

Topic	The Lord Worshiped
Reference	Matthew 2: 1-12
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In the first two weeks of last month my wife and I made two back to back trips, first to Guangzhou, China and then to Hong Kong. We spent a couple of days holidaying in Guangzhou and then couple of days later we traveled to Hong Kong and we were there for another couple of days. While in Guangzhou we were in Sahar and it was an amazing site. It was a crazy mass of people and goods, entanglement of humanity and merchandize as I watch shoppers and sellers and tourist and traders in a scene of buying and selling and I was so mesmerized by these human activities that I actually stood at the spot for about 20 minutes, looking at this chaotic crowd going about their business. It was a sea of people and vehicles moving and carrying, rushing and hauling and this scene was repeated in the commercial centers of Guangzhou that we visited. It is a huge city with a population of 12 million. Hong Kong was no different with its mesh of shops and restaurants and patrons and shoppers and Hong Kong is a city of 7 million within a small piece of land. Put together, Guangzhou and Hong Kong they represent the economic power house of Southern China. In short, what I saw was an unfiltered display of a purposeful pursuit of the material and somewhat real spectacle of this continual chase of what is physical. But in the midst of all of this it was therefore rather surprising that from my hotel window on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor somewhere in Cosway Bay, Hong Kong I saw this huge sign perched on top of a neighboring building and it says “Jesus is Lord” and it stood like a beacon of light on the busy people below, although I am not so sure how many could see it from the street level, it was like serving notice to the masses below that there is more to material living than there is much more to life than mere physical existence.

Now some of you may wonder what all this got to do with our text today, how is this related to the story of the Magi. I will come to this part at the end of the sermon.

I wish to first of all clear common misconceptions surrounding the story of the Magi.

**The first misconception** is that there were three wise men. As a matter of fact the Bible does not tell us how many they were in the group. Verse 1 merely says, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem but there is no mention of the number and I discovered that in the traditions of some Eastern Orthodox churches they have as many as 12 wise men and some early church paintings of the Magi show anywhere between two to eight wise men. Somehow in the Western churches, it has always been assumed that they were three of them and this is because there were three gifts mentioned in verse 11 (gold, frankincense and myrrh). So three gifts and therefore three wise men. Well it sounds sensible but the Bible does not say how many and centuries later

supposedly three wise men were even given actual names (Balthasar, Melchior and Casper) but this is totally unsupported by scripture.

**The second misconception** is that the wise men were there with the shepherds on that first Christmas day. This is not accurate.

Verse 11 says, **on coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.**

Notice they came to a house, not a stable. By the time they got to Jesus, a period of time has already elapsed. Jesus could have been as old as 2 years because further down in verse 16 which is outside our text today King Herod gave orders to kill all the boys who were 2 years old and under.

**The third misconception** is that the wise men are kings because they are often referred to us as The Three Kings. The reason the wise men are thought to be kings is because of two verses from the Old Testament, which some people consider to be prophecies concerning the Magi.

*Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Isaiah 60:3*

*May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to him. May the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts. Psalm 72:10*

Who then were then Magi?

Well since they study the stars I suppose they would be some sort of astronomers because astronomy wasn't the science in those days as it is today and because the wise men also interpreted dreams and did other stuff like that they would be more accurately described as astrologist. You might also think of them as some sort of magicians or sorcerers. The important point to note here is that the bible doesn't tell us a lot about who they were and Matthew when writing Chapter 2 didn't bother to give us a lot of details about the Magi, perhaps the focus of this passage is not Magi, perhaps it is not so necessary to know so much about the Magi and this is where things get really interesting. This is where we want to start to unpack these verses in a much like a child eagerly unpacking a Christmas present.

Most parts of scripture should be studied diligently rather than read causally. Of course it is fine to pick up your Bible and to read it as you would a newspaper there are many biblical narratives or stories that are instructive through plain reading without the need for interpretation or analysis. There are many psalms that speak to our heart without the need for explanation or clarification, yet at the same time there are many-many more passages in the Bible that contains multiple layers of meanings and truths which require careful study and reflection, so that we can better understand the word of God. This should be done of course under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Often the verses in such passages are like a box within a box within a box and often the verses need to be unpacked or unfolded so that the hidden part can be seen, so that we can get

to the bottom of the matters would speak and often the text at hand has linkages to other parts of the Bible, linkages that point to a larger picture, the larger picture that awaits discovery by the inquiring mind illumine by the Spirit and so it is with this in mind that we wish to approach Matthew Chapter 2.

