Him (2:3a).

## Jerusalem was also *disturbed* about Him (2:3b).

## The Jewish leaders *ignored* Him (2:4-6).

## Herod *pretended* he wanted to worship Christ (2:7-8).

# III. Those whom you wouldn't \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ expect worshipped Christ (2:9-12).

# Conclusion

### The magi were seeking the King, Herod was opposing the King, Jerusalem was disturbed about the King, and the Jewish leaders were ignoring the King!

### Main Idea: Jews ignored \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Him while Gentiles worshipped Him—how about you?

### What will be your response be to the King this Christmas?



**Rick Griffith**

15 December 2013

Message 3 of 4

**Worship Irony**

***Matthew 2:1-12***

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## God honored the magi's commitment to worship Christ with further guidance (2:9-10).

## The magi worshipped Christ (2:11).

### Gold

### Frankincense

### Myrrh

## The magi obeyed God by not reporting back to Herod (2:12)

# Conclusion

### The magi were seeking the King, Herod was opposing the King, Jerusalem was disturbed about the King, and the Jewish leaders were ignoring the King!

### Main Idea: Jews ignored \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Him while Gentiles worshipped Him—how about you?

### What will be your response be to the King this Christmas?

**Thought Questions**

1. Read Matthew 2:1-12 aloud. What is the most surprising thing you read? Why?
2. What examples can you cite of surprises where those who *should* believe in the Newborn Born actually don’t? Why do you think this is the case?

Text

Text

Text

Text

1. In what way are you disturbed about Christmas? What should you do about it?