

Turn in your Bible to Matthew 2:1-12. Every time I go to the Christmas story I find it an infinite reservoir of divine revelation. It's like diving for buried treasure. Every time you dive down you seem to come up with even more priceless spiritual jewels. Let's read the text. "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, '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.' And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, *And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.*' Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, 'Go, and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship him.' And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way."

I'm drawn to this story of the wise men, the Magi, who were supernaturally summoned to Bethlehem to worship the Christ child. When I look at this text I'm forced to ask a few questions. Who are these wise men? Why did they come so far? Why were they summoned from so far away rather than God summoning people locally, especially the local aristocracy? What was this star that appeared, then disappeared, then reappeared again? Why could only the Magi see the star and not everyone else in Jerusalem, including Herod and the chief priests and scribes? Why is it that the Magi "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" as the text says, when the star reappeared and stood over the place where the child was? What was the significance of their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? What does all of this reveal about the infant Jesus? What does this reveal about God? Does any of this have any practical relevance for us some 2,000 years later? By God's grace we will learn the answers to these questions in my discourse, which I've entitled, "The Magi's Supernatural Summons." In our careful examination of the text we are going to discover three very fascinating truths as we witness first, sovereign grace impelling; second, sinful men imploring; and third, scornful men impairing. As the Spirit of God illuminates our hearts we will be humbled by the undeniable parallels that we see in this text and our own lives.

First, let me give you some context. There are three principal characters in this story. The first is Herod, second are the chief priests and scribes, and third are the Magi. Let's talk about these characters. Herod was a Roman-appointed king of the Jews. He was an Edomite, not even a Jew, and the Jews despised him. Like all ungodly, wicked rulers throughout history, Herod was a gifted orator. He was a charming, charismatic type of man, very talented. Herod and his father Antipater were characterized by being sly, shrewd politicians that could manipulate the people. They were also very ambitious. The historian Josephus tells us that "Herod was capable, crafty and cruel." As you study Herod's life it's amazing to see how he was able to turn defeat into victory. Rome admired him and put him in to rule this area. He was a great builder. He was famous for honoring the emperor Augustus by building famous towers. He was also a sports enthusiast. He would preside over the games. And, like most of the world rulers throughout history, he was a notorious womanizer. He was a slave to his lust,

and immoral. He had ten wives, and his most famous wife was Mariamne I, a Jewess. Of course he would marry a Jew to somehow legitimize his right to reign over the Jews, as they would typically do in those days.

But also as you study the life of Herod you will see that he was an insanely jealous man. He was cruel. He was paranoid of any threats. He distrusted almost everyone. Of course he knew the Jews hated him. History records numerous accounts of murders and assassinations and tortures and executions of anyone that he considered a threat. You might say that he was the Saddam Hussein of his day. In fact, we know that he killed his wife Mariamne, as well as her mother Alexandra, and Mariamne's two sons. Five days before his death, which was approximately 4 A.D., he had another son killed. The emperor Augustus said, "It's safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son." Moreover, history records that he commanded that all of the noble families of Jerusalem be gathered up and killed as soon as he died, because he knew that no one would mourn for him and he wanted the people to mourn for someone. Although evidently this was not carried out, it exposes the diabolical wickedness of this fiendish egomaniac.

This is the ruler that God allowed Satan to put in place at the time of the birth of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ: an insanely jealous, demonically-controlled butcher, a man that was willing to murder all of the little boys up to the age of two in the region of Bethlehem in order to preserve his throne. Like all wicked rulers, Herod had the religious leaders as his allies to help control the people. They were called the chief priests and scribes. Let's talk about them for a moment. The chief priests were from the priestly line of Aaron. Most of them were what was called the Sadducees, a very liberal group, as opposed to the Pharisees who were legalistic. The chief priests had considerable political and religious muscle. The High Priest was typically an office that was given by the king as an act of political appointment. Sometimes these men would purchase the office. If the ruler didn't like them they would remove them and put in someone else who could be their puppet. They presided over the Sanhedrin, which was seventy-two Jewish leaders that would be tantamount to our Senate and Supreme Court put together. There were other categories of priests that had other functions. Most of them were Pharisees and together they formed a priestly aristocracy, loosely labeled the chief priests. These were very corrupt politicians disguised as great and noble men of God. The scribes were both Sadducees as well as Pharisees, and they were the scholars. They were the lawyers of the day. They knew the Old Testament Law. They were highly skilled at twisting the law for personal and political gain. Sound familiar? Of course these were Herod's consultants.

