

Invitations from the Magi  
Matthew 2:1-12  
January 3, 2016

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: " 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' " Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

The Wise Men are the mystery characters in the account of Jesus' birth. When I was a child, I was taught that they were kings from the East. We now know them as Magi or astrologers from the East. We don't actually know how many came to see Jesus. Three has become the tradition because of the three gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

If you have a nativity scene at home, it probably came complete with three wise men and one or more camels. These enigmatic visitors also appear in several Christmas songs. But why does Matthew include them in his account of Jesus' birth? What can we learn from these pagan astrologers who showed up in Bethlehem to honor the Messiah?

The Magi come to us with four invitations. These four invitations can help us realign our lives and bring us closer to being the people God created us to be.

**Invitation one: Follow Jesus to experience real life.**

When you think about it, the story of the Wise Men is quite remarkable. These men, living hundreds of miles from Israel, leave their families and the comforts of home for the mere possibility of having an encounter with the long-promised King of the Jews.

What could have been their motivation for such a long and dangerous journey? Somehow they had to have some knowledge of God's promise to send a Savior. Their monitoring of the stars put them in position to receive God's notice that the time had come. But more than that, their God-given instinct to find the true God must have prompted them into action.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Blaise Pascal, said, “*There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.*” God created each of us for a relationship with himself. We know this instinctively. However, most people fail to nurture that relationship and they remain unchanged and in their sin.

The Magi offer us the proper response to God. When they were confronted with the opportunity to connect with God and experience real life, they left their homes and set out on a journey into the unknown. They followed a star hoping to meet a King. They disrupted their status quo and embarked on a two-year trip to taste real life.

What would you give, what would you do, to live the life God has in mind for you? What would it mean for you to live as the person God created you to be?

Jesus comes to us and says, “Follow me.” Likewise, the story of the Wise Men invites us to follow Jesus and see for ourselves what real life is all about. The difference is that we won’t be following a star, we’ll be following the Son of God.

### **Invitation two: Experience true joy by encountering Jesus.**

After a short detour to Jerusalem, the Magi made it to Bethlehem. When they realized they were close to seeing Jesus, the text says: *They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy* (Mt 2:10 ESV). When they found God’s Messiah, they couldn’t contain their happiness.

Human beings were created in God’s perfect image. Because of that, we have a natural desire for a perfect state of joy and happiness. We long for meaning and fulfillment in our lives. But how many of us actually find joy, happiness, meaning, and fulfillment? When was the last time you were overjoyed?

Children are a constant reminder of the joy of living. When I was a child, my mother would take me downtown to see the Christmas displays in the windows of the Wolf and Dessauer department store. I can still remember the wonder of mentally stepping into a fantasy land of snowmen and reindeer.

Joy of that nature is a gift from God. Unfortunately, too many of us have lost that joy. The Wise Men experienced their full capacity for joy when they encountered the baby Jesus. Their story is our invitation to experience true joy by drawing close to our Savior.

However, in this invitation there is also a warning. The Magi were outsiders. They weren’t part of God’s chosen people. Yet, it was those outsiders, who were overjoyed when they found the Savior.

Herod’s response to Jesus’ birth was no surprise. But the text tells us that it wasn’t just Herod who was concerned about the new King. Matthew tells us: *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him* (Mt 2:3 ESV).

But wait, Jerusalem was a Jewish city. Jerusalem was where you would find the Temple, the priests, and the religious leaders of the day. They knew the prophecies about the coming Messiah. They even knew he was to be born in Bethlehem. But they weren't overjoyed.

The joy that Jesus brings is available to both outsiders and insiders, but it is only experienced by those who are interested.

### **Invitation three: Find your true self in surrendering to and worshiping Jesus.**

When the Wise Men saw God's star in the sky, they could have had an academic discussion about the arrival of the King of the Jews, and then went about their normal lives. But these men weren't interested in experiencing Jesus from afar. They wanted to be as close to Jesus as possible.

When they arrived at the house where Jesus and Mary were, their response tells us why they wanted to come. The Magi came not to see a baby boy born in a palace among the Jerusalem elite, but to see God's gift to mankind born in a stable in Bethlehem. What did they do next? *And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh* (Mt 2:11 ESV).

The proper human response to Jesus is worship. Worship is the recognition of his divine nature and his authority over us. This stands in contrast with Herod's efforts to sidetrack God's plan by trying to murder the new King. It also shows us that there are only two reactions to Jesus; either you are with him or against him. There is no middle road.

The Wise Men didn't stop with worshiping, they also gave expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts represent an act of submission. They show the Wise Men's recognition of the Lordship of Jesus. With these gifts, the Magi are offering of themselves for God's kingdom.

The text invites us to do the same. True life is never found in power, wealth, or prestige. True life is only found when we fully surrender our lives to our Lord and Savior.

### **Invitation four: Return to your old life to share the message.**

An encounter with God never happens in a vacuum. When God meets us, we are transformed. The old life, with its self-centeredness and greed, is gone. The Holy Spirit reorients our lives. We are set back on the proper track. We see God's desire that all people be saved and we act on that desire. We begin to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

The Wise Men didn't remain with Jesus in Israel. They found the King they sought and they offered themselves to him. But they didn't stop there.

The Magi returned to their homeland. They returned to their daily routine. When they leave, that's the last we hear of them. But I'm sure that doesn't mean they put their experiences behind them – never to be thought of again. You can bet those Wise Men became the first foreign missionaries for Christ.

Don't overlook the untold part of the Magi's story. Remember these men had a personal encounter with the God of all Creation. Their lives could not have been the same. They may have returned to their normal occupation, but their thoughts and their speech had to be changed. Anyone who has been confronted by the living Gospel is changed.

Have you been confronted by the living Gospel? Have you experienced God's gift of Jesus Christ? Is your life changed? Having been to the manger, having been to the cross, having been to the empty tomb, you have a story to tell.

You have experienced the real life and the joy that Jesus brings. You have surrendered to him and worshiped him. Now take your story back to your normal life and share your good news with someone who is still searching for real life and real joy – someone who is looking for their Savior.