We must first understand that when Matthew wrote this gospel his primary target were the Jews. It was for the Jewish leadership that he wrote this book. During the first century as Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman Empire, the Jewish population was relatively slow to accept or to embrace Jesus as their Messiah and hence we find Matthew very eager to portray Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. He is portraying Jesus as the fulfillment of scripture, here is your Messiah that you have all been waiting for, the Messiah that the scripture said will come has already come and out of that desire to persuade the Jewish readers that Jesus was the Messiah prophesized in the Old Testament it is worthwhile to note that compared to all the other books in the New Testament Matthew is the one who made the most number of references to the Old Testament, because the Jews were very familiar with the Old Testament and time and time again he will use the phrase and

*And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet... Matthew 2:15*

*Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled... Matthew 2:17*

*So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets... Matthew 2:23*

These verses give us a good glimpse of what was going on in Matthew's mind when he wrote Chapter 2. Another point that is worthy of note is that out of the four gospel writers Matthew is the only one who quoted Jesus as

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Matthew 5:17*

So if we were to approach Matthew Chapter 2 from this **angle of fulfillment** then the whole text becomes alive and it would lead us to a deeper truth. It was highly intentional on the part of Matthew when he opened this chapter with,

*1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem*

The key word here in Bethlehem that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem sits within the area under the authority of the Philistine authority, so it is in the West Bank. Back in those days it was just a tiny little village, it was an obscure place just 5 miles outside of Jerusalem, but at the mention of the name Bethlehem the Jews would immediately recall this prophecy in Micah Chapter 5 in the Old Testament, because in that prophecy it was foretold that there would be this great king coming out of Bethlehem. That prophecy specified Bethlehem as the birth place of

the coming Messiah and all this chief priests and teachers of the law they were all familiar with this prophecy.

<sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

They quoted verse 6 from Micah Chapter for King Herod. Hence when we put verse 1, verse 5 and verse 6 together it is crystal clear that Matthew is trying to tell the readers of his gospel that Jesus who was born in Bethlehem is the one foretold in Micah Chapter 5. Interestingly when Matthew wrote about how the birth of Jesus came about towards the end of chapter 1, Matthew never once mentioned the town of Nazareth even though many things were going on in Nazareth he was talking about Mary conceiving Holy Spirit; it was talking about Joseph seeing a dream, all happening in Nazareth. Joseph marrying Mary, all happening in Nazareth but he never mentioned the name Nazareth and in contrast if you read Luke Chapter 1 and 2 to know about how Jesus was born, you will find that the name Nazareth here and there. Matthew only mentioned this at the end of chapter 2 as if he only wanted to highlight Bethlehem which is mentioned at least four times in our text.

### **Davidic Theme**

Besides the significance of Bethlehem as the prophesized birth place of the Messiah, this little town of Bethlehem is also important from another point of view. Bethlehem happens to be the birth place of King David

*The Lord said to Samuel, “...Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.” 1 Samuel 16:1*

Bethlehem is also where David grew up and later he was anointed by Prophet Samuel in Bethlehem.

*So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. 1 Samuel 16:13*

Bethlehem is also known as city of David. Matthew is linking Jesus to David, David’s birthplace in Bethlehem and so is Jesus birthplace and this link between Jesus and David is also implicit in the second part of verse 6. Verse 6 in Matthew Chapter 2 is actually only a partial quote because the whole prophecy is Micah 5 from verses 2 to 6 stretches 5 verses. Matthew included only two verses from this prophecy. Micah 5:2

<sup>2</sup> “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

This provided the answer that King Herod was seeking. But Matthew added a second part in verse 6 is a quotation Micah 5:4

