

## The Worship of the Magi from the East

Matthew 2,1-11  
Key Verses 2:10,11

"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 and of incense and of myrrh."

Merry and blessed Christmas! Thanks be to God for sending the power of salvation, Jesus into the world so that we may be freed from the power of sin and death and serve Him without fear in righteousness and holiness. Praise be to Jesus, our Savior, who encourages us daily to overcome all fear and anxiety and who proclaims great joy to us through his Word. The joy in Jesus is an invincible and constantly springing joy, which the world does not know and cannot bear. He is the Christ and the Lord for all people in this land and in this continent of Europe.

Today we study Matthew chapter 2. Through the Magi from the east we learn the mystery of the overwhelming joy in Jesus and true worship. God grant us open hearts to personally encounter the newborn King, Jesus, and to be filled with the overwhelming joy. God set us up as true worshippers for Jesus in our generation!

### 1. They found life with overwhelming joy

Let's look at verse 1: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem." The evangelist Matthew begins the Christmas story with some important facts about the birth of Jesus: in Bethlehem in Judea; in the time of King Herod. This Herod was a vassal king appointed by the Roman Emperor Augustus over the territory of Palestine. Herod was extremely cold-blooded and obsessed with power. He even

had his closest relatives killed out of fear. Also spiritually seen that time was one of the darkest times for the people of God. There had been no revelation of God through a prophet for more than 400 years. The religious leaders were spiritually corrupt and lived for their belly and own glory. When Jesus was born, no one took notice of the fulfillment of God's promises. As we heard last Sunday, it was only some shepherds in the field who heard of the birth of Jesus and were attentive to the angel of the Lord announcing to them the good news of the birth of the Christ.

Today's text tells us that there were some Magi in the far East who heard something of the epoch-making event of the birth of Jesus. These Magi were scholars or astronomers, that is, educated people. They studied the ancient scriptures and diligently explored the starry sky. One day they were amazed to see a brand new star shining brightly in the firmament. With the help of Jewish scriptures, which had probably come into their possession through the Babylonian captivity of the Israelites, they knew something of a promised Messiah. These scholars, in their scriptural explorations, came across a passage of God's word where it says in Numbers 24:17: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth." Wow. "Star of Jacob"; "scepter from Israel." This clearly pointed to a king who

would be the promised Messiah. The Magi did not hesitate. They took special leave and set out on a long arduous journey that lasted at least three months.

What can we learn from the Magi? We see that they were deeply truth-seeking people, that is, they had great spiritual desire to see and experience with their eyes the fulfillment of God's promises, the newborn King. When they saw the new star, they acted consequently. For the Magi, a word from God was enough to leave everything behind and begin a long pilgrimage. This is how they wanted to learn the truth about the newborn King of the Jews. Let us read verse 2: "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." The Magi were actually doing well in the East. They had good jobs, were recognized, materially prosperous, and could live secure lives. But in their hearts they were searching for something else - namely, for the truth. They had realized that their good conditions were ultimately of no value if they did not find the truth and the meaning of their lives. When they saw the star of promise, they could be filled with joy and leave everything behind and begin a long pilgrimage to meet the newborn King in person. Because of the Word of God, they were eager to know how God's promise about the Messiah had been fulfilled. Their souls thirsted to know the truth.

What did the spiritual leaders in Judea do when God had given His people the star of promises about the coming Messiah? The spiritual leaders were spiritually asleep and took no notice of Jesus' birth. Let us also ask ourselves personally, "With what heart am I looking for the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promises? Do I have a deep longing to meet Jesus, to know Him more deeply, and to develop a personal life relationship with Him?" Many young people in Germany today seek happiness and joy through human idols, money, careers, or social media. But the apparent happiness and supposed joy of these things is only short-lived. Thus, their innermost being re-

mains empty and unfulfilled. On top of that, for almost two years now, a small invisible virus has seemingly ruled the world. We hear almost nothing in the news other than Corona / Covid / Lockdown / Vaccination / Mandatory Vaccination and Boosters. Of course, we don't have to ignore the virus. Yet we must not allow the virus to rule all our thoughts and actions. So many people are fearful and desperate. Many are suffering from loneliness. And Satan even takes advantage of this pandemic to seduce believers and distract them from the truth of eternal life. At the time of Jesus' birth, people were also deceived: they only saw that the Roman Empire was spreading over the world like a virus, so they lived in great fear because of Herod's reign of terror.

Here we can learn from the Magi from the East that they were not seduced by the political situation or the spirit of the times. They acted consistently by setting out to experience the fulfillment of the Word of God, the Messiah. Let us overcome seduction and fear through the pandemic and through the darkness of this time, and devote ourselves resolutely to Bible study so that we can come to know the truth of eternal life and a fulfilled victorious life, and prepare and equip ourselves like the Magi from the Orient for the era of the 2030s and 2040s.

