**THE WORSHIP OF THE MAGI**

Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse: 2:2

And asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Merry Christmas! This time we are going to study the story of the Magi. It is unique to the Matthew gospel. The story is familiar to us and often appears in Christmas plays. A few days ago, our HBF students performed a skit, “The Life of Jesus”, during Christmas Eve worship service and the Magi appeared in the first scene. Despite the familiarity, we actually know very little about the Magi. We don’t know the exact number of the Magi or their names. Many things remain a mystery. However, they show a great example of how to worship Jesus. In this passage, we are going to look through three different characters who responded to the coming of the Messiah: Herod, the religious leaders, and the Magi. Through them, we are going to learn what is true and acceptable worship to God.

***Look at verses 1-2,*** ***1After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem2and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*** The Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and looked for the king of the Jews. These Magi were not Jews, but Gentiles. We don’t know the exact country they were from. It seems reasonable to predict that they were from Persia or Babylonia. The title “Magi” was used in those regions referring to people with special knowledge. Many specialized in astrology. Some were able to interpret dreams and signs. Some practiced magic. Rulers mostly consulted with them about the important matters of the country (Daniel 2).

In this passage, the Magi were looking for “the king of the Jews.” How did they know the king of the Jews? Do you have anyone in your mind when you think of Babylonia in the Old Testament? When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia conquered Judah, a great number of people were exiled to Babylonia. The king chose young men from the royal family and nobility and taught them the language and literature of the Babylonians and brought them into the king’s service. Daniel was one of them. He was a great interpreter of dreams and signs, and he took office as the chief of the Magi for many years. (Daniel 2:48) Probably, Daniel’s faith and hope of the Messiah were known to many Magi. Also, there were sizable Jewish communities in Babylonia and Persia, so the word, Messiah, “the king of the Jews,” might not have been foreign to them.

The question is why these men were willing to make a long and difficult journey to Jerusalem. ***According to verse 2b,******“We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*** They might have been familiar with the prophesy in ***Numbers 24:7, “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.”*** While they were observing stars as usual, they noticed a special star which was associated with the birth of the Messiah, the king of the Jews. There might have been a special revelation from God regarding the star. As soon as they realized the birth of the Messiah, they hurried to prepare for the journey to find the king. The journey would be extensive, and they didn’t know how long it would take. They might have traveled in a large caravan composed of servants and guards to protect them as they went through foreign lands. However, the star they followed disappeared. It was a frustrating moment for them. They decided to come to Jerusalem asking about it, expecting that the people of Jerusalem already knew the news, since he was “the king of the Jews.”

Look at verse 3, ***3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.***The Magi’s arrival to Jerusalem and their question brought a great commotion to King Herod and all of Jerusalem. King Herod here is called “Herod the Great.” He became “King of Judea” by the Roman Senate in 40 BC. He was cruel and obsessed with power. He would do anything to keep his power. He even murdered his own family members on several occasions, including his sons and wife. When the Magi came to Jerusalem looking for another “king of the Jews”, he was deeply troubled. At the time of Jesus’ birth, he was around 70 years old and would die soon (Mt 2:19). The newborn king was too young to threaten his kingship. Furthermore, Jesus was not a political king as he assumed. However, when he heard the news about the king of the Jews, he was greatly troubled. The coming of the Messiah should be good news that would bring great joy to all the people (Luke 2:10). However, King Herod was greatly disturbed and killed all boys under two years old in Bethlehem and its vicinity.

What was his problem? He didn’t want to allow any other king beside himself to exist, even an infant. I don’t think any of us would behave like King Herod showing such hostility to Jesus and commit such a crime. Many people in the world don’t want to accept Jesus as their king, not because Jesus is not qualified to be their king, but simply because they don’t want *any* king over their lives. The idea behind is that they want to be their own “god”. The idea leads them to think that they know what is best for them better than God does. However, that is an illusion and a lie. Satan deceived mankind from the beginning with that lie. ***Genesis 3:5 reads, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*** The fall of mankind began with such a lie. That lie is the root of all unbelief and rebellion against God.

A week ago, when we had HBF group bible study, they shared their thoughts regarding who is in control of their lives. One student shared that many things happened throughout the day in his life, but most of them are out of his control. That is true, people like to think that they are in control of their lives, but in reality, major events that influence our life are not under our control starting from birth. Discovering that we are not in control of our lives is a great starting point to accept Jesus’ kingship over our lives. ***Matthew 11:29 says****, “****Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*** Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon us. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the neck of animals, used in farming. A yoke is a symbol of submission. So, when Jesus said “take my yoke upon you”, he invited us to submit ourselves to Jesus and his leading, then we will find rest for our souls. It is the paradoxical truth. However, those who submit themselves to Christ find true rest in Him.