What about the Magi? Were they really oriental kings? That's what the carol says, "We three kings of Orient are." Were they really kings? One Bible scholar, a man named Vincent says, "Many absurd traditions and guesses respecting these visitors to our Lord's cradle have found their way into popular beliefs and Christian art. They were said to be kings and three in number. They were said to be representatives of the three families of Shem, Ham and Japheth...and therefore one of them is pictured as an Ethiopian. Their names are given as Kaspar, Baltashar and Melcheor. And their three skulls, amazingly enough, are said to have been found. They were found in the twelfth century by Bishop Rineald of Cologne. Today they are on exhibit in a priceless casket in a great cathedral in Europe." Amazing! What's even more fascinating was that somehow Bishop Rineald was able to recognize and identify these three skulls after 1,200 years!

Frankly, we know very little about these wise men from Scripture, but we can piece together some fascinating historical evidence from the Bible that gives us an idea of who they were, especially as we

look at the book of Daniel. We see that the Magi were discussed there, as well as by historians like Heroditus. In verse two of our text we see that they are called wise men or Magi. Magi is an untranslatable word in the original language. It's merely a name for a certain tribe of people. It's best translated Magi. They were a priestly line of people from among the ancient Medes. These men were skilled with astronomy, the science, as well as astrology, the superstition. They would blend these two crafts together back in that day, as people do today.

Many people will talk about their Zodiac sign today. That was a practice that was condemned by God, a practice that presumes to define one's personality makeup and offer great insight into the future. That was the sin of divination in the Old Testament, where we read about diviners and soothsayers, which were nothing more than fortune tellers. We see that they were an abomination to God. Unfortunately this type of stuff is practiced in ostensibly evangelical churches today. They're called prophets. God calls them liars and false prophets.

These men were occultists in that day. They were skilled in the practice of divination and sorcery. So the word Magi was eventually corrupted through history and it is now considered the word *magic*, from which we get the word magician, which is a synonym for a sorcerer. So, these men were the priestly line of descendants from a tribe of people associated with the ancient Medes. According to Heroditus, the ancient historian, the Magi were a hereditary priesthood tribe, like the Levites of Israel that were set aside from the twelve tribes of Israel for the priestly duties. The Medes set apart the Magi.

By way of context, remember that in history we have seen four major world empires. First was the Babylonian empire on the north Arabian gulf, the Fertile Crescent region east of Israel between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. We know it today as Iraq. Then later there was the Medo-Persian empire which was a conglomerate empire that overtook Babylon. That is basically Iran, which as you can tell has a history of hating each other. Later on Alexander the Great came from Greece and conquered the Medo-Persian empire, and then the Romans came and so on. So the Medes are a very ancient people and their origins can be traced all the way back to Abraham when he was called out of UR of the Chaldees back in Genesis 12. They were a nomadic people in UR of the Chaldees. Historically, the Magi were politically powerful in the Babylonian empire, in the Medo-Persian empire, in the Greek empire and in the Roman empire when Christ was born. These Magi rose to power through their occultic astrological abilities, their sorcery, their divination. People were terrified of them. They became advisors of the royalty of the East, and thus they were called at times the "Wise Men."

So, these occultic, many of them demonic, sorcerers were extremely powerful in ancient empires all the way up to the birth of Christ. If we were to go into the Old Testament to the book of Jeremiah 39:3 and 13, we read the name of Nergal-sar-ezer, which was the Rab-Magi, which meant Chief Magi. They were in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. They were the official advisors to the kings. We read about that in the book of Esther 1:13. Now Satan of course is always trying to thwart the purposes of God, so he would have wanted the Magi to be right there with Nebuchadnezzar as he prepared to conquer Judah, as he did. You might recall that there was a fifteen-year-old boy that had dealings with the Magi and his name was Daniel. He was kidnapped from the royal family of Judah along with three of his friends and was deported to Babylon to be brainwashed into Babylonian culture. He was required to assist with all of the new Jewish prisoners in exile.

We know from Daniel 2 that Daniel rose to be a statesman in Nebuchadnezzar's court. We can read in verse 27 about magicians there that were the Magi. In chapter 4:7 we read how they were unable to interpret the king's dream. In chapter 5:11 Daniel interprets the dream and Nebuchadnezzar made him master over the Magi. And he pleaded for them in chapter 2:24 saying, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon." So Daniel helped save their lives. Daniel undoubtedly taught them about Jehovah God and the coming Messiah and all of the Old Testament prophecy. I'm sure many of these men came to place their faith in the true God of Israel. Certainly many of the other godly saints that were left in the *diáspora*, the dispersion, were able to speak of the God of the Bible, the true God, in those days to the people.

