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THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP



*If you could give anyone any gift,
what would it be?*

QUESTION #1

Jesus is Lord and He deserves our worship.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Neiman Marcus, the Dallas-based department store, has offered some unusual gifts over the years in its Christmas catalog: A complementary pair of Rolls Royce limited-edition cars; A Black Angus steer (on the hoof or already dressed) with mahogany and silver barbeque cart; A custom suit of armor; A “Noah’s Ark,” complete with a selection of animals (please allow four years for delivery); His-and-her airplanes; A pair of mummy cases (and one includes a mummy); A submarine.¹

What started as a publicity stunt in 1959 to attract customers became an annual event. What is especially amazing is that people have actually bought many of these items! You may have received some unusual gifts from well-meaning friends, but it’s safe to assume none of them were a fully-operational submarine.

Even Jesus received some gifts as a child that we might consider unusual. But the men who brought them to Jesus thought otherwise, for their gifts were both symbolic and expressive of their great worship of the King of kings. As we observe their worship, we will see that Jesus also deserves our worship.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 2:1-6

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: ⁶ And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Scholars have not been able to precisely identify the “wise men from the east.” The term loosely applied to a variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, and magic; and dedicated to studying books thought to contain references to the future. They likely were Gentiles of high position. Apparently, these wise men came from the East spurred on by calculations from the stars. God had given them a special revelation, probably through signs in the sky. Their understanding of the Christ child also may have come through contact with Jewish scholars who had migrated East to their country. These scholars could have had copies of Old Testament scrolls that further aided them. As a result, these men may have been well aware of Balaam’s prophecy: “A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel” (Num. 24:17).

As this group of men entered Jerusalem, their appearance may have caused a stir, but what surely caught everyone’s attention were their words: “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” These men were Gentiles, but they were seeking the Jewish king—and not just any king. Here was a King with a star that pointed to Jesus. It was one thing to bow and pay homage to a king, but this was a King they desired to worship.

What have you been taught about the wise men?

QUESTION #2

“Worship” carried the idea of falling down, prostrating oneself, and kissing the feet or the hem of the garment of the one honored. Psalm 95:6 describes “worship” well: “Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.” Jesus Himself clarified that worship is something done “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

The wise men probably came to Jerusalem because it was the capital city. Where else would you find the king besides the nation’s capital? Indeed, they did find a king—King Herod—and he “was deeply disturbed” (Matt. 2:3) to hear that another King was in the vicinity. Not everyone shared the wise men’s desire to worship the new king. King Herod made a pretense of it, but that’s all it was: a pretense.

Herod gathered “the chief priests and scribes”—all the religious leaders—“and asked them where the Christ would be born.” They referred to Micah’s eighth-century prophecy that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

“Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times” (Mic. 5:2).

Matthew 2:7-8

⁷ Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

“Herod secretly summoned the wise men.” Why was he disturbed—and why a secret meeting? Herod was not the rightful king from David’s line. He was not a descendant from the line of Jacob—Isaac’s son from whom the nation of Israel arose—but from Jacob’s twin brother, Esau.

What are some obstacles that prevent people from truly worshiping Jesus?

QUESTION #3

That made Herod an Edomite, a group with whom the Jews had long-standing enmity. So if someone had rightfully been born king, Herod knew his job was in jeopardy. This private meeting allowed the king to question the men without onlookers or curiosity seekers. He may have told the wise men of his “desire” to worship the Messiah, but he didn’t want anyone else to hear it.

The wise men were not aware of the king’s real motives, but God clearly was. What appeared to be right to them was, at its very core, terribly wrong! After the wise men “saw the child with Mary his mother” and “worshiped him” in Bethlehem (v. 11), God used a dream to direct them away from King Herod. (See v. 12.) Herod’s real motive became horrifically exposed after he was out-smarted by the wise men and he ordered the slaughter of all the boys who were two years and under of age in and around the area of Bethlehem. (See v. 16.)

Superficial worship was not something new. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah centuries earlier, God said, “These people approach me with their speeches to honor me with lip-service—yet their hearts are far from me, and human rules direct their worship of me” (Isa. 29:13). In Matthew 15:8, Jesus quoted Isaiah to show superficial worship was rampant during His ministry. Unfortunately, superficial worship is still among us. We don’t have to go far to hear spiritual talk and “church lingo” that is void of real worship.

Let’s do all we can to follow the wise men’s example and learn to authentically worship Jesus.



Matthew 2:9-11

⁹ After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was.

¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy.

¹¹ Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Something was unique about this star. Some have proposed that it could have even been the glory of God, like the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness. (See Ex. 13:21.) Now the wise men saw the star again. And “it led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was.”

Modern portrayals of the Nativity often show the wise men visiting Jesus on the night of his birth. However, Herod had all male babies two years old and under in Bethlehem killed (see Matt. 2:16), indicating that up to two years had passed since the wise men saw the star—and possibly since Jesus’ birth. Furthermore, Joseph and Mary were living in a “house” by this time—and it was there that the star led them. The wise men presented their gifts to Jesus:

- ▶ **A gift for His royalty.** Gold is the finest and most precious metal and showed great value from the giver to the recipient.
- ▶ **A gift for His Deity.** Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees. It was essentially an aromatic used in sacrificial offerings.
- ▶ **A gift for His humanity.** Myrrh was a much-valued spice and perfume, used in embalming and perfuming ointments.

The wise men gave lavish gifts that symbolize the wealth of all nations that one day will be given to the King. These gifts reflect the wise men’s worship. Worship must be our response to the Messiah as well.

When have you felt overwhelmed with joy in following Christ?

QUESTION #4

What are some ways our group can best express worship of Jesus?

QUESTION #5

MY GIFT FOR JESUS

Use the space below to write a brief poem, song, or prayer to offer as a gift of worship for Jesus. Or you can draw a picture symbolizing your worship of Him.

"God is spirit, and those who worship him
must worship in Spirit and in truth."

—JOHN 4:24

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on worshiping Christ this week, consider these ideas to enrich your spiritual life.

- ▶ **Look.** Slow down and reflect on some aspects of God's beauty in creation. As you see something in God's handiwork, like a star, worship the Lord. Look for ways to continue worshiping God throughout the week.
- ▶ **Invite.** Invite others to join you in worshiping the King. One way to start is by bringing them to your Bible study group. Encourage their participation and help them find Christ as they meet and worship with others.
- ▶ **Give.** Just as the wise men gave gifts to the King, we also express our worship through giving. Make a commitment to give toward the ministry and mission of His kingdom's work.



While there are many extravagant and even unusual ways to worship the Lord, they're certainly not the only ways. Simple, faithful, and consistent worship can lead us all to be wise men and women.

My thoughts

1. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jaw-dropping-neiman-marcus-fantasy-gifts_us_56339abee4b0c66bae5c2e7b.