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Sermon Notes

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The Visit of the Magi

Matthew 2:1-12

I. The Modern Misunderstandings

II. The Magi from the East

A. Who were the “magi”

1. not “kings”, and not necessarily three
2. originally members of tribe called Magoi in the land of the Medes in modern Iran
3. these magi may have been followers of Zoroaster, and almost certainly were involved in astronomy and astrology
4. they gained a reputation as having specialized knowledge about the future and were able to interpret dreams and do signs and wonders
5. two forms of guidance: STARS AND DREAMS
6. they appear in Daniel, unable to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

Daniel 2:1-2 “In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed.”

- a. however only Daniel could tell the king his dream AND interpret it
- b. the dream was of a monstrous statue which represented the entire flow of human history

Daniel 2:44 “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”

- c. the magi stood there and listened as Daniel saved their lives by giving a prophecy of a kingdom which would be set up and would last forever
- d. after Daniel, the magi continued in their practices of studying the stars in the heavens and made careful charts and records of all celestial events
- e. their observations were the most accurate in the world... they could predict lunar eclipses and the alignment of certain planets; and they had developed a very accurate solar calendar of 365 days
- f. perhaps the magi that came to Bethlehem came straight from the region where Babylon used to be... they'd been waiting all this time for the King of the Jews prophesied by Daniel

vs. 2 “Where is the one born ‘King of the Jews’?”

II. The Miraculous Star

vs. 2 “We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

- 1. “Star of wonder, star of light”... BUT all stars are amazing
 - a. quantity, size, color
 - b. God has called each star by name
 - c. demonstration of His mighty power
- 2. THIS star was special
 - a. “His star” BALAAM’S PROPHECY

Numbers 24:17 “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.”

- b. “in its rising” instead of “in the east”... IT WAS A NEW STAR
- c. seemed to be able to lead the magi, even to a specific place

vs. 9 “After they had heard the king, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.”

- d. some scholars believe it was a comet, but this doesn't allow for distinct leadership
- e. perhaps a manifestation of *shekinah* glory of God... PILLAR OF FIRE AT NIGHT... or maybe the same glory that shone around the angels who appeared to the shepherds of Bethlehem

3. The Magi were convinced it meant a new King of the Jews had been born

III. The Momentous Visit to Jerusalem

vs. 1 *“Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born ‘King of the Jews’? We have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.’”*

- 1. Long journey brings them to Jerusalem
- 2. My question: why did they go there?
- 3. Led by... 1) star; 2) dreams
 - a. star actually stopped over place where Jesus was
 - b. later, a dream warned them not to go back to Herod
- 4. God seems specifically to have led them to Jerusalem first
- 5. Outcome: Herod's vicious persecution
- 6. Question: WHY??? Simple principle

Romans 1:16 *“...first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”*

John 1:11 *“He came to his own, but his own did not receive Him.”*

- 7. God presented the true King of Israel to his own people...AN INVITATION TO WORSHIP GIVEN BY GENTILES TO THE JEWS!!! Herod represents the Jewish reaction to Christ

IV. The Monstrous King Herod

vs. 3 *“When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”*

- A. Who was Herod the Great?

1. NOT Jewish, but Edomite; descended from Esau, not Jacob
2. Julius Caesar appointed his father, Herod Antipater, to be procurator or governor of Judea
3. Father had son appointed prefect of Galilee
4. Herod quelled Jewish nationalist guerrillas, won confidence of Rome
5. Fled to Egypt when Parthians invaded Palestine... IRONIC... SOON HE WOULD MAKE JESUS FLEE TO EGYPT TO ESCAPE HIM... ultimately went to Rome to meet with Caesar Augustus
6. Successfully dealt with Romans who were convinced of his loyalty and usefulness
 - a. *Pax Romana* used local leaders to govern in their name
 - b. looked for men who used vested self interest to keep the peace & raise taxes
 - c. Herod was good at both
7. In 37 B.C. he was named King of the Jews by Augustus and The Roman Senate, even though he wasn't Jewish
8. A clever politician, in times of economic hardship, he gave back some of the tax money he had collected... in 25 B.C. during a famine, he melted down some gold objects from the palace to buy food for the poor
9. Very popular, he built up Jerusalem into a mighty city like Rome... rebuilt Temple his pride and joy... the building Jesus' disciples marveled over in Mark 13

Mk. 13:1 "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

10. BUT he could also be absolutely ruthless, for he was insecure in his power
 - a. he had his wife's brother Aristobolus drowned because he was a political threat
 - b. afterward, paid for a lavish funeral at which he pretended to weep
11. This is why Herod was disturbed when the magi came with the question:

"Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We have come to worship him."

