

THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-2

It has been generally agreed that the number of wise men from the east is unknown. In addition, it is agreed that they did not visit Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus in a stable. Matthew 2:11 states that "they were come into a house" for the visit.

Christmas cards often portray three men on camels riding over the crest of a sand dune, and before them lies a sprawling city with a bright star above. Bethlehem was nowhere near a desert; it was in the mountains of Judea. It was not a sprawling city with domed buildings like mosques but was a very small village.

Who were the wise men? They were certainly not Persian astrologers who studied the heavens. Astrology is soundly condemned by the Lord, so it is highly unlikely that God would use astrology to announce Christ's birth (Isaiah 47:13-14). It is almost always associated with demon worship.

The wise men were Jews. What were Jews doing in Persia? They were scattered up and down the Euphrates River Valley being a remnant from the Babylonian captivity. The Persians liberated the Jews from the seventy years of captivity and gave permission for them to return to Judea. Many returned, but large numbers stayed. Many who stayed in Persia were Godly Jews, like Daniel and Ezekiel. Since Daniel wrote of the time the Messiah would appear, there is every reason to believe that Godly Jews in Persia would have been watching for Messiah's appearance, especially as the designated time approached. In Acts 2:5, we learn that Jews from all over the Mediterranean world were in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Verse 9 says there were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia.

The wise men were not Gentiles. No promise of a Messiah was given to Gentiles. The wise men came to worship the child whom they expected to grow to manhood, become Israel's King, and save His people from their enemies.

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THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Scripture Reading: Galatians 4:4

God is timeless, eternal. He created time. "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law." "Fullness" means the completion of an appointed time. The Father of the triune Godhead sent forth out from Himself the Son of the triune Godhead. In Bible times and Roman culture, a son in the home was regarded the same as a servant until he reached a certain age determined by the father. At that appointed time, he was promoted to full sonship with all its accompanying responsibilities and rights.

In like manner the heavenly Father appointed a time when His Son would enter the human race and assume the responsibility of redeeming lost sinners. It took 4000 years (or so) of man's history to pass before the appointed time arrived. Certain things had to happen first. Mankind knew, from the time Adam and Eve fell in sin, that God would send a Savior who would be the Seed of the woman. The record shows the development of the human race and a nation within it, then a family within the nation. The family would become the royal family of Israel. A complete list of this development is given in Luke 3:23-38 and Matthew 1:1-17.

God knew when all the requirements had been met, and then He sent forth His Son. A foreign power governed Israel at that time. Greek was the commercial language of the day. The Hebrew Old Testament had been translated into Greek, so the whole known world had access to all that God had said and done from the beginning. They could hear and read the gospel. It was not by accident or chance that all this happened. Christ was born in the fullness of God's appointed time.

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A SAVIOR IS BORN

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:11

The same day, probably night, when Christ was born, it was immediately made known. Shepherds who were tending their flocks in fields near Bethlehem were visited by an angel who announced Christ's birth. The angel was then joined by the hosts of heaven who gave praise and glory to the Lord. It does not say they sang.

When Christ was born, He bore a long list of identities. He was the Son of God, the supposed son of Joseph and Mary, the Heir to Israel's throne, the prophesied Prophet and Priest the Old Testament writers mentioned, the One Who would redeem Israel and provide salvation for all who would believe on Him. No one else in the universe among angels or men could fill these roles.

Some people refuse to observe Christmas. They say no one knows when Christ was born and that it is a pagan celebration and totally materialistic. That may be true, but one should not lose sight of the fact that it is not the day that is observed by Christians but the purpose for the incarnation. When Christ was born, He took upon Himself the form of man and was made in the likeness of human flesh for the purpose of becoming the Savior of lost sinners. He will save whosoever will believe on Him for salvation. A Savior saves people. He does not offer assistance and help people to be saved. He does *everything that is required* to save people. He saves people by paying the wages of sin for them by dying on the cross. With His precious shed blood the sinner's sins are washed away forever. "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now Justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-9). Our Savior was born; let us never cease to praise the Lord and give Him glory and thanks.

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WHO KNEW CHRIST WAS BORN?

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:2-3

When the wise men from the East arrived in Bethlehem and asked where Christ, who was born King of the Jews, was born, nobody seemed to know anything about it. Herod did not know. The chief priests and scribes did not know. All Jerusalem was troubled because of their inquiry, indicating the people did not know. Did anyone know that Christ had been born nearly two years earlier?

In fact, quite a few people knew about Christ's birth. The shepherds knew it. They saw Christ as a newborn baby. "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child" (Luke 2:17). They told anyone who would listen. When the infant Jesus was taken to the temple, he was seen by a Godly man named Simeon. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Israel's Christ. Scripture does not confirm that he told people what he saw, but it seems reasonable to assume that he told people he saw the Christ child.

Also at the temple was a very elderly prophetess named Anna. When she saw the baby Jesus, she knew He was Israel's Christ. Luke 2:38 says she "spake of Him to all them that looked for the redemption in Jerusalem."

This begins to add up to a large number of people who knew Christ was born, perhaps hundreds. So why did the people in Jerusalem seem to be unaware of Christ's birth? Since believers are always in a minority, it seems likely that the accounts of the shepherds and others who saw Christ were rejected and forgotten. If they heard that He was born in a stable, as the shepherds would have reported, this would have seemed unlikely for One who was to be born King of Israel. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," no matter how and where He is born (I John 4:2).

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WAS MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD?*Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:23*

The argument goes like this; if Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us, then Mary was the mother of God. If Jesus was born without a sin nature, then His mother must also have been born without a sin nature. God gave her a special pure soul. After Jesus was born, Mary remained a virgin. Because she was the sinless mother of God, she went directly to heaven without dying. Does the Bible confirm any of these ideas?