The Magi were so powerful that no Persian was ever allowed to become king unless two things happened. Number one, they had to master the scientific and religious practice and disciplines of the Magi, which would have been astronomy, math, agriculture, natural history and so on. Secondly, they had to be approved by the Magi. Nobody could be crowned king unless the Magi said they could be king. All of the judicial offices, as well as the kingly offices, were ultimately controlled by the Magi. In fact, the wisdom of the Magi was called The Law of the Medes and the Persians. We read about that in Isaiah 1:19 and Daniel 6. One of the things they specialized in was dream interpretation. Remember in Acts 7 Moses was described as one who was "raised up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." The same was true in the East. People would be raised up according to the law of the Medes and Persians. So the bottom line is the Magi were the king-makers and 600 years before King Jesus was born, our sovereign God was orchestrating the events of history and setting the stage for the King of kings to be born. He did that by working through a fifteen-year-old boy by the name of Daniel.

Now, to the context of Matthew 2. Rome at the time of Jesus' birth was scared of the Eastern empire. Europe was under control by the Roman empire, but the Eastern empire across the Mediterranean Sea, across the vast Arabian desert, loomed; this great and powerful Parthian empire, the land of the Medes and the Persians, as well as the land of Babylon, an equally evil empire, and Rome worried about them. They were violent enemies. They fought in 63 B.C., in 55 B.C. and in 40 B.C. Where did they fight? They always fought along the coast of the Mediterranean in the land of Israel. Israel was the no-man's-land between two great powers. The Romans despised and feared these great sorcerers and astrologers known as the Magi. Philo of Rome, who was a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria said, "they are vipers, they are scorpions, and they are venomous creatures!"

At the time of Christ's birth, there was a ruling body in the Eastern Partheon/Persian empire called the Magistony. It was composed totally of the Magi. Their duty primarily was to make kings. At that time, their king was a real loser. His name was Phrates the IV. He had been deposed and they were looking for a new king for their Eastern empire. It was well known that they wanted to conquer Rome. Can you begin to see how God is orchestrating history for His purposes? With all this context, imagine the scene that Matthew describes. You've got an insanely jealous puppet-king that the people despise. Suddenly he discovers that the Persian king-makers have arrived.

Now, some would say that they were on camels, but history would record in other places that perhaps they arrived on great Persian steeds with a large entourage of soldiers, far more than just three. We don't know their exact number. Some have indicated that they may have had as many as a thousand mounted Persian troops with them when they came into Jerusalem. They had pointed sorcery hats and flowing robes and the great pomp and ceremony of the Magi coming into Jerusalem. Suddenly they

ask, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."

Herod is thinking, "Star? Blazing forth? Oh my goodness!" To them falling stars and comets were always an omen that predicts that a king is about to be deposed. So kings would live in constant fear of this. Frankly, as I read it, knowing the context, I see the Lord's humor in the whole passage. It's an understatement in verse three where it says that "he was troubled." The term in the original language means that he quaked. Troubled means to quake, to shake, to stir up, to throw something into confusion. You get the idea of his knees knocking together and his voice quivering. All of Jerusalem with him were afraid, because they didn't know what was going on. Are the Persians going to attack? What makes it even more interesting is that we know historically that most all of Herod's troops were out of town at that time on a mission, leaving them very vulnerable.

So what do wicked men do when they're threatened? Do they bow before a holy God, confess their sin and ask for mercy? No, they scheme against a holy God and shake their fists in His face and they consult with the kingdom of darkness. The consultants he turned to were the chief priests and scribes. We pick that up in verses 4-8. "And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet.'" They go on to quote Micah 5:2. In verse 4 when it says he "began to inquire," the grammar tells us that this is a constant asking. In other words, their number one priority was to do all they could to find out where this new baby was, this new King.

Let's go back to the text itself, at Matthew's historical narrative with all this background and look first of all at how God's sovereign grace was impelling these Magi to come to Him. It is always fascinating to see the reach of God's sovereign arm. And to see how in His infinite mercy He reached all the way to the heart of the Persian king-makers, drawing them across the deserts, from what would be modern day Iran all the way to Jerusalem. We read that in verse 1, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold." The term literally means, "Wow! Look at this! Can you believe this?" "...behold magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem." As I think about it, some 600 years before Jesus was born, the sovereign grace of God reached into the hearts of the Magi in Nebuchadnezzar's court through Daniel the prophet. He began to prepare those men, and many of them undoubtedly prepared their progeny down through the years. And now, some 600 years later, having been prepared with a message of hope that Messiah would someday come, that Immanuel would come, God with us, that glorious presence of God would once again be seen in the world, that a light would shine out of Judah, with all of this going on, suddenly they see the glorious blazing forth of God and they knew right where to go. They undoubtedly remembered the prophet's words in Numbers 24:17 that, "A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel."

