

## **The Praise Of The Wise** by Jeff Strite

Matthew 2:1-2:12

OPEN: When I was a boy, every December we'd sing: "We Three Kings Of Orient Are"  
Stand with me and let's sing just the first verse together:

"We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar.  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.  
O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect Light."

READ SCRIPTURE

PRAYER

Please be seated.

The song tells us the Kings from the Orient "traversed afar".

How far was "afar"??

Well some believe they may have traveled about 1000 miles to get to Bethlehem. That's roughly the same distance as from here to Phoenix, Arizona. You or I could make the journey in about 20 hours... but then we have 4 lane highways, and can travel at 65 mph.

These Magi didn't have those advantages. Some scholars speculate it might have taken them 2 to 3 months to make it to Jerusalem.

And theirs was not a "safe" journey. Much of the way would have been unprotected by armed forces meant to protect travelers. Thieves and robbers plagued many of the roads and forced merchants and commoners to travel in large groups, called caravans, for safety.

But these were neither commoners nor merchants. They were prominent men of society. One preacher I respect speculated that "at a minimum they would have brought with them a full military escort along with their servants. The total party could have amounted to more than 300 people."

(Brian Bill, sermoncentral.com)

That would have explained the stir they caused when they rode into Jerusalem. To have 300 people of obvious importance walk into Jerusalem would have caught the imagination of the entire city. And the fact that these Kings or Magi had no trouble

gaining an audience with King Herod gives us a pretty good idea that these were men of prominence and power.

So, we're looking at more than just 3 guys out for a ride on their camels. This was a large band of men who'd come a great distance over dangerous roads.

Just to prepare for their journey would have taken months. That's why most scholars believe these folks didn't arrive until about 2 years after Christ's birth.

Even the text hints at that. Matthew 2:11 tells us "when they were COME INTO THE HOUSE, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him..."

Where was Jesus born?

In a barn, in a manger – a feeding trough.

They're not there anymore.

Joseph and Mary have moved out of the barn, and settled into a home in Bethlehem and Joseph is plying his trade among the Jews of that area. And that's at that house where the wise men found Him, and they fell down and worshipped Him and gave Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Now these wise men had gone to a great deal of trouble.

And they'd traveled great distance.

And they'd spent a great deal of money to get to their destination.

So the question comes to my mind... why would they bother?

Jesus wasn't born in their country.

And He wasn't technically "their" King.

In fact, when they found Him, He wasn't much of a king at all.

They found Him living in a small unimpressive house, in an insignificant Judean village.

And when they arrived He probably wasn't even dressed like a king.

He was just a two year old boy playing on the floor. The adopted son of a lowly carpenter.

So, why Would They Bother?

Why go to all the trouble?

Well, because... they'd been reading about Jesus for a really long time.

Matthew 2:1-2 tells us that "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 in the east and have come to worship him.”

They knew there was to be a King born in Judea?

The King of the Jews?

And they believed that there would be a star to guide them there?

Why on earth would they believe such things?

Well, they were Magi FROM THE EAST.

A few hundred years before this, there had been Jews who'd been taken captive and forced to live in a land in the East. A place called Babylon.

How many of you remember the story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

How, about the story about Daniel and the Lion's Den?

They lived most of their lives in Babylon... in that nation in the East.

I've read that there is a possibility that the Magi may have been the descendants of those Jews in captivity, and that they had become students of the prophecies of the Old Testament... and of the Prophet Daniel.

Now, if that's true, they would have known the prophecy from Numbers 24 where the prophet Balaam foretold that: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." Numbers 24:17

That one prophecy could easily have led these Magi to look for a star that would lead them to find the ONE destined to hold the scepter of Israel. The King of the Jews.

And that's just one of the over 300 prophecies found in the Old Testament. Some of those prophecies came from the Old Testament Prophet Daniel, and Daniel would have told them roughly when this King of Jews would arrive.

