

The Homage of the Magi

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Matthew 2:1-12
Preached on: Sunday, December 25, 2016

Will you take your Bibles this morning and turn to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2, and this morning I would like to look at the first 12 verses of this amazing section of Scripture. Let me read it to you. Matthew 2, beginning in verse 1.

1 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 it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6 '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.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 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." 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 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, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.

This is a fascinating historical account, one that is filled with mystery and intrigue, and one that is also filled with divine truth concerning our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There are four principle characters in this story: Herod, chief priests, and scribes and, of course, the Magi. In order to understand this, we need to know who these people really were. First of all, Herod the Great was the Roman appointed king of the Jews. He was actually an Edomite, not a Jew, and the Jews despised him and he knew it very well. Herod was a gifted orator. He was politically ambitious. He would be what we would call a narcissist. He was totally in love with himself like many politicians, but he was an evil

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genius according to Josephus who said Herod was capable, crafty and cruel. But Rome admired him and he was the one that they liked because he kept the Jews from any kind of an uprising. He was also a brilliant architect and builder. His most famous project, of course, was the expansion of the second temple in Jerusalem. He was also, as you might imagine, a notorious womanizer. He was completely ruled by his lusts. He had 10 wives and his most famous wife was Mariamne I who was a Jewess and he needed, of course, a Jewish wife to legitimize his right to reign over the Jews. And like all tyrants, he was also insanely jealous and cruel, paranoid of any threats to his reign and so he distrusted almost everyone, especially the Jews that he knew found him to be so despicable.

History records numerous accounts of murders and assassinations at his hand. Ultimately, he killed his wife, Mariamne, and had her mother, Alexandra, and Mariamne's two sons put to death. He was so wicked that five days before his death which was approximately 4 A.D., he had another son killed. In fact, Emperor Augustus said, quote, "It's safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son." Because he knew no one would mourn his death, he commanded that all the noble families of Jerusalem be gathered up and killed as soon as he died. Although his wish was never carried out, it demonstrates just how diabolically wicked this fiendish megalomaniac really was. And it's fascinating, isn't it, that this is the ruler God allowed Satan to have in place to receive his Son, an insanely jealous, demonically controlled butcher, a man that was willing to massacre all the little boys under two years of age to preserve his power.

Now, like all wicked rulers, Herod used religious leaders as his allies to help him basically control the masses, and these were the chief priests and the scribes. Let me tell you about the chief priests. The chief priests were from the priestly line of Aaron. Most of them were what were called Sadducees and these were liberal Jews that grossly distorted the law and the Scripture in order to support their agendas. But they had considerable political and religious power and the high priest was typically given that office by the king as an act of political appointment or sometimes they even purchased that office and if a ruler did not like that particular high priest, they would be removed. And the high priest presided over what was called the Sanhedrin which was 72 Jewish leaders, and that would be tantamount to our Senate and Supreme Court combined. There were other categories of priests and they performed various functions but most of them were Pharisees and together they formed a priestly aristocracy loosely labeled the chief priests. Bottom line, these were corrupt politicians who disguised themselves as noble men of God, much like the Islamic mullahs that we see today.

Then there were the scribes which consisted both of Sadducees and Pharisees. These were the scholars and the lawyers. They were the ones that intimately knew the Old

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Testament law and they were highly skilled at twisting that law to suit their own needs for political and personal advantage. So these were Herod's henchmen, if you will.

And then finally we have the Magi. Well, I wonder who they were? Were they the Oriental Kings as the popular Christmas carol suggests? Hardly so. One Bible scholar named Vincent says this, quote, "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." He went on to say, "and therefore one of them is pictured as an Ethiopian. Their names are given as Gaspar, Balthasar and Melchior and their three skulls, amazingly enough, are said to have been found. They were found in the 12th-century by Bishop Reinhold of Cologne and today they are on exhibit in a priceless casket in a great cathedral in Europe." Now, I'm not sure which is more astonishing, the fact that Bishop Reinhold could recognize the identity of these three skulls after 1,200 years or people believing him. And of course, this betrays the frightening gullibility that remains endemic in our world today.