And notice what God did to impel them, in other words, to set their hearts into motion to come and worship the King. In verse 2 it says, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star," in Greek the term *aster*, it means a blazing forth, a shining forth. "...we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." What's amazing to me is that the saving arm of God, God's amazing grace, reaches all the way into the heart of a pagan land and ignites this blazing glow of what I believe to be the Shekinah glory of God, the presence of His divine glory in this light, signaling to these king-makers that it's time to go to Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, as the prophets have said, and worship the King because He has arrived. I'm always amazed to observe the lengths to which God will go to save those who believe.

Think about it for a moment. Like the Magi of the Medo-Persian empire, some of you were utterly and hopelessly lost in some kingdom of darkness, and yet the arm of divine grace broke through all the barriers of sin, broke through all the strongholds of idolatry and deception, somehow reached down and snatched you from the clutches of sin, Satan and death. He revealed Himself to you in some marvelous way by the power of the Spirit. Isn't it a wonderful thought to reflect upon? To think how God has gone to such great lengths to save us. To think how His tender providence sought us out. To think how far His omnipotent arm would reach to save us from some distant land of sin. What a glorious truth this is when we reflect upon it. To think that regardless how lost a sinner might be, regardless how remote the wilderness of sin in which they live, regardless the thickness of the walls of deception and disbelief, God is able by His grace to reach in and save us. That is a marvelous truth, how sovereign grace impels sinners to come to the light of the gospel. And how humbling it is to think that according to Jesus' words in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him." The term *draw* in the original language means to irresistibly compel, to take possession of something, to drag something. It connotes resistance. To think that each one of us when we were called by our Father was "dragged" into the presence of His glory where He saved us. To think that each one of us who called Jesus as Lord were drawn by this invisible love of our heavenly Father, whose sovereign grace invited us to Himself.

Now these king-makers have come. By the way, when they came, Jesus was somewhere between three months and two years old. Verse 16 tells us that Herod ascertained from the Magi the child's age and so that's why he would ultimately kill all of the male children two years and under. This is very different than the typical scenarios that you see in nativity scenes, where you have all of the shepherds and three Magi there together. The Magi came long after the shepherds, and there were far more than just three of them. But now the king-makers saw something supernatural. They saw His star in the east. What was this? Everybody knows if you look at Christmas cards what it was. It's a star like you see in the sky, right? Everybody knows that. Well, I think not. Have you ever tried to get in your car and follow a star? Worse yet, get on a horse and try to follow a star. What's fascinating is that Herod and the others had not seen it. They had to ask the Magi in verse 7 where it shone forth. "Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared." In the original language, the word *appeared* means to flash, to shine forth, a bright light. It's a term that would be used for lightning. He's asking where this lightning, this shining forth, appeared. The answer is in Bethlehem. Later in verse 9 it's described as this star, this blazing forth, and they saw it in the east. It reappears and leads them directly to the house where young Jesus was. That couldn't have been a star as we think of a star. So what was it? How would the Magi know what to do when they saw it, and where to go?

I believe the answer to this can be discovered in two ways. First of all, the Greek meaning of the word star, and other biblical accounts. As I said earlier the Greek term *aster*, which translates star, means a brilliant blazing forth of light, a shining forth of light. Also, the grammar when it says, "His star" indicates that this is not just any old blazing forth, this is one that is possessive of someone. It is His star, it is God's blazing forth. Beloved, I believe, and I can't be dogmatic with this but I believe there's ample evidence in Scripture to support this, that this star was certainly the sign of the Son of Man that will someday appear in the sky once again as Jesus describes it in Matthew 24, when all of the lights of heaven are turned out and He appears again in power and great glory. I believe that this was the blazing forth of the Shekinah glory of God.

