

# Scribes, Herod and Wise Men

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> Dec 2011

## Intro

- We will look at the account of the coming of the wise men this morning.
- First we will look at the note the differences with what the Bible says to commonly believed traditions and also find out a bit more info about them.
- Next we will look at the 3 different reactions in this passage to the birth of Jesus- that of the Scribes, Herod and the wise men.

## Read Matt 2:1-12

### Info on the Wise Men and differences between the Bible and the Traditions

- **Kings?** Magi traditionally on Christmas cards are kings, but we don't know that they were. There are prophecies in the Bible about kings coming with gifts:

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60:3)

The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. (Psalm 72:10)

Because of your temple at Jerusalem, kings will bring you gifts. (Psalm 68:29)

However, we are not told the magi were kings (they may have been), however Old Testament prophecy has multiple fulfillments often speaking about an initial fulfillment to David or Israel and a later fulfillment with the Messiah. There was a man Tiridates the first who was both king of Armenia and also a magi and he travelled to Rome to see Nero with 3 other magi to give gifts to him, so this was a known practise at the time and magi were closely associated with kings- they would have advised kings.

- **Magi?** The wise men were magi (from where we get the word magic), associated with astrology (see Dan 2:2). They came from the East. This may well be the region of Babylonia. If so, they may have been influenced by the prophecies of Daniel (who also served alongside the Magi in his day serving the king of Babylon).

Daniel the prophet lived in Babylonia (about 605 BC) and was put in charge of all the wise men, the astrologers of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Daniel had a specific prophecy (the 70 'seven's' Dan 9:20-27) about when the Messiah would come. This would have been handed down. Daniel saved the astrologer's lives by interpreting the king's unrevealed dream- this would have been ample testimony to the astrologers that Daniel's God was the true God and would lead to Daniel's writings being preserved by some.

They may also have been influenced by the prophecy of Balaam which mentions a star in relation to Israel's king.

Balaam lived many years before Daniel (about 800yrs before, 1400 B.C) and was from Pethor in Babylonia (Deir 'Alla Inscription: Long Inscription relating a prophecy by Balaam son of Beor found on walls of ancient settlement in Jordan in 1967 by Dutch archaeologists. The text, in a language between Aramaic and Canaanite, can be dated to c.800 BC ). He was a sorcerer (Num 24:1) hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel when they entered the promised land, however, he was only able to speak what God said and ended up blessing Israel and predicting the coming of their king- **Num 24:17**- 'there shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre (i.e. king) shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab (i.e. Jesus ultimately shall protect Israel). Star is paralleled with king. Even though Balaam was bad and said dodgey stuff (and was eventually killed by Israel because he advised the Midianite women to seduce the Israelite men) God over-ruled and spoke through him on 4 occasions and also permitted his donkey to speak on 1 occasion.

- **How did they know?** The star was more than just an astological sign (although it may have started that way- Kepler identified a significant conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn at the time and others have mentioned comets and supernovas). It disappeared and reappeared and led them to a particular house- therefore at least

part of it must have been the shekina glory of God- a visible manifestation of God's presence- like the fire at pentecost, the burning bush and the pillar of fire in the wilderness for Israel.

- **3 of them?** They had 3 gifts, but their actual number is unstated. Traditional names in Western Church from 8<sup>th</sup> Cent Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, but Eastern has different names (& it's all probably made up).
- **Where?**- in a house in Bethlehem- this is not in the stable and Jesus is anything up to 2 years old, as this was the age of the children Herod would later try to kill.

### **We will now look at the 3 reactions in this passage to the birth of Christ:**

**The Scribes-** *v4-5 'called together the people' chief priests and teachers of the law he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea..'*

- They knew where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2, written about 700 years before Christ). This is good- they knew their Bibles- do we? Do we know the prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament?
- They were aware of the sign because all of Jerusalem was disturbed together with King Herod by the news. But they did not go down to Bethlehem to see for themselves.
- The Magi were from the East- Mesopotamia, probably Babylon. It is thought they travelled about 700 miles to get to see Jesus. The teachers of the law were living in Jerusalem, just 5 miles from Bethlehem. They were not prepared to travel 5 miles to see for themselves.
- 2 possible reasons- fear or apathy:
- **Fear-** King Herod was a nasty ruler and the fact that all Jerusalem was shaken by the news of the arrival of the Magi
- **Apathy-** They had compromised their walk with God and would later reject Jesus and have Him crucified. Jesus would rather we were hot or cold than lukewarm.
- **Application-** Don't be apathetic or afraid to follow Jesus as the teachers of the law were- choose to be passionate and on-fire for Jesus like the Wise Men. 'Wise men still seek Him today'- choose this year to walk deeper with God or to seek Him. 'Seek & you will find'-Matt 7:7. Jer 29:13-'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'

**Herod-** *v8 'as soon as you find Him report to me, so that I may go and worship Him'.*

- Herod was paranoid against conspirators and had his favourite wife and 4 of his own sons killed.
- Later had all the kids in Bethlehem 2 years and under killed.
- Following Jesus means changes- means humbling ourselves on a daily basis. Picking up our cross daily to follow Him. Jesus humbled Himself in the garden of Gethsemane to do the Father's will- this is our pattern- dying to self to live for God. Jesus said unless a seed dies it will not bear fruit.
- We want God's kingdom to come, but it must first come to us. The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of Jesus. This is what revival is. There is a cost to revival- are we willing to pay the price?
- **Application-** Make a choice to surrender to Jesus this year. Bring areas of rebellion and surrender them to God. Realise that the gains of sin are only short lived- Herod is no longer on the throne but Jesus still is- we will reap eternal rewards for sacrifices we make for God's kingdom.

**The Magi-** *v11 '..they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh'*

- Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh (burn some)- very costly presents- Jesus' parents were so poor they could only offer the cheapest offering at the temple in Jerusalem for Mary's purification after childbirth- a pair of turtle doves-Lk 2:24. Perhaps used this gift to live on when fled to Egypt before the massacre of infants. God deserves our all in worship to Him in recognition of His greatness and kindness to us.
- Had to disobey Herod- risked their own lives to worship the King. True worship has a cost.
- Also travelled 700 miles each way, probably by camel. Again- worship has a cost.
- **Application-** how costly is our worship of the king? David said he would not sacrifice to the Lord that which cost him nothing. Have we got stuck in a rut with our worship of Jesus, just mouthing the words and going through the motions but hearts far from Jesus. Use this Christmas time as opportunity to renew our love for Jesus and to be creative in our thanksgiving to the King.

## Summary

We need to be more like the wise men:

- The scribes were fearful and apathetic, but the wise men were passionate.
- Herod was paranoid and proud, but the wise men were submissive.
- The wise men were worshippers