

## Experience the Miracle of Christmas #5

Typically, in our Christmas series messages, we look at just the Bible stories leading up to Christmas but this year, I wanted to include a story that happens after Christ was born.

So today, we're going to look at the Miracle of the Magi; how God works His way into our worlds. **I love the story of the magi.**

I love the picture that the story of the magi paints in my imagination:

A special star shining bright.

A stable illuminated by the star.

A young woman kneeling by a manger.

A new mother's love radiating from her face.

A man standing beside her, gentle and strong.

A baby lying in the manger,

A few pieces of straw grasped in his tiny fist.

A sheep here. A cow there.

And three distinguished gentlemen bowing before the baby, their faces filled with awe, their hands outstretched with gifts too beautiful and rich for a stable.

I must admit my imagination is affected as much by modern nativity scenes and Christmas pageants as Matthew's gospel account.

But the magi didn't arrive Christmas Day like the shepherds did, they arrived several days or weeks or months later. They didn't find Jesus in the stable where he was born, they found him in a house that presumably became home to Joseph and Mary after the stable and before the flight to Egypt.

And we don't know if there were **three magi**. There were **at least two**. Maybe there **were six**. Maybe 12 like the Eastern Orthodox Church's tradition suggests. The Bible doesn't say. There were 3 gifts. **So maybe 3 magi?**

Still, I love the picture. And at least some of it matches Matthew's account.

**There was a star.** And there were **mysterious gentlemen from the East bowing before Jesus**, awe in their faces and magnificent gifts in their hands.

Some accounts refer to these Magi as Wisemen, others, as 3 Kings. Matthew simply calls them **Magi**.

The idea that they may have been kings comes out of an Old Testament prophecy from **Isaiah 60** which says...

**Isaiah 60:3-6**, *“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.”*

So yes, ever since that day that Jesus was born, nations and kings have streamed into Jerusalem offering their riches in praise of the Lord. But in Matthew’s account they were **Magi**: philosophers, astrologers, astronomers, wise sages.

All of that information aside, ***what the Bible does tell us*** is that they were people very interested in when a certain king would be born.

**Matthew 2:1-12**, “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 when it rose and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **When he had** called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: **“But you, Bethlehem**, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. **He sent them** to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. **When they saw** the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

There’s something to learn from this story—something about following stars.

I want to share with you 4 things about how the miracle of the magi was made possible and how we can experience that miracle in our own lives.

### **1. FIRST, YOU HAVE TO SEE THE STAR.**

That requires that we keep our eyes open, and our hearts too.

These magi were looking, waiting and anticipating by watching for signs in heavens. The magi may not have known God, but they knew stars.

They knew when something extraordinary was happening in the night sky. They saw that peculiar star, and they took note. They investigated. They conferred with one another.

### **What seemed extraordinary captured their imagination.**

They didn't turn their eyes to another part of the sky, hoping to see the familiar and be reassured. They did not grasp at explanations, hoping to have their own previous knowledge confirmed. They saw that peculiar star rising, and they took note. Their observations and investigations led them to believe that this star was a sign that a new Jewish king had been born.

**Matthew 2:1-2**, *“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 when it rose and have come to worship him.”*

The magi were open to evidence that God was doing something special in their world. When the star marking the birth of Jesus appeared, the magi saw it, they thought on it and they looked for an answer to its purpose.

*The star God sends to you or to me might be something completely different. It might be just the right word from a friend at just the right moment. It might be a vision in a dream. It might be an impression during prayer. It might be an insight from a book. It might be something we hear on the radio or see God doing, not in our own life, but in the life of someone we know.*

*Whatever it is, **we need to be open to seeing the special thing God** is doing in our little corner of the world, in our lives.*

The **Magi** – who studied the sky - were given a special star to capture **their attention**. Whatever it is that you specialize in, God can use that to speak to you and guide you.

There have been different explanations of what this star was that they saw rising. Some say it was a comet, but most people believe that it was a result of the conjunction of two planets, **Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC**, which loomed like a star and which happened every 20 years.

These star gazers may have known every scientifically reasonable explanation for this phenomenon in their day and time, but they still left room for the mysterious. They accepted the idea that a “simple star or comet” could be a sign that maybe a greater power was at work.

Reason it all away with practical explanation and you will lose sight of the star that is rising to get your attention in your life.

## **2. NEXT, YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW THE STAR.** *This requires movement.*

When the magi saw the star, they followed it. They didn't know where it would lead. They didn't know how long it would take. They rearranged their schedules, found someone to water their plants and feed the cat, and then packed up their belongings and set out on a long journey toward Judea as they followed the star.

The magi were willing to rearrange their lives to check out the evidence that God was doing something special in their world.

The magi traveled a great distance. They didn't just move; they moved a lot. The journey to Bethlehem was 1000 miles and probably took about 2 months.

To travel this great distance over difficult terrain, they clearly had a great desire to see and worship this new King.

They also brought with them the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which were very valuable gifts.

So, I expect they had a few conversations over several campfires about the wisdom of their travels, but still they stuck with the star.

So be open to seeing the star that God may be using to get your attention and then follow after it. And while you are doing so, know that it is perfectly acceptable to use the brain you were born with.

Common sense can be helpful. So can the advice of experts. The star led the magi to Judea. It only made sense for the magi to go to Jerusalem, the capital city. ***Where else would you expect to find a king?***

**But remember this too: Common sense and expert knowledge have their limitations.**

Once in Jerusalem, the magi were not too **proud to ask directions**.