As I mentioned earlier in Numbers 24:17 it speaks of a star. The Hebrew term is *kochav*, it means the same thing as *aster*, a blazing forth. "A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel." A blazing forth is going to come. A King with a scepter, denoting rule, will arise from Israel. All of that is in reference to the Messiah. You might also remember that throughout Scripture, whenever God, who is immaterial, materialized Himself, He did so in the glorious brilliant, ineffable, resplendent light of His Shekinah, that brilliant blazing forth, when He reduced His attributes to visible light, when He wanted to demonstrate His presence to man. I believe that this is the star that led the Magi; this ineffable, dazzling light, the light of His presence, to the Christ child. We see this in the Old Testament as we discussed before. We saw this blazing forth in the burning bush with Moses and again on the mountain when Moses wanted to see the glory of God. It was the brilliant light that led the children of Israel through the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It was the brilliant shining that hovered between the Cherubim over the mercy seat that stood above the ark of the covenant. In the holy of holies in the tabernacle, as well as the temple later on. It appeared earlier to the shepherds when they saw the glory of the Lord that shone around them and the angelic messenger announced the birth of the Savior, the Light of the World, the King of Glory.

So I believe that God's sovereign grace impels these king-makers to come and worship the King of kings by sending to them the sign of the Son of Man. The very sign that the Lord Jesus describes will be His sign when the luminaries of heaven are turned out, in Matthew 24, at His second coming. Suddenly the sign of His second coming, this brilliant light of His glory, will be seen by everyone. It's interesting to me that it was visible only to those whom the Lord had chosen to save. It's always been that way. It was visible only to those who acknowledge the depths of their sin and the brokenness of their heart over their own iniquities and how they have violated the Law of God. It's revealed to those who in humility will bow before God and beg for mercy.

In fact, you may recall in Exodus 14 when the children of Israel were fleeing from the Egyptians and Pharaoh turned loose his charioteers to chase them down. They came to the Red Sea and the children of Israel were terrified that these men would come and chop them to pieces. Moses in that great text says, "Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord." He talks about how, "the Lord will fight for you while you keep silent." Then in Exodus 14:19-20 it says, "The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel," and by the way the context here is the glorious Shekinah was leading them, "moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them so it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night." In other words, it was a brilliant light for God's people, and it was utter darkness for those who refused to worship Him, namely the Egyptians. This dramatic rescue is a picture of salvation and how God reveals His glory to those who He has determined to save. To those who will believe and worship Him. By the same token, He will conceal His glory from those whose hearts are hardened against Him.

It's interesting that we see not only sovereign grace impelling, but secondly, sinful men imploring. In verse 2 they say, "Where is He born king of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." They did not respond to the light of His grace with indifference or with passivity like so many people will do, especially very wealthy, educated, influential people, dignitaries and politicians. In the spectrum of saving grace where we know, according to 1 Corinthians 1, we see that there are not many mighty, not many noble—and we saw that with the shepherds when the angel came first to them. That's the majority of the Church, that's where I would fit. Not in the mighty, not in the noble. Secondly He comes to the powerful, erudite Magi. There is a spectrum of divine grace here. He

comes to everyone, but primarily those who are humble and broken of heart, and many times those who are the lowest on the social, economic ladder. That's a real picture of how the last will become first and the first shall be last.

Notice how the Magi respond. They did not say, "Well, how interesting. Look at this beautiful light. That must have been the light that Daniel was talking about that they saw in the days of the Old Testament. I think I'll ponder this light. I think I'll reflect upon this revelation that was sent to me." Nor did they say, "I've heard of this Jewish Messiah, how He would someday come. But that's really another religion of another people and culture, that has no part with me." Nor did they say, "Well, perhaps I should respond to this sign, but frankly the journey is too far, the risks are too great, the reward is too small. I'm comfortable in my own spiritual state and I think I'll just let this one slip." Those are the words of a fool. That's not how they responded. But rather, as we look at their lives, we see that by God's grace they recognized their sin, causing them to seek a Savior, thus they were sinful men imploring. They were pleading with God to know more of His grace. As we look at them going across the desert to worship the Christ child, we can see that somehow in their hearts they were saying that there is nothing more important than being forgiven. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. I think of the words of our Lord later on in Mark 8:35-37 where He said, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" They understood that principle and they sacrificed everything to go and pay homage to the King. They brought their very best to the King, the very best they had to offer.

What a contrast to many worshipers today that begrudgingly give the very least they can give or have to offer, whether it be financially or with their time. I was thinking of dress. We will adorn ourselves in our very best attire for weddings or funerals in order to pay respect to the people. Certainly we will do so if we are asked to go into the White House to meet with the president. But when I come to church to worship the Lord of glory who has rescued me from the pit by His infinite mercy, I will only pay Him homage with my most casual attire? And then I will proudly defend my nonchalant informality with proud platitudes of how cool God is and how He doesn't care what's on the outside, only on the inside? Friends, I would caution you with such a low view of God. This was not their attitude. It says they, "fell down on their faces and worshiped Him." They paid homage to the King, including the very best they had to give.

