

## Focus Texts

### Mathew 2:1-6,9-11 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> “ ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

...

<sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

<sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

## “WE SAW HIS STAR”

*(1) The wise men are the message to us, that the Lord brings people from afar, to show Him honour and (2) the message of the star is that the King of the world has been born!*

### INLEIDING

The story of Jesus' birth is not a new story for most of us.

We know about Jesus in the manger with Mary. We know the story of the angels who appear to the shepherds in the open field.

### **But what exactly is the message of the star and the wise men from the East?**

The wise men say to Herod: "**We saw his star in the East**". The **star** convinced them to take the long journey to Jerusalem, in search of the King of the Jews!

What a miracle! A star guides a group of strangers from afar, to Bethlehem - to Jesus!

Perhaps we have heard this Bible story so many times, that we no longer dwell on the fact that Jesus' birth was really a very special, wonderful and festive day!

### **What effect does the message of the star have on us?**

- Some, like king Herod, will be very **upset** about this.
- Others, like the Scribes of Jerusalem, will actually be quite **indifferent**.

But we want, like the wise men, to *see* the star of the King of the Jews, today. And we also want to **honour the Lord Jesus Christ with indescribable joy!**

Therefore, we look,

(i) Firstly, to the **message of the wise men** and

(ii) Then, to the **message of the star**.

...First, we must hear the **message or the wise men...**

## 1. THE MESSAGE OF THE WISE MEN

### [Statement]

#### 1.1 They come from the East

The **wise men** are one of those figures in the Bible about whom many people have wondered a lot.

There are many theories and speculations about them.

Let's just fall with the door into the house and say directly: we don't know exactly who they were or where they came from.

Still, even if we don't know exactly, that doesn't mean we should just read the story without trying to understand.

Then we will miss the **message of the wise men!**

There are many things about the wise men that are indeed given in the text.

For a start we read that the wise men came to Jerusalem from the **East**.

With this, the Holy Spirit wants to convey a very important message to us. We will see this when we look **at the symbolic meaning of the "east"** in the Bible.

In the Bible there is a:

- (i) **positive** as well as a
- (ii) **negative** meaning behind the eastern direction.

**(i) In a positive sense, the East indicates light, the Paradise, God's recreation and redemption.**

We read e.g. in Gen. 2 that God laid down the garden of Eden in the **East**.

However, after the fall into sin, Adam & Eve were chased out of the garden and the Lord placed cherubim in front of the entrance to the garden on the **east side**, to guard it (Gen. 3).

Since the garden of Eden was closed and guarded, there is this thought throughout the Bible that God's people want to go **back to the Garden - back to God**.

That is why the Lord also commands that the entrance to the Tabernacle and Temple must always face the **east**. The **entrance to the Tabernacle also had to be open**.

So, when the people move into the Tabernacle's front court, they move **from the east in a west direction**. Symbolically, they move closer to God.

The Tabernacle's **open entrance** facing **due east** in the direction of the sunrise points to the coming Messiah! The Christ, who **is the only entrance to the Most Holy presence of God**.

Like the sun rises in the east, so will the **Christ be the Light for the nations!**

When someone wants to go to the Father, then he can **only go through Christ, the only entrance to the Father!**

(ii) There is also **negative symbolism in the Bible linked to the east**. **When someone moves to the east, it usually indicates the symbolic removal from God.**

Think of the murderer Cain, of whom there is in Gen. 4 expressly said that he went away from God and went to live in Nod, **east** of Eden.

Lot, Abraham's nephew moved **east** to live in the land of Sodom & Gomorrah, says Gen. 13.

Much later, the people of Israel were also taken into exile to Babylon, which lies **east** of Jerusalem.

When someone **moves towards the east**, it indicates removal from God. When someone **comes from the east**, it indicates salvation.

The wise men of Matthew 2 do not move to the east. They are arriving in Jerusalem **from the east!**

The message of the wise men from the east, is clear!

