



Dwelling in the Word

Prayerfully read Matthew 2:1-23 and ask:

1. What words, phrases, or images stood out to you?
2. What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you?
3. How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

Beginning the Conversation

1. What are some of your family's Christmas traditions that you appreciate? Why?
2. Many base the practice of gift giving on the Magi's gifts to (toddler) Jesus. How could this inform the meaning and significance of the gifts we give to one another?

Digging Deeper *(pick some of the following questions to discuss as a group)*

1. The first section describes the visit of the Magi (2:1-12). As outsiders to the people of God, it is somewhat surprising that the Magi are the first to recognize Jesus as the "King of the Jews" and worship him (see Matt 8:11). What does this say about God's love for all people, what God was accomplishing through Jesus his Messiah, and what God is accomplishing through the church?
2. The next section narrates the young family's flight to Egypt to escape Herod's fury (2:13-15). Knowing that Jesus and his family were refugees in another country, how should this impact our attitude toward refugees and those displaced from their home lands? What do you think of the following from Pope Pius XII shared in the sermon? How can the church live out this concern?
3. King Herod is known to have been a violent and unstable monarch. In response to his actions on the male population of Bethlehem, Matthew quotes a lament from Jeremiah (2:17-18 quoting Jer 31:15). What is the role of lament in response to such tragedies and unconscionable acts, and how does lament implicitly express hope?
4. In the last part of this chapter, Jesus' family avoids Bethlehem and settles in Nazareth in the northern region of Galilee (2:19-23). Throughout this passage, Matthew quotes the Scriptures to show God's workings in preserving the holy family (2:6 quoting Mic 5:2-4 and 2Sam 5:2; 2:15 quoting Hos 11:1; 2:17-18 quoting Jer 31:15; 2:23 quoting perhaps Isa 11:1 or 49:6). What does this say about God's character?
5. In this passage we see a contrast between the way of emperors like Herod who rules with violence and power and the way of King Jesus who serves with humility and grace (read 20:25-28). As followers of this humble king, in what ways would this impact the way we live and lead?

Living it Out

1. How can this passage shape (and others like it) shape our attitudes towards outsiders and the marginalized? (especially knowing that we too were outsiders to God's grace!)



BIRTH OF THE KING

According to the Gospel of Matthew



The Magi's Visit (Matthew 2:1-12)

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The Magi's Visit



"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem" (2:1).

- ♦ Herod "the Great" – a brutal and paranoid ethnarch who ruled Judea from 37–4 BC.
- ♦ "Magi from the east" – lit. "From the rising [of the sun]," the east, or even the exotic far east (Persia, Babylon, Arabia).

The Magi



Who were these "Magi"?

- ♦ "Magus" (μαγος *magos*) — a Persian or Babylonian wise man and priest, who was an expert in astrology, interpretation of dreams, and various other occult arts (DBAG).
- ♦ Generally characterized negatively in the Bible and ancient world.



The Magi: Conclusions



The point with the Magi as first to recognize Jesus as the “King of the Jews” is that they are unexpected and unconventional outsiders to the people of God.

But however unconventional the Magi are, Matthew presents them positively.

The Star



“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east...” (2:2a).

- ✦ Many attempts to identify the star with natural phenomenon.
- ✦ But: this is no ordinary star: “and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was” (2:9).

The Scripture



“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...” (2:4).

- ✦ “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” (2:6; loosely quoting Micah 5:2, 4; and 2Sam 5:2).

- ✦ Bethlehem was the “City of David” and expected messianic birthplace of the Messiah (John 7:40-42).



Herod’s Plans



“Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him’” (2:7-8).

- ✦ Herod had no intention to worship the infant Jesus.
- ✦ Providentially, the Magi were told in a dream to return home another way (2:12).

The Gifts



"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him..." (2:11).

- ♦Gold – royalty.
- ♦Frankincense – priesthood.
- ♦Myrrh – sacrifice.



Or simply extravagant gifts fit for the true "king of the Jews"?

Conclusions



The main point for Matthew is that the Magi were gentiles (non-Jews) who were the first to recognize Jesus as the "King of the Jews."

A secondary point is that God revealed the truth about the Messiah to the Magi — a bunch of pagan fools! — while those who were wise enough to figure it out for themselves missed it!

The Gospel is for all people!

Invitation



Like the Magi, we are invited to come and worship Jesus.

But instead of bringing gifts, he gives us the greatest gift ever!