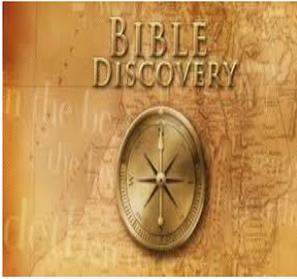


21 Dec 14

Matthew 2:1-12

## God Draws near the Magi



The Gaither Vocal Band sings, “Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so, And I heard it first on the radio. This love of God so rich and strong, Shall be the saints’ and angels’ song, And I heard it first on the radio.” There was a time when we learned everything by listening to the radio. Where do you go for information today? How do you keep up with what’s happening around the world? The day of the daily newspaper and the nightly local news has been replaced by 24 hour news networks, satellite, internet and instant updates on your cell phone.

Obtaining information 2000 years ago in an area east of Israel was entrusted to important men of a completely different empire from the occupying Roman Empire. Believed to be responsible for choosing the kings of the great Parthian empire, they controlled most of the world east of Israel all the way to India from 247 B.C. to A.D. 228. While not kings themselves, they were the “king makers” and the keepers of the scrolls and articles of the kingdom all the way back to Babylonian and Persian rule.

To better understand who the Magi were, let's look back to the Bible. We'll go back to when Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians had besieged Jerusalem taking many of the wisest back to Babylon. The Old Testament book of Daniel tells us of Daniel being taken to Babylon. Daniel 2:48 says that Daniel, as chief of the Magi, was ruler of the entire province of Babylon. Daniel’s role with the Magi was founded because he was a great prophet through his faith in the Living God. These Magi obviously were powerful men in the Babylonian and Persian empires. We see one instance where a power struggle takes place between some of the Magi in Daniel chapter 6, with God supernaturally stepping in to rescue Daniel from the lions' den. We know it wasn't because the lions weren't hungry, because when Daniel's accusers are thrown in, they're devoured. Later this same land area came to be ruled by the Parthians. At Daniel chapter 9, scripture records Daniel's prayer for forgiveness for him and his people together with our merciful God's promise to provide the Anointed One or Messiah. This too would have been information available to the Magi.

Out of this land at the time of our Lord's birth, come the magi or kings as they're sometimes called today. Out of this eastern place come men seeking to know the Anointed One who would be a king. They're drawn by a star shining in the sky, but more, much more they're drawn as God drew near to them. Having understood that Daniel and his prophecies would have held great value to them, passed down through the hundreds of intervening years, we see their comprehension as Daniel may have explained such promises as, “I see him, but not now, I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel”. [Numbers 24:17]

Unlike the shepherds heralded by angels, or Mary and even Joseph visited by the messenger of God with good news, these gentile thinkers were led by their intellect to follow God's beacon of light in the sky to come and see what had occurred as had been prophesied for hundreds of years.

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They started out following the star but it's easy to see they made some assumptions along the way. Rather than continuing to examine the stars each night and to focus on where it led them, they seem to have “jumped to conclusions” making assumptions that a “king” born in Israel would naturally be found in the palaces of Jerusalem – the city of David as Jerusalem was often referred to – among the royalty of the day. This leads me also to ponder how often, as God's followers today; we too can jump to conclusions which become obstacles that lead us to decide something without having all the facts; to reach unwarranted conclusions.

We jump to conclusions about what God's will for our lives is; jump to conclusions about what our closest friends and family are doing, or thinking, or feeling. We do so often out of our limited knowledge which we often take as being much more in-depth than it actually is. We do so from our place of understanding rather than from God's leading. Am I right?

Because it involves making decisions without having enough information to be sure you are right, resulting in badly made or rash decisions, use of our own logic and sense of direction often leads to conflict, turmoil and emotional strife. We then find ourselves frustrated trying to figure out what went wrong. Often what we least wanted in our relationships is exactly what we wind up with because we've pursued our own path.

### **Look back at the Magi in today's lesson.**

They stopped at some point following the star and went to King Herod asking where to find the new king born as King of the Jews. They tell him they have come to worship this new king. Herod's response, together with all of Jerusalem is one of great troubling. They bring together the priests and teachers of the law. One can just imagine the scene.

Remember I spoke earlier of these Magi being responsible for choosing kings in the Parthian Empire. Rather than the meek astrologers arriving on camels out of the desert, we can understand them better as great leaders converging on Jerusalem surrounded by a mighty army astride Arabian stallions and frightening the powers-that-be to no end. Scholars suggest the normal Roman garrison may have for the most part been away at some war so the residents of Jerusalem were woefully exposed. This would not have been so for three scholars strolling quietly into town.

More frightening though was the message they brought - a new king born to the Jews? What was this all about and where could he be as no one had heard any news from any of the august nobles of the Jerusalem court. The council of the tabernacle extrudes from the prophets, *"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel."* [vs. 6] How surprised and unprepared they were for the good news. How surprised and unprepared we are when God chooses to reveal His mercy and truth when we are not following Him. Do we have our priorities sorted out? This year, for Christmas, are we searching for the Christ Child or checking Santa's list for whether we're on it? This year at Christmas have we gotten caught up in the flow of commercials, demands for a new this or that, or have we opened our hearts to the possibility of our Heavenly Father filling us with His Spirit – with his heart and mercy and love?



**A New King born  
to the Jews!**

**Have we opened our  
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If you are not receiving a resounding **"YES!"** to those questions then look with me to where the story leads the Magi. Despite Herod's twisted attempts at controlling the situation, they head out and once more look up! They look and *"see the star they had seen in the east and they follow it to where it stops over the place where the child was."* As is always the case we discover what we need to find when we focus back on the Lord. We don't know where they found the child. It was definitely sometime after the night of his birth in Bethlehem and I believe after Jesus had been presented in Jerusalem. If we use Luke as a guide, where we're told, *"When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to*

*Galilee to their own town of Nazareth."* [Luke 2:39] There would be no reason for them to return to Bethlehem – they'd only gone there because of the census. Once the Magi had visited and a subsequent dream warns Joseph of danger, it could have been from Nazareth they fled to Egypt just as from Egypt they returned to Nazareth when the Lord let them know it was safe. The presence of magi at the manger in the nativity scene is wonderful and captures the full message of visitation with Jesus, but isn't altogether historical.

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Again and again we see the balance between worldly wisdom which often leads us into trouble and the wisdom of God which leads to peace, joy - triumph. Only after the Magi follow God's star to the place where Jesus is, are they able to worship Him and give them their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Only as we

place ourselves in God's hands and let Him lead us can we too bring him our gifts of service and love and joy, and worship Him. Only when we have let God build a relationship with us; let God draw near to us as God draws near to the Magi, can we be open to knowing the direction we should go. See here how our story ends – *“And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”* The Magi had begun their journey following an unfamiliar star, they had tried to sort it all out in their own strength and having failed returned to following the star, after which in the end they experienced a closeness with the Creator of all things to the point that in a dream they're spoken to and obeyed knowing He would keep them safe and sound.

How about you, have you experienced the glory of Christmas; have you experienced the closeness of your Almighty Heavenly Father? Have you allowed God, the Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ to draw near to you? Have you turned from following the ways of man and chosen to follow the star? Have you had any good dreams lately? If you would like to discuss your relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, give me a call at 1-519-317-8659 or send me an email to [office.mbbc@xplornet.com](mailto:office.mbbc@xplornet.com).

Hoping that you and yours will enjoy a very Merry Christmas.

Blessings,

*Pastor Dave*