

# The Wisdom of the Wise Men

BY RICHARD JORDAN

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,”

“Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” (Matt. 2:1, 2)

We are not told how soon after His birth this visit took place, but no doubt considerable time had elapsed. Popular notions gained from so-called “Nativity Scenes” depicting the wise men and shepherds worshipping together before “the babe lying in a manger” simply do not fit the facts.

From Matthew 2:2, it seems clear that the wise men first saw the star at the time of Christ’s birth. After the necessary preparations for what would be a long journey, they made their way first to Jerusalem, not Bethlehem. Following their interview with Herod, the star reappeared and led them to where Christ was now living. Upon finding Him, He was “a young child, not a ‘babe’,” and was now living in a “house.” From this and Herod’s decree in Matthew 2:16, it seems probable that as much as two years had elapsed since the first appearance of “the star in the east.”

The contrast between the wise men’s desire to find and worship Him “that is born King of the Jews,” and the attitude of the Jews themselves, is striking. When the wise men came to Jerusalem, “the city of the great King,” to make inquiry as to His whereabouts, not only was *Herod* “troubled,” but “*all Jerusalem with him.*” (Matt. 2:3)

Jerusalem, with the wicked Herod on the throne, had no heart for Messiah and cared not to receive Him. And even though they possessed the oracles of God and were able to identify the details of His birthplace, they had no love for Him of whom it all testified.

Their scornful unbelief shows itself even more fully as we read of God’s warning:

“And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”

“And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.” (Matt. 2:12, 13)

What a picture this presents of the obstinacy and blindness of that favored nation! Because a usurper reigns in Jerusalem, the true King must flee—and to *Egypt!* While, as it were, the Gentiles cry out to Israel for the blessing God promised through her, Israel is in unbelief and apostasy. Thus, Jesus is rejected from the very first.

There is a brighter note and happier theme here, however. The wisdom of the wise men should not be overlooked, for their visit was an event of profound significance.

## THE DOCTRINAL SIGNIFICANCE

Tradition has long held that there were three wise men. It is more probable that the number was much greater and, in any event, their entourage would certainly have been an impressive array. Three has been the traditional number because they brought three gifts. The significance of the

gifts, however, is not in identifying the number of the wise men, but in their doctrinal connections of the gifts themselves. Matthew 2:11 records them thus:

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; GOLD and FRANKINCENSE, and MYRRH.”

These three gifts represent the three Messianic offices Christ came to fill. *Gold* is for a king, as 1 Kings 10:10, 11, 18 quickly illustrates. *Frankincense* concerns the priesthood (Ex. 30:34-38), while *myrrh* was an ancient embalming fluid (John 19:39-40) and spoke of the “suffering affliction” of the prophet. (Jas.5:10)

That the Lord Jesus Christ came to be Israel’s true Prophet, Priest and King is too clear in Scripture for any to doubt. The gifts of the wise men indicate the depth of their understanding of just who this “newborn king” really was.

### **PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

In light of the above, we should not overlook the fact that the homage of the wise men holds foreshadowings that are of tremendous prophetic significance. Certainly their appearance, their diligence in seeking Him out and then, having found Him, their open and glad-hearted worship of Him foreshadows the day when the kings of the earth will seek His face and worship Him. Then the age-old predictions will be a reality:

“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles SHALL BRING PRESENTS: the kings of Sheba and Seba SHALL OFFER GIFTS.”

“Yea, ALL KINGS SHALL FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM: all nations shall serve him.” (Psa. 72:10, 11)

“...all they from Sheba shall come: THEY SHALL BRING GOLD AND INCENSE;<sup>1</sup> and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.” (Isa. 60:6)

These are, of course, prophecies about Messiah’s coming to establish His kingdom on this earth. Repeatedly, this is where the focus of Matthew’s record finds itself, for it is Matthew who preeminently presents Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of Israel. Thus, just as Luke’s account focuses on the more personal and human aspects, Matthew pen points onward to the ultimate goal of Messiah’s kingdom.

The coming of Christ brought a great opportunity to the nation Israel. Now she was to have Messiah in her midst and hear the glad cry, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” The time was at hand when she was to be the channel of God’s blessing to the nations. Hence, the wise men’s coming and their finding “*the house*” where the Lord was, can but remind the instructed heart of the prophetic prediction:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.”