Well, frankly, we don't know a lot about these wise men mentioned in Matthew's account, but we can piece together Scripture and other pieces of history to give us a fairly clear picture of who they were. In fact, the book of Daniel sheds light on their identity, the identity of the Magi, as well as other historians like Herodotus who was the fifth century BC Greek historian, a contemporary of Socrates. If we look in Daniel, we see that these wise men or Magi, were basically part of the Medes and the Persians. In fact, wise men here in verse 2 of this text is really an untranslatable word and it really refers to a certain tribe of people and is best translated Magi but they were the priestly line of people from among the ancient Medes. They were very skilled in astronomy, the science of astronomy, as well as astrology, which is the superstition that Satan uses to deceive. And when you put those together, you have the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism which is the ancient pre-Islamic religion of Persia which is modern day Iran. And we can see the satanic affect of this today, for example, in the 12 signs of the zodiac or the horoscope, a practice, by the way, that is condemned by God because it presumes to define one's personality and their makeup and just really who they are and also offer great insight into the future. By the way, this is the sin of divination that is talked about in the Old Testament. They were called diviners and soothsayers or fortunetellers and if we look in Deuteronomy 18, we see that these people are detestable in the eyes of God.

Now, because the Magi were skilled in the practice of divination and sorcery, the word "Magi" was eventually corrupted down through history into the word "magic" and that's where we get the term "magician," which is a synonym for a sorcerer. So the Magi were a priestly line of descendants from a tribe of people associated with the ancient Medes, a

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very ancient nomadic people whose origins can be traced back to Abraham who was called out of Ur of the Chaldees where they first lived. You read about that in Genesis 12. Now, according to Herodotus, that ancient historian, the Magi were a hereditary priesthood tribe, I should say, like the Levites in Israel which was one of the 12 tribes set apart for priestly duties in Israel. So the Medes set apart the Magi for their priests.

Now, we also find that the Magi had great political influence in four major world empires. We see them in the Babylonian empire which is modern day Iraq. We see them having power in the Medo-Persian empire which was a conglomerate empire that overtook Babylon, that's modern day Iran. And also influence in Greece, you remember Alexander the Great that conquered the Medes and the Persians. And then even in the Roman empire and what we see is that the Romans greatly feared these Magi. That's a very important point for you to remember. The Magi rose to power through their demonic cultic astrological abilities. They actually had power, it was Satan's power. They used sorcery, divination, astronomy, and they became the advisors of the royalty of the East and that's why they were called the wise men.

Now, it's fascinating in the Old Testament, for example in Jeremiah 39:3 as well as verse 13, we read about Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, which means the chief Magi, in the court of Nebuchadnezzar and so they were the official advisors to the kings of that day. You read about that, for example, in Esther 1:13. So we see how Satan empowered these men to advise Nebuchadnezzar, for example, in the violent conquest to overtake Judah. And you will recall that in the Old Testament we have a young 15-year-old Jewish boy that had dealings with the Magi and his name was Daniel. He was kidnapped from a royal family in Judah along with three friends. They were deported to Babylon to be brainwashed into Babylonian culture. And they were required to assist the other Jewish people, the prisoners in their exile.

If we look in Daniel 2, we see how Daniel rose to be a statesman in Nebuchadnezzar's court and we see how these Magi were called in verse 10, the Chaldeans. That is probably another name for the Magi. They were also in verse 27 called magicians. You will recall that they were unable to interpret the king's dream and therefore he was going to put them to death but in Daniel 2:24, we read how Daniel pleaded with the king, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. I will declare the interpretation to the king." So Daniel interpreted the dream and Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel master over the Magi. It says in chapter 5, in verse 11, the king appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. So these guys owed Daniel their life. Being their new leader and lifesaver, Daniel undoubtedly had their undivided attention and he would have taught them about Jehovah God; he would have taught them about the coming Messiah; he

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would have explained to them the great truths of Old Testament prophecy along with teaching the other godly saints of the diaspora of that day.