For many years of my life I did not know the truth of God's word. Although I grew up in a Christian home, I ignored the Word of God and lived according to my sinful ego. I sought fulfillment through money, career and human recognition. I even wanted to make a big name for myself as a businessman, shining day and night in big letters. But inwardly I was so empty and desperate that I cried out inwardly, "I wretched man! Who will deliver me from this death-devastated body?" Thanks be to Jesus, for he heard my heart's cry. He invited me to His living Word so that I could meet Jesus as my King and LORD and accept His dominion over my life. He revealed Jesus' unconditional forgiving love to me on the cross through the words of Luke 23:34a: "Father,

forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Now I get to live a holy pilgrim life according to Ezekiel 37:10 and Nehemiah 2:17, following Jesus day by day and serving as a shepherd, Bible teacher, and spiritual leader for spiritual revival in Europe to intellectual young people on campus. So, with my house church, I serve the Bonn/Rhine-Sieg University of Applied Sciences with the Gospel and challenge the further mission in East Germany, Europe and all the way to the Muslim world. Instead of being deceived by the spirit of the times and the power of death, we may follow the star of God's Word, Nehemiah 2:17 and Ezekiel 37:10, by making the spiritually dead bones of young people alive with the Word of God and work together for the work of spiritual revival in this generation and for the mobilization of the Next Generation.

Let us read again verse 2: "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." After a long arduous journey, the Magi arrived in Jerusalem. They went to the palace of King Herod. But in the king's palace there was no newborn king of the Jews. Their coming made King Herod's ears prick up. When he realized that this foreign delegation was not asking for him at all, but was looking for the newborn king of the Jews, Herod raged. Let's look at verse 3: "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." All his envy, prestige-seeking and recognition-seeking surfaced again and caused the whole city of Jerusalem to be terrified. Immediately Herod summoned all the chief priests and scribes of the people. These reported to the king a word from the prophet Micah. Let us read verse 6: "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel." This promise from Micah 5:1 says that the Messiah would not be born in the capital city at all, but in the little town of Bethlehem. Jesus came not as a magnificent worldly king, but as a humble spiritual king. He is a shepherd king who rules the hearts of the people with

love and with peace. He is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and leads them to green pastures and fresh water.

Look at verses 7 and 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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." Herod pretended to be nice and friendly, although he had evil in mind. Like the devil, he was a liar from the beginning. Today, evil powers also rule people through Corona, Internet, all kinds of crises. Let us, instead of being ruled by these seductions, like the Magi, actively seek with discernment the true King, the true object of worship, Jesus.

Let us read verses 9 to 11: "After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east 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 and of incense and of myrrh." On the way to Bethlehem, the star went before them and led them to the place where the little child was. The Magi rejoiced greatly and went into the house and found Mary with the baby Jesus. They were greatly rejoiced (Luther translation). They rejoiced with very great joy (Elberfelder translation). Have you also experienced this very great joy this Christmas season? This overwhelming joy only comes through a personal encounter with Jesus, our Savior, King and LORD. This encounter is not a one-time thing. The first encounter is the beginning of a lifelong life relationship with Jesus because of the Word of God and because of His forgiveness grace. The true and great joy comes from the life and love relationship with Immanuel.

We remember the book of Nehemiah. When the city of God was helpless against the enemies and the walls of Jerusalem were broken and its gates burned with fire, Nehemiah mobilized his people to build the wall. Despite constant attacks from the enemy, the Israelites worked well together and completed the wall construction in only 52 days. They repented of their idolatry and returned to the Word of God. Nehemiah 12:43 says, "And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away." As they served God together and praised God, they all became joyful. God Himself caused great joy among His people when they lived again with God and with the Word of God. Such great joy was also experienced by the Magi. Their hard spiritual and practical struggle to leave their accustomed life in the Orient and set out on the arduous and dangerous journey to find the infant child was richly rewarded and blessed by God

We also have great joy because we see the gracious guidance and mighty work of God in our work during the past years. Great joy fills our hearts that our baptized children are growing spiritually in the midst of various temptations and are participating in the rest of Jesus' sufferings with determination and joy. Great joy fills our hearts as our bible students, children and youth worked together in the Christmas Theater performances and worshiped Jesus with heartfelt love. Great joy was experienced as we mobilized next generation workers through GLEF, Junior Leadership Camp, Global Leaders Conference and Master Classes this year in the midst of a pandemic and received strengthening, encouragement and vision through the Word of God. Let us actively share our joy with young people during this time and invite them to the great true joy in Christ. The evil power of the coronavirus will burn out, but the star of the Messiah shines forever. The true perfect joy is in Jesus alone! He is Christ, the LORD, and the great joy that will come to all people!

## 2. The true worship

Let us read again verse 11: "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 and of incense and of myrrh." The Magi had only one desire: to find the promised Messiah in a miserable manger and worship him. For this they had invested everything. In their joy, they fell down and worshipped the little child. They opened their treasures and gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. They received no gift in return, but they were not disappointed. Why did they prepare such precious valuable gifts for a little child? These gifts speak very profoundly about who the newborn King, Jesus, is. Gold is the symbol of a king of kings. It shows something of Jesus' deity and is a reflection for the glory of God. Frankincense is so fragrantly beautiful and was offered by priests when making sacrifices. It points to the purity and healing power of the Savior and to the true High Priest, Jesus. Myrrh has a very bitter taste - a reference to Jesus' substitutionary painful death on the cross for our sin. From the Magi we learn here about true worship. They came to Jesus and worshiped the infant and opened their precious treasures and went back without expectation of return.