They move **closer to God**. They go to Christ, the Light for the nations, the **only entrance to the Most Holy presence of the Father!**

The wise men come from a dark place of exile, **far from God to the feet of Emmanuel!**

Christ is the Saviour, also for these strangers from the east!

...And pay close attention! They didn't just blindly move west - they deliberately followed the star...

### **[Statement]**

#### **1.2. They have insight into the star of Bethlehem**

The wise men say:

*"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For **we saw his star when it rose...**" (v.2)*

They knew it wasn't just another star. They had **insight into the meaning of the star**.

They understood (partially) what that particular star meant.

How can it be that these people from the east understand what a star means?

This information is also not expressly given to us. But we can make inferences.

The Greek word for "wise men" is ***maghoi***, which can also be translated as "**magicians**".

***Maghoi*** refers in broad terms to pagan people who were familiar with the occult or star and dream interpretations and all kinds of medicine.

The pagan people saw these **maghoi** as wise people. People with supernatural insights and powers of the gods. Sometimes they were also priests.

Daniel, who was taken into exile with the rest of Israel to Babel (in the east) many years ago, also had to do with such magicians, we read in Daniel 2.

The **soothsayer priests, fools and magicians** had to try to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's visions and dreams. They couldn't. But the Lord gave Daniel insight to be able to do it.

Later Daniel had a very strong influence, there among the people and the **magicians** of Babel. He received prophetic visions of the coming King of the Jews. Go read e.g. his prophecy in Dan. 9.

We also read of another person who was in exile in the East. In Persia. Queen Esther. Esther also protected and promoted the Jewish people and their expectation of a Messiah - just think of the Purim festival of Est. 9, which has been celebrated by the Jews for years.

So how did it happen that the magicians from the east know what the Star of Bethlehem means?

Well, the Jewish influences and writings of people like Esther and Daniel remained there in the east and lived on among the people of Babylon and Persia. As well as the influences of the other Israelites who lived there in the East, of course.

**The information was all at the disposal of the magicians, the soothsayers and the astrologers.**

And this is most likely how the wise men of Matthew 2 understood what the Star of Bethlehem means!

So, our text today, doesn't want to say that sorcery is right. The passage does not want to tell us that we should try to obtain information from God through astrology and fortune telling. Not at all.

On the contrary, Matthew wants to show us that **the wise men were the furthest from the truth. It should have been highly impossible for the wise men to know anything about Jesus' birth!** They are far removed from God! They are physically far from Jerusalem and they are spiritually far from the Lord, because they practice astrology and sorcery!

And **yet the Lord provided and gave them insight into the meaning of the star! The Lord guides these lost people with his star!**

Their insight and information are indeed defective.

Therefore, they first stop there in Jerusalem at Herod, to ask him for more information. They think: 'surely Herod will know that the King of the Jews was born there in his territory?'

Think about this now...

Here are these famous, pagan wise men. They embark on a very long journey of several weeks with a lot of equipment and supplies. As well as the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that they want to bring to the King.

Yet they don't even know exactly where they are going! They just know, they must follow the star. They must move in a *western* direction, to Judea!

Then it is so beautiful to see how these men do not pay tribute or show honour to Herod. No, they know, Herod is not the One. He is not the real king.

They only stop at Herod to ask him for directions! Herod must tell them where the real King of the Jews are!

But Herod doesn't know. On the contrary. He is very upset to hear about Jesus' birth, we read in v. 3. All of Jerusalem were also upset because they are afraid of Herod's reaction!

Herod then calls the Jewish scribes and high priests. Of all, surely, they will know where the King was born?

The scribes have the scriptures. They have all the necessary information and they know exactly where the King will be born.

But the Jewish Scripture experts, unlike the pagan wise men, are completely indifferent.

**Without any excitement**, the priests just repeat the prophecies they know so well:

*“ ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, ...for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ” (v.6)*

Bethlehem! Bethlehem is where the King is! And with that the **wise men went on, while the scribes and the priests stay behind.**

... What effect does the message of the wise men have on us?...

