

## Worshipping Like the Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12

An expressive woman wandered into a liturgical service which is formal and structured. As the pastor preached, she became so caught up in his message that she exclaimed, "Praise the Lord!" A fellow worshipper leaned over and whispered, "Excuse me, but we don't praise the Lord here in this church". A man in the pew behind them overheard and corrected him, "Yes we do; it's on page 19 in the hymnal."

The question we need to ask ourselves is, "What really is worship?" Is it what we say or don't say? Is it about how we feel? Is it what we do? Or is it silent meditation?"

Today, I'm going to answer that question by taking take a page from the wise men's book as they search for Jesus in order to worship him. This message is part two of our series this December I'm calling "Lessons of Christmas". The first lesson we learned last week is that there is a reward for waiting just like Simeon received his reward when he saw with his very own eyes and cuddled in his own arms the six-week-old baby Jesus in the temple after years and years of waiting. So, all God wants us to do is to patiently wait on him because he has something great waiting for you. The Bible says, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

Today, I'd like to talk about a lesson we'll learn from the wise men or the magi as they are otherwise known. We'll look at the characteristics of true worship.

What is true worship? There are so many definitions of true worship out there. All cite different Bible verses. And many of them I agree with.

But what I agree most with is the one I saw from gotquestions.org and it says this, listen, and I quote, “True worship is God-centered worship. People tend to get caught up in where they should worship, what music they should sing in worship, and how their worship looks to other people. Focusing on these things misses the point. Jesus tells us that true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). This means we worship from the heart and the way God has designed. Worship can include praying, reading God's Word with an open heart, singing, participating in communion, and serving others. It is not limited to one act, but is done properly when the heart and attitude of the person are in the right place.” (end of quote)

In short, I would say that worship comes from the heart but involves every part of our being.

Martin Luther wrote, “To worship God in spirit is the service and homage of the heart, and implies fear of God and trust in Him..”

In our message today, we’re going to look at three characteristics of true worship as exemplified by the wise men in their quest for Jesus. These are characteristics we need to develop in our own lives to truly worship Christ our Savior. Each characteristic would refer to a particular part or parts of our body. After all, Paul mentions 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.”

So, to begin, for true worship to occur,

1. I need to have DISCERNMENT (Eyes to see Jesus)

Verses 1-2 of our text says, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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.”

From this, we see that they used their eyes to seek Jesus. “We saw his star”. Their eyes were instrumental in their first step in knowing Jesus.

Who are the wise men? A legend says that they were three kings. In the Philippines, they are given honor. We celebrate the Feast of the Three Kings on January 6. It is a time of feasting, visiting, and gift-giving and it officially marks the end of the Christmas celebration in the Philippines. Imagine that, some more gifts and food after Christmas. That’s why it’s more fun in the Philippines.

But let’s get to the truth. Are they really kings and are there only three? What does the Bible say? First of all, the Bible doesn’t say they were kings. The word used in the Bible for these men is “Magi”. Magi is the plural of the Latin word magus which refers to someone who is a priest in the old Persian religion called “Zoroastrianism”. The magus also studied the stars, in short, he was an astrologer. Thus, these magi were actually priests who interpreted events by looking at the stars. They were deemed wise because of their knowledge and wisdom. And they saw this great bright star beyond the horizon which they followed.

How about their number? We don’t know how many wise men there really are in their company. The Bible doesn’t mention how many. Traditionally, people say there are three because of the three gifts they gave to Jesus – gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But, the Bible doesn’t say how many wise men there really are. There could be three or more than three.

Now, as the Magi observed the heavens they saw something they had not seen before, a new star, which attracted their attention. They believed a new star as a sign that a new king had been born.

There are many different views about what they saw, but Mark Kidger, a British astrophysicist believes the star was real and that it can still be seen by a telescope today even though it is now dim.

He says that it was a bright nova probably described by Chinese Astronomers as an unusually bright star which appeared in the eastern sky for 70 days in 5 B.C. the year that many scholars believe Jesus was born.

Kidger believes that ancient astrologers would have found the star significant because of when and where it appeared. The star appeared during a triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces. They believed the conjunction of planets would have told them a king would be born. The nova would have told them the king had been born.

In the Scriptures, however, there is mention of a prophecy that refers to the coming King of Israel. In Numbers 24:17, a prophecy is made of the coming King of Israel, "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. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth." Some scholars believe that the wise men must be familiar with the prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures. And when they saw the bright star, they interpreted it as a sign that the promised King of the Jews has arrived. Be that as it may, for sure either God used a natural event or caused a supernatural event to announce the coming of King Jesus.

And for us Christians, the star really holds great significance because it was a sign of Jesus who called himself "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). John MacArthur wrote, "The morning star announces the day's arrival, so Jesus' coming will announce the end of the darkness of humanity's night and the glorious dawn of His kingdom."

We will never know for sure what the star was that led the Magi to Jerusalem, but we do know they had eyes to see him. When these men saw the sign they recognized God was speaking to them.

In the Bible, we read how God has spoken to people in many different ways:

1. To Moses he spoke to him through a burning bush.
2. To Elijah he spoke in a still quiet voice.
3. To Samuel he called his name in the tabernacle.
4. To the shepherds he spoke through an angel.
5. To Peter he gave a vision of clean and unclean animals.
6. To John he gave a revelation we have in the Book of Revelation.

