

Reflections on Christ Jesus: the Wonder of Christmas *Matthew 2:1-12*

I. Introduction – READ vv. Matthew 2:1-12

- A. As you know very well, Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus Christ differs from the account of Jesus' birth in Luke. However, ...

The account in Matthew and the one in Luke are **NOT** contradictory of each other; but rather, they *wonderfully* compliment one another. Their differences are divinely purposeful. For instance, these two birth accounts differ and, in fact, compliment each other in several ways:

- In perspective: Matthew views the birth account more through the eyes of Joseph; while the perspective of Luke's account is more through the eye's of Mary.

Why? Genesis 1:27 may have the answer!: "So God created man (*i.e.*, mankind) in His image, ... male and female created he them." As is in all of life, the perspective of both genders is valued and needed. The divinely created strengths are clearly and wonderfully evident: Mary with her humble, trusting, submissive spirit; and Joseph's strong, loving and obedient leadership. The nativity account is far richer and fuller because holy Scripture included both perspectives. Clearly this is also a vital lesson for us, and for all of life.

- In the details. Matthew records Joseph's heartbreak at Mary's pregnancy and the wrenching dilemma (*conundrum*) it created for Joseph. Matthew also records Joseph's dreams with angelic visitations. He records the journey of the wisemen and the family's nighttime escape to Egypt.

On the other hand, Luke records: Mary's visitation by the angel Gabriel, her bewilderment at a supernatural conception, her sweet and trusting surrender to the will of God, the circumstances behind their trip to Bethlehem, their crude accommodations for delivering God's Son, and that unforgettable night for the shepherds with their journey to see the most illustrious birth in all of human history!!

These amazing details do not contradict one another, to the contrary, they bring its reality more to life! Additionally, the two accounts differ in their purpose:

- In their purpose. Why, you might ask? For what purpose? For one reason (this really constitutes another one; see "In perspective" above): in **Luke's account**, the Jewish nation is invited to the birth – represented by lowly Jewish shepherd's (a favorite image

of God in the OT; AND He is their promised Shepherd King (as David). In **Matthew's account**, it's Gentile wisemen who come from afar, by invitation of God, to behold God's gift of salvation: to Israel – yes, - but also to the Gentiles.

(Their gift 'to the child', surely accentuates God's immeasurable gift 'of the child' to the WORLD!!)

Between the two accounts, no one is left out of God's saving, redeeming love for mankind. Did Jesus Christ come for the Jewish people? Absolutely. Just as He had promised. Did He come only for them? Matthew's account – as does the entire book Matthew - makes it plain that God's love gift is for ALL: both the Jew and the Gentile (just as God had revealed 2000 years before in His covenant with Abraham, Gen. 12:1f)

B. In Matthew's account notice with me what we behold:

1. First, **The Child**: Christ the Lord (v.11) -

"And going into the house, they saw the CHILD ..." -

The central figure of Matthew's birth account is clearly in view: it is **JESUS!**
Another major focus in Matthew's account, the Wise men: they are the ...

2. **True Seekers**: Wisemen (v.1) -

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, WISE MEN from the east came ..."

The contrast could not be stronger: like night and day. For those closest to the place of Christ's birth show little or NO interest. BUT, those most unlikely, far-off, even Gentiles from enemy territory show remarkable longing for the Christ child that God has sent! Matthew wants us deeply reflect on such devotion.

The third and major group in Matthew 2 is a WORLD spiritually asleep at the dawn of humanities greatest day. Here we *behold* a world in bondage to sin and self. It is a sin darkened world; into which, God's light is gloriously sent (John 1:9).

3. **A Darkened World**: Indifferent or Enraged! (v.2, 4-5,13; cf. Rev. 12)

Yes. And a world much like today!

The Wise men ask: "*Where is HE ...*" to a people and nation clueless that God's long-promised Savior had come (v.2); then, with wicked intent, "*Herod inquired of [chief priests and scribes] where the Christ was to be born*" (v.4)

Let's reflect on Matthew's inclusion of each of these three; AND what the Spirit of God wants us to learn from each one.

II. Reflections on Christ Jesus: the Wonder of Christmas

A. The Christ Child or better, "The CHILD: *the Christ the Lord!*" - **HE** is the clear climax of the story!! HE is ...

1. The One their gaze falls upon first AND on Whom it remains (2:11a):

"And going into the house they saw ..." THE **CHILD!!**

("Him" is used 3 times in the verse). Through their eyes we see *HIM!*

Literally, *"with Mary, the mother of Him."* (v.11)

"they fell down and worshiped Him."

"opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts."

The CHILD, not Mary or Joseph, but JESUS CHRIST alone is central!
What a good and needful reminder for our own lives not just at Christmas, BUT each and every day! May our lives always be about **HIM!!**

2. The Christ Child is the only One worshiped (2:11b) - *"they fell down and worshiped Him"* - a wonderful declaration of HIS deity! (*Immanuel!*)

Matthew includes this important act of homage by these Gentile believers because he knows their worship was indeed both absolutely right and correct! (cf. Matt. 4:10, Jesus Himself said, "you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve."). Their worship of the babe was a massive exclamation point to the true nature of Jesus!! Indeed, He was "God with us": Immanuel. (cf. also, Rev. 19:10 and 22:9)

3. To King Jesus, precious gifts were given (2:11) - "Opening their treasures, they gave Him gifts" - (Gold, the treasure of *Kings*; Frankincense, for priestly duty, Myrrh, costly spice used for *embalming*)

•They gave "their treasures" (2:11). This is the same word used by Jesus in 6:21: *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (your heart always follows your *treasure*). Where is your treasure? What most do you value? Jesus said, *"there your heart will be also."*

Scripture places this word in the story for our own reflection. Is your greatest treasure JESUS? As we see, it was for these very wise men.