In Daniel 9 God sets a time table for the coming of the new king... called the "Anointed One". In this prophecy, spoke of 70 sevens... 70 sets of 7 years apiece.

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens..." Daniel 9:24-25

When Daniel prophesied that there would be 7 sevens and 62 sevens from the decree

to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of the anointed one, the new ruler of Israel.

God was essentially telling folks:

“PAY ATTENTION. The clock starts ticking when the walls they start brickin’.”

(Don’t laugh, I worked hard at making that rhyme)

And clock started with the decree issued by King Xerxes to his Jewish servant Ezra somewhere about 457 BC (Ezra 7:6-7 and 9:9)

Doing the math, that meant the Anointed One would arrive around 27 AD. So, if the Magi knew of the prophecy, they would have been watching the skies diligently during their lifetime.

But the point is this: they’d read about Jesus.

They’d read about this coming King.

And once they read about Him they felt compelled to find Him.

They diligently sought Him. They spent a great deal resources and traveled a great distance and great personal peril to seek Him.

The question I want to ask you this morning is this:

Have you heard about Jesus?

How many of you have “heard” of Jesus? (Wait for a reply)

And how many of you have come here to seek Him this morning? (Wait for a reply)

You do need to realize, there’s more to SEEKING Jesus than just showing up.

I mean, the Wise Men could have just showed up.

They could have looked inside the house - saw Jesus - and then gone merrily on their way.

And there are regular church goers who show up at church, they look around, they see Jesus, and then go on their merry way without ever getting close to Him.

There are many who haven’t come to spend time with Jesus, they’ve just come to feel religious... and church is a great place to be religious.

But, the Wise Men didn’t just “show up”

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him...” Matthew 2:11

The Wise Men came to worship Jesus.

It’s almost as if they couldn’t help themselves.

Like they were compelled by being near Him... to go to their knees and worship Him.

Has that happened to you?

How would you know if you had?

Well, here's a few thoughts:

- Are you so compelled to be here on Sunday mornings that you feel frustrated when you can't make it?
- And when you get here, are you filled with joy when you sing the hymns and song of praise to Him? I mean, you don't just sing the words – they mean something to you as a way to show Jesus how much you love Him?
- And, can you hardly wait for the chance to eat His meal at His table?
- And do you hunger to find out what the Bible says about Him?

ILLUS: You see, when you've come to Jesus, like the Wise Men did, you begin to act someone who's in love. Have you ever seen a young man or woman who's deeply and hopelessly in love? It's nauseating isn't it?

They reread each other's letters, emails, and their texts.

They can't wait until they can get back together with the one they love.

And they look at their boyfriend/girlfriend's pictures all the time – they've got them on their walls, their wallet and on their computer.

When you reach that state of mind with Jesus you find you have to BOW DOWN before Him because you can't hardly imagine not being around Him.

But notice, the Wise Men did more than just bow down to Jesus.

The wise men "... fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." Matthew 2:11

You know, when you're in love, you want to give things to the person you love.

It matters WHAT you give them.

And you spend a lot of time picking out just the right gift to give them.

Here in Matthew 2 we're told that the Wise Men brought three gifts.

And we're told exactly what those gifts are.

Do you remember what those gifts were? (Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh)

Now, when you think about these three gifts, a couple things come to mind.

First they're expensive gifts.

Gold was one of the most valuable of metals.  
Frankincense was a costly perfume.  
And Myrrh was a precious oil.  
There's a lot of money wrapped up there.

But the 2nd thing that comes to mind is: these hardly seem appropriate gifts for a child.

ILLUS: One comedian observed: "If it had been 'Wise Women' instead of 'Wise Men', they would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole.

And Wise Women would have brought PRACTICAL gifts.  
Gifts from Baby's-R-Us, including diapers, wipes, bibs and formula."

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh aren't real "practical" gifts for a baby.  
Babies don't have much need for those items. They really don't care about gold and incense. Therefore these gifts couldn't have been real practical ... could they?