Now, something else very important and, believe me, we're going to get to the text but you need this background, all right? What's fascinating is that the Magi were so powerful that no Persian was ever allowed to become king except for two conditions: 1, they had to master the scientific and religious practice and disciplines of the Magi. They had to understand astronomy, math, agriculture, architecture, natural history and astrology. But the second thing before they could ascend that throne, they had to be approved of and crowned by, you guessed it, the Magi. All the judicial and kingly offices were controlled by the Magi. In fact, the wisdom of the Magi was called in Esther 1:19 and Daniel 6:15, the law of the Medes and the Persians. And of course, they specialized in dream interpretation. So think about this: 600 years before Jesus was born, our sovereign God who has ordained the end from the beginning, used Daniel to prepare these ancient Gentile kingmakers for the arrival of the King of kings. Of course, they didn't know that. Here we have Zoroastrian wise men who possessed an intimate understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and all of this is being passed down until Jesus comes.

Now, the plot thickens. As we come to Matthew 2, we see something very fascinating in that time of history. Rome was terrified of the Eastern Empire. Across that vast Arabian desert loomed the great Parthian Empire, the land of the Medes and Persians and Babylon, an equally evil empire as Rome. And what's interesting is historically there was one place that they fought all of their battles. In 63, 55 and 40 BC, guess where they fought their battles? Right on the Mediterranean coast, right there in the land of Syria, Jordan, Palestine, the land of Israel. So Israel was a no man's land between two great powers. My, what a coincidence. The Romans especially despised and feared these sorcerers and astrologers. In fact, Philo of Rome, who was a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria said of them, quote, "They are vipers, they are scorpions and they are venomous creatures." Now, at the time of Christ's birth, there was a ruling body in the Eastern Parthian Persian Empire called the Magistoni and they were totally composed of Magi and their duty was simply to make kings, and what's interesting is in 2 BC their king, Phraates IV, was poisoned by an Italian concubine who had borne him a son and she wanted him to ascend the throne so she had to get rid of the king. So they were looking for a new king of the Eastern Empire, one that would hopefully help them conquer Rome. Do you see where this is going?

So let's put it all together in perspective as we marvel at how God providentially orchestrates all of the events in history to accomplish his purposes. Here we have an insane, jealous, puppet king that the people despised and then suddenly he discovers these Persian kingmakers that are entering into Jerusalem. Now, if I can put it to you

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rather simply: these weren't just three dudes riding camels, folks. That's not how they traveled but their customary mounts of that day were white Persian steeds and they would always travel with a large entourage of soldiers, usually about a thousand mounted cavalry. This is not cavalry Bible church, this is Calvary Bible Church. All right, so that's how they would travel and these kingmakers are not going to go anywhere unescorted, especially into Roman territory, and so they would have been accompanied not only by soldiers but also by multiple servants. They would have had a large caravan. They would have to pack their tents, all of their supplies, because this would be about a two month journey one way.

So imagine the scene. They have these pointed sorcery hats, all of these flowing robes, this large caravan protected by this mounted Persian cavalry, these kingmakers are coming into Jerusalem and in verse 2, notice what they say, "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." Now, folks, if you understand what's going on here, this is actually rather humorous. Herod, of course, being superstitious, hears the word "star," in Greek "aster" which means "a blazing fourth of light," and he probably thinks that this is a falling star or perhaps a comet which in those days was always an omen that predicts it's time to depose a king. So he's thinking, "My goodness, this could be somebody coming to depose me." Plus notice that they are asking where is the king of the Jews so this adds to the humor.

Notice this great understatement in verse 3, "When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled." Folks, that word "troubled" means a whole lot more than what we think. It carries the idea of quaking to the point where you can't hardly speak; as we would say, your knees knocking, you are shaking in your boots, you may be doing other things because you're so terrified. That's the idea. You are thrown into confusion. "When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." And do you know what makes it even more funny, we know that historically at this time Herod's troops were out on a mission and so they were quite vulnerable.

So what do wicked men do when they are threatened? Well, they angrily scheme against God and they consult with the emissaries of Satan, the chief priests and scribes, and that's what we see happening in verses 4 through 8 where it says, "Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire," grammatically it means that he is constantly asking. He is worked up here. "He began to inquire of them where the Christ, " the Messiah, "was to be born. They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet.'" So he's on a search and destroy mission. "Find that child before this thing gets out of control."