- So, this *word* demonstrated far more than the value of the gifts (gold, frankincense, myrrh); it speaks of the **heart** behind what was given. To God, giving their HEART was of far, far greater value than the material possessions they gave!

The lyrics of a Christmas carole end with: “*What can I give Him? I’ll give Him my heart.*”

B. The True Seekers -

The journey, the effort, the worship, the gifts, it was all about **HIM!** Matthew skillfully puts the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of it ALL. So should we! ALWAYS!!

1. Who they were these WISE MEN?

- Magi (Gk. *magoi*: cf. Acts 13:6,8) -

In Jesus’ day, these were very learned and influential men.

At this time, the term “*magoi*” (pl.) was still used of a priestly cast of Medes who were known for their interpretation of dreams. They became in Persia nearly the same as the Levites were in Israel. They became teachers and instructors of the Persian kings. They were skilled in Philosophy, medicine, and natural science. However, at a later time the word took on a lower meaning related to fortune-telling, sorcery and other controlling powers (cf. Acts 13:6,8; Elymas or ‘Bar-Jesus’ sorcerer/magician with Sergius Paulus (*magos*; (s) s. Gk. in Matt. 2:1,7,16 (pl).

- Gentiles – These who sacrificed so much to come to Jesus were NOT Jewish but rather Gentiles. Often considered outside the love of God by God’s chosen people, but not so to God. His SON was sent to bring light and life to ALL!! (John 3:16). Matthew wants this clearly known!

- Far distance (Ezra 7:9, a four month journey from Babylon to Jerusalem) – 800 – 1000 mi. journey. The distance was a measure of their longing, of their devotion, and their diligence in seeking the Savior. All of which God wonderfully honored. It surely is a lesson for us today.

- Previous enemy territory – The east – likely Babylon – the area of the Jewish exile and captivity

•They were NOT many (*remnant*) but remarkably devoted – These God-fearing Gentiles picture and represent a righteous remnant that were waiting for God’s glad news (“peoples from afar”; Isa. 9:6,7; 49:1; 42:4,6,10-12)

2. What they did:

•Searched the Hebrew Scriptures – These were diligent students of the OT (ex. Num. 24:17; Daniel’s succession of kingdoms, ch. 2; Isa.49:1; 60:1ff). In coming to Jerusalem they inquired: “*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.*” From their question it is clear they knew:

- A kingly child would be born in Israel; and would rule (Isaiah 9:6-7)
- The nations would fall under His rule (Ps. 2)
- A star signaled His arrival (Num. 24:17)
- He was due their homage, their gifts and devotion (Isaiah 60:1-6)

•Received a “little” light from God (*the star*) – These seekers of truth and of God followed the light they had. What a beautiful picture of God drawing me to His Son! (Actually, “What God did!”)

•Exhibited a great seeking – They embarked on a long, laborious, difficult and dangerous journey. They traveled toward the city of Promise, Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Nor were they deterred by the ignorance or disinterest in the City or the disappearance of the star. There’s was a great hunger and thirst for the Living and True God, and His salvation.

•Offered unbounded JOY – And when the star reappeared “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!” They offered the sacrifice of praise! (Psalm 119:108; NT, Heb.13:15)

•Demonstrated exemplary worship – 1) Truest joy, 2) Humble, glad-hearted submission, 3) demonstration of exaltation, 4) gave Him their best, their treasure (i.e., their heart). In all, it is a beautiful picture of sincere, complete, worship and devotion!

•Responded in obedience to God's Word – Last, when God spoke, they obeyed. (What the apostle Paul calls “the obedience of faith.”)

C. A Darkened World – His reception by a sinful world (*Isaiah 60:1-3*)

Jesus Christ is the great divide of humanity. He is the light of the world, the Savior of it, and the Wonder of Christmas. The child – God’s Son – is God’s gift to the World. There are those who see His light, wonder at it, follow it – even at great cost, and receive from God greater and greater light, until they behold God’s GIFT – His Son, bow before Him, give Him

their treasures, and go away changed, traveling life on a totally different path. However, there are far more who reject the light, or even hate the light; and Jerusalem was filled with those who were indifferent, uninterested, or who wanted nothing to do with God, or His Son.

III. Conclusion and Implications

Where are you this Christmas? Matthew chapter 2 is more than a Christmas story, it is first presentation of the Gospel: and Jesus Christ is at the center. Where is your interest, your worship, your heart? The right response is that of the WISE MEN; what an example they provide for us. But sadly, its the exception, not the rule. This Christmas, follow the WISE MEN in their example. Make Jesus Christ the wonder of your Christmas and of your life.