

## 远道而来的敬拜者——马太福音 2:1-12

### Worshippers from a Faraway Land—Matthew 2:1-12

#### ***Introduction, outline***

- Scripture reading: Matthew 2:1-12 Isaiah 60:1-9  
Matthew 2:1-12  
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 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah;For from you will come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.” 9 After hearing the king, they went on their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over the place where the Child was to be found. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And after being warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.
- Magi from the East worshipping baby Jesus is a real Christmas story recorded in the Bible. What is it truly about? In one word, it is about worship.
- Outline:  
Title: Worshippers from a Faraway Land
  1. Their Identity (v.1)
  2. Their Search (vv. 2-8)
  3. Their Joy (vv. 9-11)

#### **Their Identity (v.1)**

- “magi from the east arrived”: the term 'magi' has no equivalent in either Chinese or English. It refers to a specific group of people from a particular historical period and culture. 'East' refers to the region of the Tigris-Euphrates river valley, or, the Mesopotamia region, which is the cradle of human civilization, located in today's Iraq and Iran.

**【Biblical Background】** **1)** The two rivers in Mesopotamia are among the four rivers that surrounded the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:14), which was the center of the world at that time. **2)** Abraham's hometown, Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11:28, 31; 15:7), was located in Mesopotamia. God sent him westward to Israel, making Israel the new center stage of human history, while the former center, Mesopotamia, became known as the East. **3)** The Israelites rebelled against God, so He rose the empires of Assyria and Babylon in the East to discipline His people (1 & 2 Kings). **4)** Babylon took the Israelites as captives, relocating them to their Eastern kingdom. One of the captives was the great prophet Daniel (Daniel 1). **5)** Daniel, in Babylon, kept his faith and worshiped Yahweh. His influence even led King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to begin worshiping Yahweh (Daniel 4). **6)** Due to Daniel's successful interpretation of dreams, the king appointed him "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon." (Daniel 2:48). These wise men (associated with "magicians, conjurers, sorcerers" in Daniel 2:2) in the original text are referred to as 'magi'!

**【Historical Information】** The Eastern wise men/sages/magi belonged to a priestly family in Media (kingdom of the Medes, as in the Medo-Persian empire which succeeded Babylon). They not only performed religious rituals, but also excelled in astronomy, mathematics, agriculture, architecture, and other fields. They served as important advisors and counselors to kings. Their religion was of a polytheistic origin, but, quite interestingly, right around Daniel's time, a man named Zoroaster founded a monotheistic faith known as Zoroastrianism, whose sacrificial system bore striking similarities to the regulations God gave to the Israelites.

**【Conclusion】** Under Daniel's influence, it's highly likely that some of the magi became worshippers of Yahweh. This influence continued in the East all the way to the time of Jesus, when, with the tiny traces of divine revelation given to them, God opened the eyes of some magi and they believed in the God of Daniel's worship. So, they became worshippers of Yahweh, eagerly waiting for the promised Savior-King foretold by God.

### **Their Search (vv. 2-8)**

- “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?”: The magi inquired all around the holy city of the Jews about their newborn king. The Jewish people were clueless. The magi must have been greatly surprised. Their own king had been born, yet how could they not know?
- “we saw His star in the east”: Not some random star, but 'His star,' the star of the Messiah. This is a messianic prophecy in the Old Testament, not some bizarre astrological superstition; it's written in their own Bible!

**Numbers 24:17** “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel.”

**【Comparison】** While the Jewish people were totally indifferent about their own king, God brought people from the far East to worship Him.

**John 1:11-12** “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name”

**【Principle】** No matter how far your background is from God, when you sincerely receive Jesus, believing in Him from the heart and seeking Him, you are given the right to become a child of God. This is still true today.

**【Explanation】** What was the star? Why did only the magi see it? The word 'star' can refer to any kind of light, not necessarily a physical star. At that time, some shepherds also saw the 'glory of the Lord' (Luke 2:9). The star was simply the glory of the Lord appearing. God's appearance often takes the form of bright light (Matthew 17:2; Acts 9:3; Revelation 1:16; 2:23). God can selectively open the eyes of some individuals to see His glory (see Exodus 14:20 for an analogy).

- “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled”: He was troubled because of the fear that his own throne was being threatened. Herod, being a power-hungry and ruthless king, could not tolerate another king in his territory. Hearing the news of the magi looking for a new king, Herod immediately had a murderous plan.