<sup>4</sup> He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

He took Micah 5:4 because of the word Shepherd because as far as the Jews are concerned at the mention of shepherd king you immediately think of King David because David was a shepherd boy when he was young. So from this explanation what I am trying to infer is that there seems to be a Davidic Theme cutting across Matthew Chapter 2 from the use of the word shepherd in verse 6 and the repeated mention of the name Bethlehem, the birthplace and the hometown of David. So this Davidic Theme is not so obvious from the surface. This serves two purposes; one is to highlight the kingship of Jesus because David was the greatest king in the Jewish Old Testament history. So when you link Jesus to David you are actually trying to highlight the kingship of Jesus. Now this Davidic Theme in Matthew chapter 2 serves another purpose which is quite apparent if we shift our view to Matthew chapter 1 verse 1

*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham... Matthew 1:1*

Normally, it should be son of Abraham, the son of David because Abraham perceives David but here you rather mention David first then Abraham. He did this because he wants to link the ancestry of Jesus to David, which also leads to Abraham.

So why is it necessary to link Jesus's ancestry to David, to emphasize that why is Matthew pointing his Jewish readers to the fact that Jesus came from David's line. The reason is very important because there are many Old Testament prophecies that foretold that the coming Messiah not only will be born in Bethlehem but will be a descendent of David

*Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. Isaiah 9:7*

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit Isaiah 11:1*

*“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. Jeremiah 23:5*

*In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. Jeremiah 33:15*

Hence Matthew is trying to impress upon his Jewish readers, Jesus qualification as the Messiah not only was he born in Bethlehem he is of David's line and also highlighting the kingship of Jesus.

### **Mosaic Theme**

Matthew 2:16	<i>Herod kills children</i>	Exodus 1-2	<i>Pharaoh kills children</i>
Matthew 2:13-15	<i>Jesus rescued, flees</i>	Exodus 2	<i>Moses rescued, flees</i>
Matthew 2:19-23	<i>Jesus returns to Israel</i>	Exodus 3-4	<i>Moses returns to Egypt</i>
Matthew 3:1-12	<i>John announces judgment</i>	Exodus 5-12	<i>Moses/Aaron bring judgment</i>
Matthew 3:13-17	<i>Waters of River Jordan</i>	Exodus 14	<i>Waters of Red Sea</i>
Matthew 4:1-11	<i>Temptation in wilderness</i>	Exodus 17-19	<i>Travel to Sinai</i>
Matthew 4:18-22	<i>Jesus calls disciples</i>	Exodus 18	<i>Moses appoints rulers</i>

What was the need for a Mosaic Theme as well?

Just as God had Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt so also here God has Jesus to lead his people out of slavery to sin. So in Exodus it was a physical redemption, here it a spiritual redemption and this is the purpose of Jesus coming into this world as a savior by dying on the cross, by taking the penalty of sin. This Mosaic Theme is to highlight the role of Jesus as the Savior just as Moses was the savior leading the people out of Egypt.

Matthew when he wrote Chapter 2 he was trying to put across a deeper message by painting these two broad strokes of Davidic Theme and another broad stroke of Mosaic Theme across these verses and if you miss these two themes then this chapter becomes mainly the story of the Magi, but the intriguing thing about Matthew Chapter 2 is that beyond and beneath the story of the Magi there lies the more important matter of who Jesus is and what he has come to accomplish. In other words, the story of the Magi in Matthew chapter 2 is not about the Magi.

- ✓ David Theme points us to kingship of Jesus.
- ✓ Mosaic theme points us to Jesus role as savior.

In short Matthew is telling that this king and savior is also worthy of our worship. The kingship of Jesus is symbolized by the gift of gold from the Magi; his atoning death on the cross is represented by the gift of myrrh from the wise men. Myrrh is an oil extracted from a tree that takes out the sap or the gum from this tree and in ancient times this is used to embalm the body of the departed. So it symbolizes death and hence even through the nature of the wise men's gifts Matthew is trying to portray Jesus as king and savior symbolized by the gold and the myrrh. In Jesus first coming he came as a savior but in his second coming he will come as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that is why we always refer to Jesus as Lord and Savior. These two titles always go together. Symbolically, when Jesus first came he came as a Lamb of God to be sacrificed, but when he comes again he will come as the Lion of Judah to rule as king.