***Look at verse 4, 4When 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.*** King Herod immediately held an emergency meeting with the religious leaders to find out the birth place of the Messiah. Look at ***verses 5-6, 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: 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 shepherd my people Israel.’”*** The religious leaders knew exactly where the Messiah would be born, Bethlehem. The coming of the Messiah was God’s ultimate plan since the fall of men. Finally, it was fulfilled in their own eyes. However, no one wanted to bother themselves to move a foot, even though Bethlehem was located less than 5 miles away from Jerusalem. What was their problem? They knew the Scriptures and where the Messiah was to be born. As the religious leaders, they took a role in the Temple service. However, they were indifferent to the coming of the Messiah. Their attitude seems better than that of King Herod who rejected the Messiah, but not receiving Christ is the same as rejecting Him. 30 years later, we know that they were the one who sought the death of Jesus, crying out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Jesus’ coming into the world is the greatest news in human history. However, how did people respond to the news? Jesus often lamented over people of his time due to their indifference to the good news. Not only people in Jesus’ time, but also people these days have the same response as those religious leaders. They are familiar with the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus and have heard of who Jesus is, but their interest is not on Jesus, but on something else. We live in a busy and fast changing world. We have so many concerns each day without mentioning them. Recently, many classes in my school closed down due to COVID. I thought that we were about to end the long tunnel of the COVID pandemic, but it seems we are getting into the tunnel again. Two weeks ago, while I was meditating on the angel’s message to the shepherd, ***“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” (Luke 2:10)*** I noticed that many things came into mind each day concerning how to serve the ministry of God better, but I missed one of the most important things, welcoming Jesus in my heart. I felt like I was one of the people indifferent to the message of Jesus’ coming. Since then, I have been trying to focus myself on Jesus again. What is your response to the coming of the Messiah? Do you have an excitement or great joy in your heart? We have to examine our heart and to focus on the meaning of Jesus’ coming into the world. May we have a great joy in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

***Look at verses 7-8, 7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He 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.”*** Herod invited the Magi to his palace and acquired more detailed information regarding the star and asked them to inform him of the exact location after finding the child, so he also might go and worship the Messiah. He pretended to be a worshiper of the newborn king, but he had something else in mind. He wanted to get rid of the newborn king by any means.

***Look at verses 9-10, 9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.***Even though they lost their way at some points of time, the star they had followed rose again and went ahead of them. It led them to the house where Jesus was. It was exciting for them to find the star again, they were overjoyed. They had finally found the king*.*

***Look at verses 11-12, 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*** When they came to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. The word “the child” in Greek refers to “little child”, not a baby. They found him in the house, not in a stable. This gives a clue that this event occurred sometime after the birth of Jesus. As soon as they saw the child, Jesus, they immediately bowed down on their knees and worshiped him. They presented him with very valuable gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Obviously, the gifts they presented to Jesus were very expensive and valuable.

The coming of the Messiah is indeed good news for all people and a full demonstration of the love of God. It is so great that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:39). This is our confidence in Him. At the same time, Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the object of our worship. In this passage, the Magi gives us an example on how to worship Jesus. Their worship was more than bowing in homage to the king. They give their best gift to Jesus as a token of giving their hearts. Their meeting with the Messiah seemed to take a short time. However, their worship already began when they were waiting for the Messiah, looking at the stars every night with great expectation. Even though it was costly, they were willing to take a journey to meet the Messiah. They had to give up their own comfort and personal plans to meet the king. We no longer need to go and look for Jesus in Bethlehem to worship him. Now, we can worship Him wherever we are. How should we worship Jesus? Apostle Paul teaches us what is acceptable worship in ***Romans 12:1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”*** The worship requires us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, which means self-denial and full devotion to God. There are many people who serve the worship service each week in many forms: praise worship, sound and video, playing piano, and making arrangements for the worship environment. It is important that everything goes well for the worship service. However, worship is more than a performance, it is giving our full attention and our hearts to God. Also, worship is not about receiving, but offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. This is the true and proper worship. I pray that our worship may be pleasing and acceptable to God.

In conclusion, we look at the attitude of the Magi towards the coming of the Messiah compared to the responses of King Herod and the religious leaders. The journey of the Magi required a great sacrifice, putting everything aside to follow the star. Finally, they met the Messiah and worshiped Him. People may hesitate to devote themselves fully to Christ, thinking that there may be too much sacrifice involved. However, devoting ourselves to Christ is not losing, but gaining the most valuable treasure that we can never find in this world. The Apostle Paul was probably one who gave up the most to follow Christ. However, he never regretted this decision. He said in ***Philippians 3:8, What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.*** Paul didn’t have any hint of a negative view towards his decision, but full of positivity and expectation because he knew the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus compared to what he gave up. The journey to follow Jesus Christ may be difficult and challenging. However, the journey will not disappoint us. The best decision we can make in our life is to commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us keep our journey to follow Jesus Christ with great hope and expectation.