First, being born into the human race did not make Jesus God. He was God before He became man, a member of the triune Godhead in eternity past. Our text says He was God with us, implying He came to be with us. God is a singular word in English, but it contains a plural thought in both English, Greek and Hebrew. This is why God said in Genesis 1:26-27 "Let us make man in our own image." One image for "us" and "our." Mary is not the mother of the triune Godhead. Christ lived in eternity past without a mother. The Pharisees understood this (John 5:18). She gave birth to God's Son without being the originator of His being.

Did Mary have a sin nature? If she did, she was a sinner and needed a Savior like everyone else. She acknowledged this when she said in Luke 1:47, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." She had a Savior.

Did Mary remain a virgin after Jesus was born? Matthew 13:55 names Mary's four sons, who were born after Jesus, and mentions sisters. There were at least six more children born to Joseph and Mary.

Did Mary die? As far as we know from the record, the Bible does not say she didn't. It seems safe to say she died. Mary was a Godly woman, and we respect her as much as the disciples did. We should not say more about her than the Scriptures warrant.

*EM**Notes:***MARY HAD A LAMB***Scripture Reading: John 1:29*

The title of this devotional is not very original. It has been used by pastors all over the country for years. When Christ was born of Mary in Bethlehem, this was in fulfillment of a plan made by the triune Godhead in eternity past. "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). God knew Adam and Eve would sin before they were created. He already had a plan of salvation formed. Man would be redeemed by the shed blood of His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus would become the sacrificial Lamb of God at an appointed time in the history of the human race. When that time came, John the Baptist announced to Israel, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God was under no obligation to save the human race. He offered salvation out of a heart of love beyond anything we can understand. How can we know God loves us? Love is always a giver. That is why John 3:16 says "For God so loved... He gave...." Since God has done everything that needs to be done to save lost sinners, how can a sinner be saved? John 3:16 goes on to say, "whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To be saved, it is required that a sinner believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the entire burden of sin and gives that person everlasting life. Aren't you glad that Mary had the Lamb of God, the only One Who can save us and give us never ending, everlasting life!

*EM**Notes:*

LOOKING AHEAD

Scripture Reading: Titus 2:11-14

We live in the present, but we look to the future. There is nothing wrong with that. We, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, look for His appearing when we shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the clouds of heaven. When Paul wrote to Pastor Titus he called his attention to the "blessed hope and glorious appearing" of our only Lord and Savior. At the present time, things are not going well in our country. Many Americans are no longer ashamed of immorality or concerned about the disintegration of home and family or the increase of crime of every description. Our government is bewildered by problems for which it seemingly has no solutions. Saddest of all is the decline of the church in America. Instead of sound expository Bible doctrine, we hear more and more a philosophy of Christianity and religion. This should not really surprise us. Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 3 that in the last days "perilous times shall come." The list that follows can hardly be a description of the ungodly world. The world has had all these unfavorable features since Adam and Eve began having children. Verses 2-7 are describing the decrease of godliness within the professing church.

The preaching of the Word of God, rightly divided, with a strong emphasis on Pauline dispensational theology is accepted by very few Christians. Sin is becoming more acceptable and tolerated. As a new year begins, and as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us make it our resolve to follow the admonition of Romans 12:1-2--namely our reasonable service, unconfomed to this godless world system, daily renewing our minds through the Scriptures, making every effort to please the Lord who bought us. If we follow Paul and "continue thou in the things thou hast learned," we will not go astray doctrinally. "Add verse" (Titus 2:13).

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WARNINGS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Scripture Reading: Titus 3:8-15

"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." In these closing verses, the apostle makes it clear that we are yet on the earth and that the oppositions will continue. We find here a partial list of the things, and individuals, which cause division and disruptions among the believers. How easy it would be for them to enter into the things which are "unprofitable and vain," that which will exalt men and not God!

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to build up, not to tear down. All of the gifts and ministries God has given to men were for the purpose of building up and uplifting the members of the Body of Christ. I rejoice in the truth of Ephesians 4:15-16. When each member of the Body is fulfilling the purpose that God has for them, it will result in "the edifying of itself in love." This is why the apostle wanted them to be "careful to maintain good works" (verses 8 & 14). In verse 8 we read, "These are good and profitable unto men." How important it is for each one of us to be working in the area of the "profitable" things! We find also that when the believer is doing "good works" (after salvation), he will not be "unfruitful." Paul wanted all of the believers to be fruitful in their lives. May we also be "fruitful."

Floyd Baker

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THAT BLESSED HOPE

Scripture Reading: Titus 2:13, II Timothy 4:8

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” The word “looking” can be rendered “expecting” as well. It was the “looking,” the expecting of the Lord that gave them direction in their lives. When His people are looking for Him to come, they will be busy serving Him in their lives. Why should we lose sight of this precious truth? There are many today who have given up looking for Christ and are looking for the anti-christ instead. How sad and tragic this is! If men do not see the distinctiveness of Paul’s message and the dispensation of grace, they might well be led astray.

It is a “blessed hope” for many reasons. We know that we shall see our loved ones who have died in Christ, and it will be the end of physical suffering for many of God’s people. There are many other reasons that could be stated, but none so important as the one given by the apostle. It is “the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” It is the shining forth of God’s Son. Not only is He declared to be our Saviour but “the great God” as well. What glory surrounds our blessed Lord. This is the focal point of the letter to Titus. All that we are, or hope to be, is found and centered in the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord. May we continue to look for Him.

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