**【Insight】** Those who reject Jesus today also want to be a kind of monarch in their own life. They don't want their throne taken by another. They want full control of their life. Nobody gets to decide how they spend their time and money. No one tells them what to do or where to go. They just live life their own way. The Bible shows that Jesus is indeed the King: He did create you, He does control the history of mankind, He will judge all your actions in the future, and He is indeed your only hope for life. Jesus is already the King objectively, but your relationship with Him depends on whether you want Him to be your King subjectively. If you don't want that, you'll be greatly troubled just like Herod when you hear about Jesus.

- “and all Jerusalem with him”: When Herod is troubled, you know trouble is sure to come. Anyone with common sense would know immediately what these king-searching magi from the East mean to Herod, and they'd immediately get anxious and troubled over it.
- “Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people”: Herod went to the experts. The chief priests and scribes were the experts in the Scriptures. These folks were full of head knowledge of the Bible, but they did not live accordingly (Matthew 23:2-3).
- “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written...”: Quoting from Micah 5:2. Bethlehem is right next to Jerusalem. The magi traveled from afar, overcoming many obstacles to worship Jesus, full of excitement; yet these religious leaders who lived right next door showed no interest at all to His birth. So you see how much they love their God really. No wonder God didn't reveal Jesus' star to them. Even if they had seen it, it would've made no difference.

**【Insight】** Worship is a matter of the heart, not external information. If one's heart isn't seeking God, no amount of external information would do any good. Those who genuinely seek God, however, He always has a way to reveal the glory of Jesus to them.

**【Key Point】** The fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus' parents lived in Nazareth, several days' journey away from Bethlehem. In Luke 2, the Roman Emperor Augustus ordered a census, requiring everyone to return to their hometown for registration. This is what led to Joseph and Mary having to go to Bethlehem to give birth to Jesus there. See, in order to fulfill one prophecy about the birthplace of the Messiah, God moved the entire Roman Empire by stirring the heart of the Emperor, just to ensure Jesus would be born in Bethlehem as foretold in Micah 5:2. Do you see what it means that “until

heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18).

- “Then Herod secretly called the magi ... so that I too may come and worship Him”: What a lie! His real purpose was to go and kill Him.

### **Their Joy (vv. 9-11)**

- “When they saw the star...”: The original is more like 'Look! The Star!' highlighting their excitement and astonishment. The star had disappeared before, and now it suddenly reappeared, moving ahead of them all the way to where Jesus was. God was in total control of when and how they saw the divine glory, unlimited by any scientific principles.

【The Wisdom of God】Initially, God made them see the star, drawing them from afar to worship Jesus, signifying that Jesus would receive worship from all the earth. Then God hid the star temporarily, prompting them to ask around, thereby revealing the indifference of the Jews toward God, where the Bible experts who ought to be closest to God showed no interest in Jesus’ birth. Then, through the scribes’ quoting of the Bible, God demonstrated the absolute trustworthiness of His Word; and even Herod's murderous plot served to fulfill a prophecy in the Old Testament (Matthew 2:13-18). Afterwards, God once again allowed the magi to see the star, guiding them to fulfill their worship.

【Insights】What struck me most here is that it shows me so much of God's sovereignty, thus giving my worship a booster shot of strength and confidence. This passage isn't just about the magi's worship, but it's supposed to help us also to worship better.

- “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy”: Joy is a mark of authentic worship. They came such a long way just to offer their worship. What a precious heart! The essence of worship is to delight in God, and, out of that joy-filled heart, to offer up anything as a willing response.

【Insight】True worship is quite simple. It's the spontaneous offering out of love for God because He is our joy, and serving Him brings us immense delight. This principle applies to all kinds of ministry. Remember, ministry is not about forcing others to do this or that, but about ourselves delighting in God first so we just can't help but do something for Him!

- "Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh": Offering their homeland's most valuable products signifies that Jesus' value in their hearts surpasses everything. In addition, these gifts might carry some deeper significance. Gold symbolizes royalty, highlighting Jesus' role as King; frankincense, an incense used in sacrifice, highlights Jesus as God; myrrh, used to embalm the dead, highlights Jesus as the Savior who would suffer death for sinners.

### **Conclusion**

*Are you a worshipper from a faraway land?*

**Ephesians 2:13** “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”