Well, actually they were.

And the reason these gifts were practical is because God helped them pick out the gifts.  
They were extremely practical for Jesus and His family.

ILLUS: Do you remember what happened right after the Wise Men left for home?

Matthew 2:13 says "When (the Wise Men) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

"Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Herod was jealous King. He had no intention of sharing his throne with anyone. He even killed his wife and two of his sons because he saw them as a threat to his kingship. So, when the Wise Men told him about this new "King of the Jews", it was his intention to kill this child and remove any doubt about Him taking his throne. As far as he was concerned, there was only room for one King in Israel.

So, when Herod realized the Wise Men had no intention of returning and telling him where this child could be found, Herod sent his soldiers to Bethlehem with orders to kill every child 2 years and under.

But Mary and Joseph had escaped.

They'd fled to Egypt

A place where they had no friends or family to help them.

A place where there was no one to meet their needs or help them find shelter.  
How could they survive?  
Where would they get the money to pay for food and lodging?

(Wait for the audience to respond)

That's right. They had gold.

Have you seen the price of an ounce of gold lately? I could live a pretty long time on just an ounce of gold. And Mary and Joseph had more than just a few ounces.

And once that ran out... Frankincense and Myrrh could be sold for a lot of cash.

Their little family would be comfortable in exile for quite a while and still have enough to set up shop once they came back to Nazareth to live.

But that's just the practical use of the gifts of the Wise Men.

Because, you see, God told us exactly what those gifts that were given to Jesus.

When He told us about the Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, He intended to declare to us just who Jesus was.

Gold was a gift you gave to a KING

Frankincense was a gift priests offered to a GOD

And Myrrh was used as an oil to PREPARE A BODY FOR BURIAL.

In fact John 19 tells us that Myrrh was used to embalm Jesus when he died. Myrrh was a gift symbolizing the preservation of life after death. It was a gift for a savior who would die for us all.

(Matthew Stoll – sermoncentral.com)

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In those three gifts, God declared that His son would be

- Our King
- Our God
- And Our Sacrifice... He would die for us.

In fact, that's what the last verse of that old Christmas Carol recognized.

I'll just sing you a little of it:

"Glorious now behold Him arise, KING and GOD and SACRIFICE.

Alleluia, alleluia! Sounds through the earth and skies."

So, let's review:

The Wise Men were compelled to find Jesus.

And when they found Him, they fell in love with Him and they bowed down and

worshipped Him. Then they gave Him gifts worthy of...

- Their King
- Their God
- And Their Sacrifice

(Pause) So... what gift do you bring to Jesus this year?

(Pointing to the offering plate)

You could answer that by giving \$10 in the offering plate.

Or \$100.

Or \$1000.

Or \$10,000

Well, you could.

But that's not really the gift Jesus is looking for.

The gift Jesus is pleased with is when you lift up your voice singing songs of praise to Him? You say you can't sing? No problem. God says He loves it when we make a "joyful noise"

And He's pleased with the gift of your presence at church each Sunday so that you can take of the Lord's Supper? He loves it when we make eating with Him a priority in our lives.

And He's pleased with the gift of opening your Bible to learn more about Him.

One man observed that Christmas is based on an exchange of gifts.

God's gift to us was His Son

Our gift to Him --- is our lives

(paraphrase of comment by Vance Havner)

If you don't belong to Jesus this morning, this would be a great time to give Him the gift of your life. And giving it is as easy as anything man has ever conceived:

1. All you need to do is believe that Jesus is who He said He was: the Son of God who came to offer Himself as our sacrifice.
2. And because you believe that, you recognize that you needed that sacrifice because you've sinned. You've messed up in your life and you want to turn it around. You want to repent of your past and your sins.
3. And you want to confess Jesus as your Master and Lord. That He owns everything you have and are.
4. And then, you simply allow yourself to be buried in the waters of Christian baptism and risen up a new creature.