

Christmas: Matthew 2:1-12



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Student Guide

Christmas is a special time when we learn lessons from some of the most colorful characters in the Bible. We are reminded of the true meaning of Christmas. Their responses to the birth of Christ digs deep down within our souls and plants healthy seeds of truth which grow in us faith and love for the Lord Jesus. For example, Luke records the shepherds busily watching over their sheep at night (Luke 2:8-20). Suddenly, they received a heavenly revelation concerning the Messiah who was to come. Shepherds were working men. On the other hand, our study today leads us to the wise men, aristocrats from a faraway eastern land. Christ came to save all whether the working class or the rich and famous.

1. The Truth Which They Sought (vv. 1-6)

Matthew records the visit of the wise men from the east. The men about whom Matthew writes were learned astrologers from the east, a highly respected group of academics in the first century. King routinely sought their counsel.

Some attempt to portray the number as three, corresponding to the three gifts they bore (v. 11). No reason exists, however, to limit the number of wise men to three. What Matthew clearly communicates to us is, they came seeking Jesus, a lesson we all need to hear.

Indeed, the wise men asked the first question in the New Testament, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (v. 2). No more significant question may be asked than to inquire after the Lord Jesus Christ. As the wise men searched for Jesus, Matthew reveals several insights. First, they were *motivated* by a star. Magi were life-long star students, the ancient equivalent of modern astronomers. And, their persistence paid off nicely. They noticed a different star, an odd star which drew them away from their homeland. Note: a person who genuinely follows Jesus will always end up in places where he or she is uncomfortable and alone. Faith demands we look to Jesus in times like these. The fact remains, God broke into their world, their field of interest and led them to Jesus. He always does. He breaks through the thickest barriers and knocks down the sturdiest walls. And, if we follow the star God gives, it will always lead us to Jesus.

Second, not only were the wise men *motivated* by a star, they were also *aggravated* by a scoundrel. Herod had heard about the wise men’s claims and became severely troubled. And one particular thing lit his fuse every single time— *competition which threatened his position*. In addition, “all Jerusalem” was troubled along with Herod (v. 3). Imagine the influence Herod’s character had on thousands of other people. We do not behave in a vacuum. Some people wrongly think as long as others do not observe them, what harm could their action be. Again, moral choices invariably affect other people. Herod’s actions poisoned virtually the entire population of Jerusalem.

Third, the wise men were *educated* by a Scripture (vv. 4-6). The “chief priests and scribes” were called together to examine the facts. The men Herod pulled together knew their Bibles. Often people know what the Word of God clearly says, but will not seek to obey the Word of God. The very men who quoted the passages to Herod would not navigate a five-mile hike to Bethlehem to see if the Messiah was really born. Additionally, there remains a latent danger that we may become too familiar with the Bible. When such familiarity descends, we take truth for granted. Scripture was in the head but not the heart, so to speak.

What Matthew gives us in one full sweep reveals much: the wise men were *seeking* Jesus; Herod was *opposing* Jesus; and the scribes were *ignoring* Jesus. These three categories of respondents to the Gospel of Christ are still alive and active among us today! Our prayer is that we will, as the wise men, remain seekers of the Lord Jesus.

Question: *Seeking after the Lord Jesus invariably takes us to places where we feel uncomfortable. Think of an experience suitable to share with the group when following the Lord put you in an awkward place.*

2. The Thrill Which They Caught (vv. 7-10)

Thrilling things were going on in Bethlehem. Their hearts must have quickened with each step the wise men took toward the little city about five miles away. The wise men believed the Scriptures. Pagans from the east acting upon the Word of God while Jewish scribes ignored it.

As they journeyed to see the “young child,” three questions arise. *First, who is he?* He was not only the Messiah of prophecy as David’s son, but also the Christ of history as Mary’s son. More importantly, He was the Christ of eternity as God’s Son—the second Person of the Holy Trinity born in human flesh.

A second question naturally arises: *from whence did he come?* According to Matthew, He came from heaven. Finally, *what did He come to do?* One answer presents itself: He came to save us from our sin. Answers to these three questions should grip our hearts and challenge our faith.

Question: *Does the identity of Jesus excite your heart? Explain. Do you think your life reveals your excitement about being a follower of Christ?*

3. The Treasures Which They Brought (vv. 11-12)

Perhaps more than any other place in Scripture, we have the origin of giving gifts at Christmas rooted in the wise men’s practice. Admittedly, there is a paradox in this passage. While the wise men brought gifts to Christ, we give our gifts to one another.

The wise men brought three gifts: *gold, frankincense*, and myrrh. Each gift has symbolic importance. *Gold*, for example, is a gift for kings and royalty. How fitting is this gift for Jesus.

The second gift given by the wise men to the “young child” was *frankincense*. Frankincense was fit for priests. It was carried into the Temple and burned as incense on the altars. Jesus came down from heaven, lived among us, understands us, and represents us.

Finally, *myrrh* is the gift for a prophet. He spoke the truth and died because of it. Myrrh’s latent powers to preserve are seen in its use as an embalming substance. Christ died for us, lives for us, and preserves us.

After giving their gifts to the “young child,” the wise men experienced another revelation from heaven. Herod’s promise to come and “worship” the child they sought was only a trick. He planned to kill the child as soon as he discovered his whereabouts.

Question: *Examine your own Christmas-giving traditions. Is the focus more on what you “get” than what you “give”? How can you make sure that your gift-giving does not eclipse the central Person of Christmas, Jesus Christ?*

Wrap Up

In this study, we’ve examined the quest of pagans for the Lord Jesus Christ. We observed the obstacles they faced in finding Him. Yet, we also are inspired because they never gave up. They followed the light God graciously gave and ended up finding Jesus. The same goes for us. We too will find Jesus if we but follow the light God graciously and miraculously gives.