**They consulted** the authorities and they obtained advice from **scholars** who knew the ancient texts that they did not know.

**Matthew 2:7-8.** *“Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”*

Consulting the experts, the magi learned that this particular newborn king was to be found, not in the obvious place--Jerusalem, but in a most unlikely place--the little town of Bethlehem. Accordingly, they changed their travel plans.

Later, the magi found out that Herod, the very one who had provided access to the experts, was an enemy, not a friend, of the newborn king. And, therefore, also a threat to them.

**Sometimes, what seems helpful turns out to be wrong, and the experts turn out to be dangerous.**

They learned what they could from the authorities and experts, but they did not obey them without thought. They used their brains – intellect.

**So listen to advice and get counsel, but always keep the star before you.** That is, as long as it draws you into scripture and according to scripture.

Equipped with their new information about Bethlehem, the magi left Jerusalem. But still they followed the star that had brought them thus far.

**Matthew 2:9-10.** *“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”*

So far, the star had been a faithful guide. It had drawn them into Jerusalem and into scripture - the ancient biblical prophecies. And the star continued to lead them in accordance with scripture, leading them to Bethlehem.

**Presumably**, if the star had begun to lead them in ways that contradicted scripture, the magi would have known enough to stop and question its leading.

**3. DON'T GET SO ATTACHED TO THE STAR THAT YOU MISS WHAT (WHO) IT POINTS TO.** The star is a guide.

The purpose of the star is to get your attention and encourage you along your journey. Joy comes from DISCOVERING the purpose of the journey—**Jesus**.

When the star had led the magi to Bethlehem, they were overjoyed...

**Matthew 2:9-11**, *“And the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.”*

They were joyful because the star had served its purpose. They stopped looking at the star **and they gazed on Jesus instead**.

And Matthew says. **Seeing Jesus was just the beginning.**

Having made contact with Jesus, the magi acknowledged his Lordship. They bowed down and worshiped him. They didn't simply pat each other on the back for having made it to their destination.

Meeting Jesus, no matter how long the journey to that point, was just the beginning. **Bowing in humble servitude to His Lordship leads to responding with gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

Having acknowledged his Lordship, the magi gave of themselves. They presented him with the very best gifts they had to offer. They knew he was king. They honored him as their king. And lastly, they were told that because of the evil intentions of Herod they had to...

**4. GO HOME ANOTHER WAY.**

God wanted them and His Son protected from the evil in the world. Besides that, when they left Bethlehem, the magi were changed. They were going home, but it was a whole new journey entirely. They weren't just tracking their steps back to where they came from. They went home by another way.

They traveled a different route on the map.

I think it's safe to say that they traveled a different route in their lives too. An intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people.

An encounter with Jesus changes our direction, we are prompted by His Holy Spirit to go home another way. To change. To be transformed.

For the Magi and Us, it all starts by Seeing the star and then following it to our ultimate purpose – to an intimate encounter with Jesus.

So that when we return home, we live a different way.

**You see, there is something to learn from this story of the Magi.**

Something about special stars that capture our attention and guide us.  
Something about following those stars.

Something about bowing before Jesus and offering him our very best.  
Something about honoring him as king, serving Him and offer Him our gifts.  
Something about traveling a different route after that.

Because an intimate encounter with Jesus has a way of doing that to people.

There's something to learn from this story for people who didn't grow up in church.

Who don't know much of anything about Jesus.

Who know about God, but don't have an intimate relationship with him.

Who never went to Sunday school. Who never memorized any Bible verses.

Who don't know anything substantial from Genesis to Revelation.

**And** there's something to learn from this story for people **who do know Jesus** and who've walked with him for a lifetime, and for everybody in between.

There was a time when the magi lived far away from Jesus, so far that they knew nothing about him.

What an amazing thing—to be gifted with a special star to capture their attention and to guide them.

**IN CONCLUSION:**

God just might give you a star to capture your attention and to guide you. And if you follow that star, everything just might change. An intimate encounter

with Jesus has a way of doing that to people, whether it's the first intimate encounter or the fiftieth.

There isn't a single one of us who doesn't still have some distance between how we live and a perfect relationship with Jesus.

When we think about it, we're like the Wisemen. We have a need and a longing for hope, to know that the future can be better and brighter than today.

That in the midst of all of the madness, there will come peace.

We need to know that we are never really alone and that there is light in the midst of the darkness. We need to know that He will bring something beautiful out of all of the pain and darkness of this life. We need that.

Too often we can only see the darkness that's in front of us. That's why we need the light of the world breaking forth in the birth of the Christ child. We need to know there is hope, there is a Redeemer and a Savior, there is light for us and forgiveness and grace.

And so, like the wisemen, we journey in the darkness to the manger to remember the light that came into the world.

But we have to **Choose to Believe**. Becoming a Christian starts with a decision of faith.

You have to choose to trust that God actually cares about you. You have to choose to believe that His words are Truth. To believe that He sent His Son to go to the cross and by His death, paid the price for your sins and so you could receive forgiveness. You have to choose to believe that on the third day, the tomb was empty and he rose from the dead and that the worst thing is not the last thing.

We choose to believe that and when we do, we find what the wisemen found as the text describes - that their hearts were filled with joy. That joy is the fuel that sparks our worship. A worship that serves God with all we have.

This message of the miracle of the Magi is for you today, whether you know very little about Jesus or have known Him for decades. Have open eyes and hearts to see the star God is using in your life to draw you to Him, follow it, and when you find what He has been waiting for you to know, embrace it. It will transform your life... ***Will you Pray with Me?***