Heb. 1:1, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, (that was in the past. How about today?) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” Folks, God now usually speaks to us through His Word given by his Son. But, I won’t put God in a box. He is God and he can do what he wants when it comes to revealing himself to people. For example, we hear stories of Muslims coming to Jesus because they saw him in a vision or in a dream. There are countless stories like that and we cannot discount them. Besides, these former Muslims demonstrate through their lives that they have truly been converted.

What is discernment? Discernment is the ability to understand what is taking place. It is to judge something by your eyes or with your mind so you perceive and understand the significance of it.

In Eph. 1:18, Paul writes, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” Paul wanted the believers to clearly understand what Christ had done for them in forgiving their sins and their hope of salvation.

Today most worship is based on people's emotions. They judge worship on how it affected them emotionally. But true worship is about honoring God, not about how you feel.

Matthew Henry wrote, "Christians should not think it is enough to have warm affections, they should labor to have clear understanding." You see, understanding God's truth gives a believer a more solid foundation.

Let me share with you these guidelines for being discerning:

1. Don't believe everything you hear - check them out.

2. Study the Bible for yourself - read good commentaries.

3. Ask questions so you understand - don't be afraid to ask.

Truth must be clearly understood with our minds and then felt in our hearts so we are moved to act on it in our daily lives.

For true worship to occur, I need to have discernment. Then, I must also possess

## 2. DETERMINATION (Feet to follow Jesus)

Let's look at verses 9-10 again, "After 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. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."

If these Magi came from Persia, which is modern Iran, to Jerusalem their journey would have taken them months and months. They traveled only by camel. Iran to Israel is about 1833 miles. By car, that's only about 33 hours. By camel, well, that can take months with all the stops and bad weather and, of course, the route would be quite different. T.S. Eliot wrote a poem called Journey of the Magi in which one of them recounts the hardships of cold weather, stubborn camels, grumbling helpers and dirty villages as they made their long journey.

They took the long and difficult journey because of the longing of their hearts to worship this new born king. They didn't have to make the journey, they could have just stayed home.

This king wasn't their king and being a baby he wouldn't even know they had come to see him. They came because their hearts had been stirred by the sign and they were determined to see this child. Their long journey was not in vain because God guided them to where the child was so they could meet the one they sought. Folks, God guides those who sincerely desire to know him.

Those who really desire to know Christ will seek Him with all of their heart. If you really want to worship Christ it takes a personal commitment of your time and spiritual desire of your heart. Distance doesn't matter when you want to truly worship Jesus. There are some of us here who come from faraway places.

In Jeremiah 29:13, God says to the exiles in Babylon, "You will find me when you seek me with all your heart." In Scripture, the heart refers to your desires, emotions and will. God wants us to want him before he reveals himself to us.

Now, as we follow Christ, we can lose our determination to follow through:

1. Discouragement because of difficulties at home or on the job so that you are more concerned and focused on them than your relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. Distractions with different activities so you are too busy to really have the time to focus on our relationship with Christ.

Folks, it takes real determination on your part to commit yourself to be faithful in attending church and a Bible study so you can grow.

So, for true worship to occur, you need to have discernment, you must have determination and thirdly, you must offer your

### 3. **DEVOTION (Heart to worship Jesus)**

Verse 11 says,” On 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.”

In Greek, the phrase “bowed down and worship” expresses the action wherein one falls upon one's knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence. This is exactly what the 24 elders do before God on the throne in heaven in Revelation (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). The 24 elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne.

This kind of worship is what God deserves. Psalm 95:6 “Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” Matthew uses both words to show the wise men truly honor Jesus as king. Both their acts of falling down and worshipping demonstrate their humility to Jesus, who was the object of their devotion.

Their devotion to Christ was the result of the truth they knew about Christ. Their hearts followed their heads, not just their feelings. C. Spurgeon wrote, "The bowing down indicates that we count ourselves to be as nothing in the presence of the all-glorious Lord." The word devotion means to set something apart for a special purpose. Devotion to God is giving your heart and your affection to Him with reverence and faith through music and meditation.

So, to sum up, true worship isn't about you; it is about giving honor to Christ. It doesn't matter how you feel, it is acknowledging his greatness. The purpose of worship is submitting yourself to God by saying you are willing to do whatever God wants you to do for him.

Worship is not just feeling good, upbeat and happy because your emotions were touched. True worship is humbly and submitting yourself to do the will of God in your life.

It is the attitude of Mary when the angel told her she would be the mother of the Messiah. She said, “I am the Lord’s servant...May your word to me be fulfilled.” (Luke 1:38)

To conclude, let me share this fact. In making Sunday the day when Christians would gather together to worship, Emperor Constantine in 300 AD sent builders to the Holy Land to build churches on the different sites where significant Biblical events took place.

One of the places where he built a church was over the cave where it is believed that Christ was born in 334 AD. It is the oldest church in which Christians have continually worshipped. As you descend down one of the two flights of stairs into the cave of the Nativity under the altar of the church, the opening is so low that you must stoop to enter.

Made into the embedded white marble floor is a 14 point silver star about 2 feet across. It is lit by 15 silver lambs representing the different Christian communities. Around the star is the Latin inscription: Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.

There are two altars opposite the nativity: one for the manger where the baby Jesus was laid and the other dedicated to the Magi who came from the east guided by the star.

There is something beautifully symbolic about the fact that you have to kneel to enter what is considered the birthplace of our Savior Jesus Christ.

In, Phil. 2:9-10, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.