12. Herod proceeded to disturb all Jerusalem because he was disturbed... perhaps he broke into homes looking for Jesus... we don't know

V. The Micah Prophecy

vs. 4 *“When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.*

A. The Bible experts called in!!... These same people were some of Jesus’ bitterest opponents, but here they give some of the first testimony for Him

vs. 5-6 *“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written...”*

B. Micah lived at the same time as Isaiah... over six centuries before Jesus!!

C. Bethlehem

1. First mention... Rachel, Jacob’s beloved wife buried there
2. Caleb’s son Salma first settled there
3. means “house of bread”... probably a granary there
4. David’s ancestor Boaz had barley fields
5. Jesse, David’s father lived in Bethlehem, and David grew up there
6. David shepherded father’s flocks in the hills of Bethlehem
7. After the exile to Babylon in the time of Micah, Bethlehem became sparsely populated

D. Micah’s prophecy

vs. 6 *“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 be shepherd of my people Israel.”*

1. Identifies God’s Messiah:
 - a. place of Messiah’s birth

- b. nature of Messiah's rule... a shepherd of the people (NOT EXPLOITER OF THEM)
 - c. Jesus fulfilled both... place of birth AND nature of His rule
2. Demonstrates God's power
- a. power over time... 650 years in advance!!!
 - b. power over earthly events... even over the hearts of kings

Proverbs 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases."

Luke 2:1,3 "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... and everyone went to his own town to register. Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David."

POWER even over Herod's heart, for it was not Ceasar that mandated that everyone go to their hometown to register!!

VI. The Mock Worshipper

vs. 7-8 "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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him.'"

A. Herod the consummate politician

- 1. plays with the minds and motives of the magi
- 2. wants to use them to accomplish his ends... if herod goes to look for the child, he might lose him

B. Herod the jealous and insecure

- 1. WHY did Herod call them secretly? Fear!!
- 2. He doesn't want everyone to know about the birth of a new King; the people may rise and rebel

Illus: "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown"

“He who spares his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life will find it.”

C. Herod the mock worshipper

1. worship means to ascribe value and worth to something
2. Herod saw the immense value of a child born in Bethlehem
3. BUT his assessment of the value did not lead to true worship!! JUST TO FEAR... it is the knowledge of demons...

James 2:19 “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”

4. Knowledge of Christ’s identity not sufficient... you must LOVE HIM in that identity... love the fact that He is Messiah, God incarnate, your savior... or He is NOT your savior

VII. The Mission Consummated

vs. 9-12 “After they had heard the kind they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and incense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

A. The mission: worship

B. The Jerusalem interruption... the star resumed the journey

C. The star moved, the star stopped... God specifically leading them right to the King

1. REACTION: incredible joy... the mission is nearing completion; they have found their king
2. LONG journey, perhaps months and months long

Illus.: Have you been searching all your life for something to give you meaning?? Only heart-felt worship of Jesus Christ can bring total completion and purpose to your life... you were made to worship this same person!!

Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in you."

D. The worship begins:

1. "House" not stable
2. place doesn't matter... object of worship is real issue
3. Def'n. of worship:
4. FULL UNDERSTANDING?? NO!! They just understood from God's leading that Jesus was the Messiah
5. The gifts... sacrificial worship

VIII. The Meaning Explained

A. Prophetic visitors

The Streaming of the Nations!!!!

Genesis 12:3 "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."

Isaiah 49:6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

B. Prophetic gifts

Isaiah 2:2 "In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains. It will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it."

Isaiah 60:5-6 "Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels from Midian and Ephah."

And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.”

1. The gifts of the magi are symbolic of future wealth brought from Gentile nations to worship messiah
2. The Gospel of Christ will spread around the world and people will bring the most costly gifts they have to worship Christ
3. Gold... universally desired; more people killed over gold than any other substance
4. Frankincense
 - a. white sticky resin, scraped from the terebinth tree which grows in Arabia
 - b. the bark is cut and tiny drops of the resin flow out slowly
 - c. trees are rare, process is slow, resin aromatic, so cost is very high
 - d. part of recipe for special incense used to worship God in Exodus 30:34
5. Myrrh

VIII. The Modern Application

- A. Sacrificial worship
- B. Selfish and wicked rejection