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So as we look at the text for a few minutes here this morning, I'm going to give you a very simple outline. We're going to look first at light for the kingmakers and, secondly, darkness for the king haters. We're going to understand what this says about our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and how this should impact us today. So with this context, let's examine the historical narrative under the heading: light for the kingmakers.

Again, verse 1, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold," which means, "Wow! Look at this!" "Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem." They are asking, "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." I find it amazing that 600 years before Jesus was born, the sovereign grace of God reached down into the hearts of some of these Magi in Nebuchadnezzar's court through Daniel and undoubtedly they were told about the opportunity for forgiveness and hope through a Messiah that would one day come, Immanuel, God with us, that is one day coming, the glorious presence of God would again be seen in this world, a light that would shine out of Judah. In fact, the prophet tells us in Numbers 24:17 and I'm sure Daniel would have explained this to the Magi, "A star," in Hebrew "a kochav, a blazing forth, shall come forth from Jacob and a scepter shall rise from Israel." And of course, who is this? Well, it's referring to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world. In fact, Jesus said in Revelation 22:16, "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." In fact, 2,000 years before any of this happened, God inspired Jacob to prophesy in Genesis 49:10 saying this, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." Now "Shiloh" is what we would call a cryptogram or a secret code for the Messiah, the one who is also called in Revelation 5:5, the lion from the tribe of Judah. And undoubtedly these were some of the truths that Daniel taught the Magi over which he ruled.

Now in the miracle of divine providence some 600 years after Daniel, you have the Magi, these kingmakers, seeing a blazing fourth of light, something supernatural. Well, the question is: what was that? Well, everybody knows it was a star. Haven't you seen that on television? You see that on all the Christmas cards. Folks, the nearest star to the earth is the sun and it is 93 million miles away. The outside portion of the sun is 7 million degrees Fahrenheit. Let me ask you: have you ever seen a star appear and then disappear and then appear again? Why was this star visible to some but not visible to everyone? Have you ever seen a star disappear then appear and lead people over a single dwelling like we have here in verse 9?

And what's intriguing is that Herod and the others in Jerusalem did not see this "star in the east." In fact, in verse 7, they had to ask the Magi where it appeared. Notice it says, "Herod secretly called the magi and ascertained from them the time the star appeared."

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"Phaino" in the original language. It means "to flash or to shine forth like lightning that explodes in the sky." So he understands now that this isn't some celestial body millions of miles away in the heavens. And it's curious, isn't it, why would the Magi go west to Jerusalem when they saw that brilliant shining in the east? And the answer is: they had to have known the meaning of what they saw and undoubtedly they remembered back through all of the ancient days what Daniel had told them. They knew something of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, the King of the Jews. And again, later in verse 9, this blazing forth of supernatural light that they saw in the east suddenly reappears and leads them directly over the house where the Messiah was. I hardly think a star as we think of it could do that.

By the way, as a footnote, Jesus by this time was between three months and two years old in verse 16 and we see Herod ascertained from the Magi there the child's age so he could kill all of the males two years of age and under. By the way, isn't this a very different scenario than what is typically depicted in nativity scenes where you see three wise men and some camels and we've got some of these at our house too and I don't want you to think that it's heresy here to have these nativity scenes but, you know, they are hovering over a manger and then you've got Santa over here and Rudolph the red nose reindeer and Frosty the Snowman and he is waving at everyone, wearing UT orange. I mean, it's crazy what you see these days.

But, dear friends, I don't want you to miss this: what the Magi saw was not some massive luminous sphere of plasma held together by gravity that shines due to thermo-nuclear fusion of hydrogen. That's not what they saw. They saw, according to the text, an "aster" which is a brilliant blazing forth of light. They saw a shining but I want you to notice it's not just any shining, it says that this was "His star," a possessive genitive in the original language. It was His star. It was His blazing forth. Folks, I'm convinced that what they saw was the Shekinah glory of the living God, a foretaste of the sign of the Son of Man that will appear in the sky that Jesus described in Matthew 24 when he returns again, when all of the lights of heaven will be turned out and no one will miss his second coming. This was a glorious light of the divine presence that signaled to sinful men that God had arrived. This was the same blazing fourth of light prophesied in Numbers 24:17, a kochav, "A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel." In other words, a King is going to rise from Israel one day, a reference to the Messiah.

