

January 6, 2024

Abounding Joy
Matthew 2:1-12

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ~ Matthew 2:10

The visit of the “wise men” is a famous story—but what exactly is it intended to teach us?

To begin with, the focus is on “worship” (three times repeated in these twelve verses), and a contrast between the response of Herod and the response of the Magi (or the “wise men”).

Herod responds in fear, and a vicious secret plot begins to brew in his mind to protect his kingdom from this apparent threat of the newborn king. The Magi have come to worship, and because of this, they experienced great joy, rejoicing with great joy. Herod pretends that he too wishes to worship, but the reality is very different.

The Christ-child has always called us to respond either in faith in worship, or if we find his rule a threat, we may find ourselves responding in a more Herod-like fashion. There are “Herods” today who object to the exclusivity of Christ, the claim of his kingship, the claim that he is the Savior (and the only Savior).

Somewhere inside all of us, there is a tendency to give way to fear, and fear that this king will uproot our little Herod-like kingdom over our own world and neighborhood, and our own little empire. And in a way He will.

He must be worshipped, and therefore He must be put back on the throne of our lives. But when we do that, we also experience joy, great joy, exceeding joy.

The other theme here, of course, is that of the Magi or the “wise men.” In ancient culture these Magi were thought to represent an astrological or astronomical star gazing, an Eastern wisdom, perhaps even “magic.”

They function here in this story first to remind the hearers that Jesus was also about bringing people of all cultures and races to worship him. Second, they also function to tell us that all wisdom—even this strange Eastern wisdom—is really one that finds its fulfillment in Christ.

He is Lord of heaven and earth, and, yes, of the stars too, this miraculous star leading the way.

Come then, bow before him, and worship him as the real King, put away our Herod-like fears, and join with the Magi in experiencing and sharing in our great Christian joy.

***Prayer:** Loving God, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I love you and thank you for sending Jesus. Please receive my heartfelt worship and praise for his worthiness and glory and use me to advance his cause in the world. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

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