Their hearts are overflowing with gratitude. They brought gold which was the most precious metal, a symbol of nobility and royalty. They brought frankincense which was an extremely expensive incense with a wonderful odor. It was stored in a special chamber in the temple and it would be sprinkled on various offerings, especially the grain offerings, symbolizing the passionate desire of the people to offer a sacrifice that was a sweet aroma to God, that would be acceptable to God. They also brought myrrh which was a very costly perfume. It was mixed with wine as an anesthetic and offered to Christ on the cross. It was also mixed with other spices to be used to prepare a body, as it was for the Lord in His burial. Oh would that we would all render such homage to the Savior, rather than so often the undignified and irreverent manner that has become so popular.

Contrast these sinful men imploring with thirdly, scornful men impairing. Isn't it interesting that Herod and the religious elite immediately began scheming to thwart the purposes to God because that was a threat to their power base. Herod responds in anger and in fear. 'How dare anyone challenge my

authority!' Thus he commissioned the Magi to go to Bethlehem in verse 8. "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." Obviously that was a very disingenuous request betraying Herod's self-centered cruelty. As Satan's ape, Herod's plan from the start was to thwart the purposes of God rather than humbly submit to Him.

What if Herod had understood Psalm 112:1 and 7 where it says, "How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments...He will not fear evil tidings, his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord." That was not his heart. Herod refused to humble himself before the truth. Later on the Jewish people despised the Lord, resented Him, saying in Luke 19:14, "We do not want this man to reign over us." Like all people who are hardened in their heart against the Lord, they shake their puny fists in God's face: the mark of a fool.

What a contrast to the Magi. Notice later in verse 9, this blazing forth appears again. In verse 10 they saw the star, and when they did it says, "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." For whatever reason, the Shekinah presence of God disappeared and then came back. There was a time there where they had to walk by faith and not by sight. Many times we have been there ourselves, and what a joy it is to suddenly see clearly God show Himself powerful on our behalf, displaying His presence in our life. So they once again see the light of divine grace as God draws these men to worship the King. So seeing the glory of God they naturally expressed inexpressible joy.

May I remind you, that which was once shrouded in His mysterious Shekinah now comes and dwells among man, as a tiny baby in a manger. As Jesus would later say in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall walk in the light of life." So the Magi follow the light of life that pierce the darkness. It says, "They fell down and worshiped Him." Please note that it does not say that they fell down and worshiped Mary, which I'm sure remains a bone in the throat of the Roman Catholics who worship her. But they came and fell down and worshiped Him.

Throughout redemptive history, God had progressively revealed His character. He did so in creation, through His Shekinah, through the Lord Jesus, through the testimony of His grace revealed in His Word in the New Testament. And someday He will reveal His glory once again when He comes again the second time in power and great glory. The question is, what is your response to this gift of grace? Dear friend, He has revealed Himself to you today, those of you who have heard what the Word has said. We know that if you confess Him as Lord, the Word of God tells us in Jude 24, that someday you will "stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy." But if you refuse, you will stand in the presence of His glory all right, but rather than being blameless with great joy, you will stand guilty with great terror. For it is a terrible thing to stand condemned before a holy God.

I'd like to summarize these marvelous truths with a poem.

What love is this that seeks to save a sinner lost in sin?
What God goes forth to save a man who has no thought of Him?
What mercy draws a wicked heart that hates the Law of God,
And loves to wear the phony masks of spiritual façade?

What grace would reach into the dark of Satan's kingdom night?

The Magi's Supernatural Summons

Matthew 2:1-12

What God would condescend to man to exchange for him His life?
What love pursues rebellious foes that mock His judgment sure,
And spurn a Savior's plea to help, and sacrifice so pure?

Tis Jesus, yea, the Son of God, the Savior meek and mild.
The Lord of all who left His throne and came to us a child.
Tis Jesus who persisted in the quest to save our souls,
The faithful Shepherd of the flock ever gathering to His fold.

For this may thankful hearts proclaim the precious gospel news,
"As sheep once lost, we've now been found, never more to lose."
Oh faithful, Prophet, Priest and King, Your love yet reaches still,
Until the triumph of Your grace, this earth with glory fills.

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