### **[Application]**

Our King was born many years ago and the Lord brought people from far away to worship Him!

- Are you **upset** by this news, like Herod - because Jesus poses as a power threat to you? Or are you upset, because you are afraid of the reaction of people?
- Are you perhaps **indifferent** to the message this morning? Have we heard this story of the wise men and of Jesus so much, that we no longer respond to God's Word and His promises?
- Don't be left behind. You and I must **move closer to God**. Towards Christ.

The Lord let His Light shine upon us - we who were in spiritual land far from God!

Now we may enter, through Christ, the only door and entrance to the Father and His all-holy presence!

With the Star of Bethlehem that shines here in His Word, Today, the Lord brings you to the feet of Emmanuel.

This is the **message of the wise men!**

...And now we must also hear the message of the **star**...

## **2. THE MESSAGE OF THE STAR**

## [Statement]

### 2.1. The star is the fulfilment of prophecies

Perhaps you are wondering, what was this star we read about in Matthew 2?

- Some say maybe it was a **shooting star**.
- Others say it was a **constellation of Jupiter and Saturn**.
- Some other people claim it may have been an **angel**.

We don't know.

What do we know? What does the Scripture say?

We know the Lord is placing a bright, **dazzling message in heaven for all the world to see**. As Ps. 19 says:

**"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.** (Ps.19:1)

The Lord announced His glory in the firmament above with the Star of Bethlehem in heaven!

The message of the Star of Bethlehem was that the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24 will be fulfilled:

**"...a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel..."**  
(Num.24:17)

What does the prophecy mean?

This means a ruler will arise from the descendants of Jacob. And it is Jesus Christ! He is the **star** of Jacob!

In Revelation Jesus says:

“I am the bright **morning star**.” (Rev. 22:16)

...The star above Bethlehem is the clear fulfilment of God's prophecies!...

### **[Statement]**

#### **2.2. The star shines over the King of the world**

And with the shining star above Bethlehem, the wise men also found the birthplace of the **shining Morning Star**! They then found the **star of Jacob**!

“...behold, the star that they had seen when it rose **went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.**” (v.9)

The night is pitch dark, but the Lord's star shines so that the nations will come to his light!

Isaiah 60 says this:

*“...for your light has come, **and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.** For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. **And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.**” (Isa. 60:1-3)*

In other words:

**Just as the wise men came from far away to the light of the Star of Bethlehem, so the nations will come from everywhere to the light of the shining Morning Star, Jesus Christ!**

The Lord brings the important ones of the world to come and kneel in a stable, next to a manger by the baby Jesus.

One would think that the wise men were disappointed when they finally found the place of Jesus' birth. Maybe they were expecting a palace? Maybe great luxury and bodyguards with opulence and wealth?

What do they find? They find a little child, among the animals, with his poor mother.

But they're not disappointed. On the contrary, they are **indescribably happy!** Here it literally says, they have a "**mega-joy!**" They are **totally overwhelmed with joy!**

These travellers from a distant land were converted at some point. They were children of the Lord, because they did not just come to complete a political exchange.

Here it states,

"...they **fell down** and **worshipped** him.." (v.10)

Which means, they **worshipped** Jesus as their Lord!

Do you see. It isn't only Jews who worship Jesus. This Jesus is King from the north to the south, the west to the east!

**The message of the star** is clear to them: **the Light for the nations, the King of the world and the Saviour of men lies in this manger!**

He is to be **worshipped!** He must **be worshiped with great joy!**

## CONCLUSION

### [Application]

What effect does the message of the Star of Bethlehem have on us?

We want, like the wise men, to **honour the Lord Jesus Christ today with indescribable joy!**

He has brought us today from all over, to recognise Him as King over the north, south, west and the east - the whole world!

Don't let the message of the Star of Bethlehem pass you by today!

The King is no longer in a manger. He is high above us, far above the stars.

Worship Him!

**AMEN!**

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