## **What should our response be in the light of what we have just learned?**

As parents we are always ready to react on the things that our children face. Many people when confronted with the deep biblical truth they refuse to do anything about it or they chose to either suppress or to avoid that truth but if it is other truths in their lives not spiritual how fast they will act.

When a spiritual truth is staring at them how do they normally respond and Jesus says in Matthew 7:26 **But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.**

If the truth is that Jesus is Lord and Savior is Matthew is trying to convey here in Chapter 2 how are we going to respond to him and the answer as suggested by the title of the sermon is that we worship him. The term worship him appears three times in our text today.

2.... We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

8..... so that I too may go and worship him.”

11..... and they bowed down and worshiped him.

What does it mean to worship him?

We have to give him glory through our lives, live in a way that worship permits every space in our life.

## **Gift of frankincense**

Commonly the frankincense is taken to symbolize Jesus role as the great high priest or the mediator elaborated in Hebrews Chapter 4 and 7. In generally, gold points to his kingship, frankincense points to his role as great high priest and then the myrrh points to his death on the cross.

Towards the end of Exodus 30 Moses was once given detailed instruction by God, God told him to take pure frankincense and God told him a few other ingredients which he supposed to mix, grind into powder to make a special incense which the high priest was supposed to burn in front of the ark of the covenant within the tent of meeting or the tabernacle. This special incense including frankincense which symbolizes holiness and righteousness when it is burned it will produce a sweet aroma rising up to God pleasing to him. I think this is a beautiful metaphor for worship. Our lives should be similarly offered to God as a sweet aroma pleasing to him and this is one illustrative way of understanding worship. Perhaps with this in mind that Paul wrote

*For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* **2 Corinthians 2:15**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* **Romans 12:1**

In other words our lives in its totality should be lived in a manner pleasing to God. He smells the way we live and he likes it. This would include our actions and decisions, our speech and conduct, our lifestyles and priorities to name out a few and this is what I mean by a worshipful life. Ask yourself does it smell good to God?

## THOUGHTS ARISING ABOUT WORSHIP FROM MATTHEW CHAPTER 2

1. If we accept that Jesus is king then our worship will be marked by reverence and awe. We will readily and willingly honor him and exalt him and magnify him if we accept that Jesus is king. His will be so important to us; his words will be so important to us but is that the case in our walk with Jesus.
2. If we acknowledge that Jesus is savior then our worship will be characterized by thanksgiving and praise, will be so grateful and appreciative of what he has done. Our hearts will leap, enjoy and in songs when we realize that when we were yet sinners Christ died for us. We were wretched sinners lost and condemned but yet God extended his grace and his love to us but unfortunately none of this shows up in the way we worship. The psalmist writes in Psalm 9:1, I will give thanks to your Lord with all my heart I will tell of all your wonderful deeds and Hebrews 13:15 says, through Jesus therefore we continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that open profess his name.

So in summary although worship encompasses many aspects as an extension of what we have learned today from our text, our worship or rather our life of worship must be typified by reverence and gratitude. Reverence will lead to obedience, gratitude will result in humility and then only will our lives rise up like a sweet aroma pleasing to God.

I would like to revisit what I saw from my hotel window, up on that building there was the sign “Jesus is Lord”, down below on the streets were the multitudes going about their busy lives and there pressing schedules. Anyone of us could be one of them. I wonder how many looked up and saw the sign, I wonder how many saw the sign but the ignored it and I wonder how many saw the sign and responded to it. The wise men also saw a sign in the sky, they responded to it by coming to worship Jesus. I also wonder if there were other people at that time who also saw the star. If they did I wonder if they ignored it or they responded to it but the wise men made the 1000 mile journey from possibly Persia or Babylon all the way to Jerusalem looking for Baby Jesus so that they could bow down and worship him from verse 11 of our text. During this Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of Jesus perhaps God has a sign for you. It may be in the form of a verse or passage of scripture or the lyrics of a Christmas carol or the spoken words in a sermon or perhaps just the quite prompting of the Holy Spirit. When you see this sign would you respond to worship like the wise men or are we like the people in Guangzhou and Hong

Kong too engross in our buying and selling, our going and coming, our eating and drinking that will be failed to see this star.