As a footnote, you will recall in Scripture that God is immaterial and often when he would materialize himself, in other words when he would allow man to gaze upon him, he would reduce his attributes to visible light called the Shekinah, which is a word that refers to the glorious light of the presence of God. So what people would see would be a radiant, brilliant, dazzling, resplendent, ineffable light that we could describe as a star, a

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blazing forth. So, beloved, I believe this was the effulgence of the glory of God and God describes the Shekinah throughout Scripture. We know that it was what Moses saw in the burning bush and again on Mount Sinai, remember when Moses begged God to show him his glory. It was the Shekinah that led the Israelites through the wilderness, a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. It was the Shekinah that hovered between the cherubim over the mercy seat atop of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later the temple. It's what appeared to the shepherds when they saw, remember, the glory of the Lord when the angelic messengers announced the birth of our Lord and Savior. That's what Saul saw on the road to Damascus, who later became the Apostle Paul. We saw it on the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus revealed himself, his glorious presence, remember, to Peter, James and John and the text says that his face shone like the sun and his clothing became white and gleaming. And beloved, it will be the sign of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, when he returns in power and great glory. It will even be the lamp of the Lamb that will illumine the new Jerusalem according to Revelation 21:23. Isn't it interesting when he came the first time, only a selected few could see it, but when he returns again, the effulgence of his glorious presence is going to be seen around the world. No one will miss it. Every man will see it.

So the grace of God drew these Persian kingmakers to the Messiah. They must have been saying, "My, that prophet, Daniel, he was right all of those years ago." Of course, this would have been utterly reprehensible to the Jews to think that God would extend his mercy to the Gentiles, and even worse, to these pagan sorcerers, these elite rulers from Persia. But these Magi were also a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 65:1 where God said, "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation which did not call on My name." Then he goes on to say, but of Israel he said, "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, A people who continually provoke Me to My face," which by the way, is a passage that the Apostle Paul uses in Romans 10:20 and 21 to describe the rebellion of his fellow Jews. So here we witness the power of sovereign grace that can pierce into the darkest heart with the light of truth and draw undeserving sinners to the light of his mercy.

Verse 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. When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." They weren't able to see what they wanted to see so desperately.

Well, let's look secondly now and finally at the darkness of the king haters. Obviously, Herod knew of the promised Messiah that would one day come and he greatly feared that that day had arrived in a way that he could have never imagined. Notice verse 4 again,

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"He gathered 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.'" What an amazing statement, a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel. It's fascinating because these were the very words that God spoke to David in 2 Samuel 5:2 when he originally enthroned him over all of the tribes of Israel at Hebron.

So Herod and the religious elite, they knew what was going on. They knew that this had to be the Messiah but they refused to humble themselves in obedient worship to him and instead, verse 7, "Herod secretly called the magi and ascertained from them the time the star appeared." Yeah, because he didn't want anyone to know what he suspected to be true, that this was the Messiah, the King of the Jews, nor did he want anyone to know of his nefarious plan to kill him. He needed to know the exact date of when they first saw that light so that he could have some approximate idea of the age of the child so he could plot to kill him.

So Herod responds in anger and fear 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." Well, obviously this was a disingenuous request betraying, once again, his self-centered cruelty and his pride. By the way, remember Satan is God's ape and Herod is Satan's ape in this text, and as Satan's ape, Herod's plan from the start was to try to circumvent the purposes of God, but like all godless rulers that reject the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, his schemes are going to be futile. And frankly, Herod was a picture of the rebellious Jews of that day that would one day join him in their refusal to worship their Messiah. Remember in Luke 19, they said, "We do not want this man to reign over us."