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and

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<sup>1</sup> Notice the absence of myrrh here. His sufferings over, Messiah will reign as King-Priest in His kingdom (Zech. 6:12,13)

we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isa. 2:2, 3)

The wise men’s coming with their gifts and homage thus signaled the great opportunity about to be placed before the nation Israel. Their visit also demonstrated the depths of Israel’s unbelief.

### **PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

There is a touching practical lesson taught by these visitors from the east, a lesson concerning God’s watchcare over His own and His supply of their every need.

After the wise men departed, Joseph was instructed by the angel of the Lord to “take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt.” (Matt. 2:13) They were to remain there until the death of Herod.

At first glance this seems simple enough, but when we recall the meager financial resources<sup>2</sup> of Joseph and Mary we can only imagine how seemingly impossible such a journey would have seemed to them under normal circumstances. But these were by no means “normal circumstances!” Rather, they had just been visited by wealthy men from the east who had presented them with “*treasures*” of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These valuable gifts would amply provide the needed funds to make the long and hurried journey to Egypt and also the means to live in that strange land for some time. How touching to see God use the worship of the wise men to supply these pressing needs!

Faithful believers today can be no less confident of God’s supply, for our Apostle clearly says:

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:19)

Although this passage has been much abused by uninstructed and self-centered believers, it is nonetheless a blessed reality.

God has—and will always—provide everything His people need to do the job He has given them to do and to be the people He wants them to be.

In time past, God promised material blessings and prosperity to the nation Israel as a reward for their obedience. (Deut. 28:1-13) This was done because they were called to be His *earthly* people. As such, they needed these physical, material provisions to accomplish His purpose in and through them.

Today, in the dispensation of grace, God again promises to supply the need of each member of the Body of Christ so that we can do the job He has called us to do and be the people He has purposed us to be. The scope of our blessings is “*all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*” (Eph. 1:3)

We are *not* promised today that He will shield us from either poverty or pain. This is clear from the testimony of Paul himself in this regard in the very context of Phil. 4:19. Notice his words just a few verses prior:

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

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<sup>2</sup> From Luke 2:21-24, it is clear that Mary and Joseph lived on very meager finances for they were forced to offer the “poor man’s” sacrifices as per Lev. 12:6-8.

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Vs. 11, 12)

The “need” that Paul experienced was the want of such things as *food* (he says he was “hungry”), *clothing* (he says he had been “naked” in 1 Cor. 4:11), *housing* (he says in 1 Cor. 4:11 he had “no certain dwellingplace”), *health* (see his testimony in 2 Cor. 12:7-10 and Gal. 4:13), *deliverance* from trouble (for example, 2 Tim. 2:9 and 2 Cor. 11:23) and the like. Clearly “health and wealth, protection and deliverance” were not in Paul’s mind when he penned Phil. 4:19!

What then? Obviously, if Paul needed such physical and material provisions in order to accomplish the task God had given him, they would have been supplied. The simple fact that “God shall supply all your need” and yet these physical things were not provided demonstrates that they were *not* needed.

Honestly now: Although we may earnestly *desire* such things, do we really *need* health in order to serve our Saviour? Do we really *need* finances? Social standing? Deliverance from any or every harm that may beset us? Is a “safe” and “comfortable” life really what we *need*?

God has provided for members of the Body of Christ “*all spiritual blessings*”—every blessing of the Spirit, everything we need to live our lives day by day regardless of circumstances for His glory.

And this supply is “*according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” In other words, our provision is in accordance with His plan and purpose for the Body of Christ. Col. 1:27 defines it for us:

“To whom God would make known WHAT IS THE RICHES OF THE GLORY of this mystery among the Gentiles; WHICH IS CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY:”

*All we need is Christ!* We don’t really *need* material and physical provisions—in the final analysis, we do not even need our physical bodies themselves, for our service for the Lord does not end at death but rather it gets “*better!*” (Phil. 1:23)

Having *already* been *blessed with all spiritual blessings* and made *complete* in Christ, ours is to “... *look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” (2 Cor. 4:18)

In spite of all the physical and material hardships Paul was called upon to bear, he *did have what he needed* to successfully endure – he had “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

My believer friend, are you waiting for God to somehow give you what you need so you can serve Him? Oh, there is good news: He *already has*, abundantly and completely in Christ!

May we, dear reader, be “wise,” recognizing who Christ really is, understanding exactly what His ministry and message is and, most of all, resting confidently and fully in Him—in “... *him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us...*” (Eph. 3:20)