But what a contrast to the Magi. Notice what happens sometimes later in verse 9, "And having heard the king, they went their way; and, lo, the star, which they had seen in the east," by the way, it doesn't say that they followed from the east but they saw it. You see, it was a signal. It was not a GPS like we have in our car. But now it says that it "went on before them until it came and stood over the where the Child was." So, again, only a selected few could see this light, those who had humbled themselves by believing on him. But those who remained hardened in their rebellion and their unbelief could not see the light. So, once again, the light of grace reappears and now it leads these men to the Savior.

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Now, any time anyone would see the glory of God, it is going to produce within them just incredible excitement. I can't imagine what I would do if suddenly I could see that. By the way, don't you long to see that? And it's coming someday. So notice the inexpressible joy in verse 10, "And when they saw the blazing forth, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." And why would that be? Because they saw God working on their behalf to lead them to the Messiah, the Son of God, now a tiny babe in a manger. The glory of God is now contained in this human body and later Jesus would declare in John 8, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life." And John tells us, you will recall in chapter 1, verse 14, "and the Word became," what? "It became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Back to verse 11, "And they came into the house and they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped him." By the way, notice they did not worship Mary which is a bone that sticks in the throat of Roman Catholics who worship her. "They fell on their faces and they worshiped Him." That literally means that they prostrated themselves in lowly worship. They just fell down before him. This is how the ancients always would approach an Eastern monarch. And friends, I might add that the higher a man's conception of God, the more lowly his homage. You want to ask yourself: does this reflect my worship?

"And opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh." In other words, their hearts now, they are just overflowing with gratitude. Gold, of course, is that precious metal, a symbol of nobility and royalty. Frankincense was an extremely expensive, fabulous fragrance of a perfume. It was in fact stored in a special chamber in the temple. It was used to sprinkle on the grain offerings and it symbolized the passionate desire of the people of God to offer unto the Lord sacrifices that were pleasing to him. They also offered myrrh, a very costly perfume unlike the incense of frankincense, and this was also mixed with wine, you will recall, as an anesthetic, and it was offered to Jesus on the cross which he declined. And mixed with other spices, it was used to prepare a body for a funeral, for burial, I should say.

So we look at this, friends, and we see that there are those who hate the King and those who love the King and you want to ask yourself: which group do I belong to? And I pray that especially as we think about the Christ of Christmas, we will emulate these ancient kingmakers, we will fall down on our faces and worship him. May we give him the best of our time and treasure as a true expression of our love for him. And may we also, and this is so important as we come to the end of our time here together, let's don't just look back at the glories of the Incarnation but let's look forward to the glories of Christ's second coming, live in light of what Isaiah prophesied in chapter 4, verse 5, "and the

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The Homage of the Magi

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Matthew 2:1-12
Preached on: Sunday, December 25, 2016

glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Oh, how I long to see the glory of God.

I close with something that Nancy and I read in our devotions the other day from Charles Spurgeon. Here's what he said, "We anticipate the happy day when the whole world shall be converted to Christ, when the gods of the heathen shall be cast to the moles and the bats, when Romanism shall be exploded and the crescent of Mohammed shall wane, never again to cast its baleful rays upon the nations, when kings shall bow down before the Prince of Peace and all nations shall call their Redeemer blessed. When," and then he quotes the first two phrases of a great hymn, "When Jesus shall reign wher'er the sun, Does his successive journeys run," and as I read that, Nancy began to break out in song. She has a great mind for remembering lyrics and she started singing,

"His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.
Let every creature rise and bring,
Honors peculiar to our King.
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud Amen."

Oh, what hope we have in Christ, amen?

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the eternal truths of your word that speak so practically and so powerfully to our lives. I pray that as your people we will contemplate these things, not for the purpose of being aware of history and some of the fascinating events that you have orchestrated but, Lord, so that we might fall on our faces and truly worship the living Christ so that we might live as your people, awaiting your return to take us unto yourself. And Lord, if there be one here today that knows nothing of what it means to walk with Christ, to have sins forgiven, to be declared righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, I pray that today will be the day that they will humble their hearts, that they will acknowledge their sin because they know it's true, and that they will cry out to the Lord Jesus to save them by his grace alone. This is the cry of our heart. Thank you, Lord. We give you praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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