How may we be true worshipers? Many co-workers bring their early morning prayer, deep Bible research and joyful one-to-one Bible study with a sheep and their invincible faith struggle with the Word of God as a treasure to Jesus. M. Priska brought her missionary life as her precious treasure to Jesus by forming a house church with a local shepherd. She brings her whole life to Jesus by bearing all kinds of pains and persistent prayers for the mobilization and spiritual education of her children and sheep with joy. Although she suffers from arm, shoulder and knee pains, she serves the work of God selflessly and devotedly. She always cordially prepares the environment for the work of God by keeping the lamp of prayer burning in the center. Sh. Johannes

brings his precious time and shepherd's heart as treasures to Jesus by serving our Mustard Seed Orchestra despite serving in the clinic and post-doctoral work. The house church of M. Peter and M. Sarah has been giving their mission house church as precious treasures to Jesus for more than 41 years, giving up their private lives and resolutely using their treasures for the disciple-making work. They even rejoice over many persecutions and misunderstandings and serve the work of God, especially for the global leadership of the Next Generation. Instead of thinking of retirement, they are determined to establish 120 mission bases for the M-mission and for the world mission, which could mean martyrdom for them.

At the time of the first early church, there was a cruel persecutor: Saul. He went about seeking whom he could seize and throw into prison. But the resurrected Jesus met this enemy of God, led him to repentance and called him to be the chosen instrument of God for the world mission. When Apostle Paul received the grace of forgiveness through Jesus, he led a 180-degree changed new life. He held fast to the grace of God despite countless afflictions, sufferings, stoning, caning, shipwreck, imprisonment, and dangers from his people and from the Gentiles. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 he testified, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." When Paul met Jesus and received His pardoning grace, he worshiped Jesus with his whole life and through his martyrdom. God used him to preach the gospel all the way to Europe. God used him especially as one of the authors of the Bible. Paul encouraged believers to follow his example, writing in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."

Our hearts are also greatly moved by the Huguenots who had to run for their lives in spite of the fiercest persecutions in France,

but who gave their lives as holy sacrifices for Jesus. One of them, Marie Durand, was imprisoned at the young age of 19. She could have been set free if she had renounced her faith or revealed the whereabouts of her brother. However, she resisted this temptation to the end, clinging to the grace of God. During her 38-year imprisonment in a prison tower, she gave her life as a precious treasure for Jesus. She remained strong in the grace of Jesus even in a cold prison, serving her fellow prisoners as a shepherdess and pastor.

Countless predecessors of faith - including the Magi themselves - encourage us and challenge us to be true worshipers for Jesus in the new year: forming 10,000 one-on-one Bible study teams; mobilizing our bible students and next generation; pioneering 1,700 universities and spiritual revival in Germany and Europe. Let us ask ourselves personally in this hour, "How may I be a true worshiper for Jesus?" I too may bring my new life as a worship to Jesus by serving the entrusted young people and children with the Word of God and through the community of life, starting with Olaf, Noah, David and Andrea. I get to worship Jesus by opening up the Rhine-Sieg campus with my house church and building the prayer altar there daily and forming one-on-one Bible study teams. I may worship Jesus by resolutely giving myself for the disciple-making work and joyfully participating in the rest of Jesus' sufferings.

Our Next Generation may continue to intensify for the work of God and for their spiritual cooperation with their parents and Bible teachers, whether through the spiritual struggle for their one-on-one Bible study, early prayer, through their participation in GLEF and Leadership Seminars. Let us open our most precious treasures to the Lord and experience the mighty working of God. God raise up 100,000 Bible teachers, and send out 100,000 missionaries by the year 2041. God will surely bring about spiritual revival of Germany, Europe and all the way to the M-world through our Nativity work.

Today we were greatly encouraged by the Magi from the east. Based on a word from God, they set out on a long pilgrimage. With deep longing for the Messiah, they followed the star to the end. When they found Jesus and worshipped him, their hearts were filled with exuberant joy. Just like the Magi who found the true object of their devotion and worship in Jesus, this year through Bible study we too may find the newborn King, Jesus, and come to know Him deeply and worship Him. A little baby that lay in the manger is our true King and Savior. He is the eternal Creator who became man to redeem us. He is the Good Shepherd who feeds His people and ultimately gave His life on the cross for our redemption in death. He is also the true victor who rose from the dead on the third day. He is the eternal Ruler who ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is the King of kings and the LORD of human history. He is the Eternal One whose kingdom has no end. He is worthy of all our worship. All believers from all peoples and nations will one day stand before His throne and worship Him. May God bless each of you to faithfully follow the star of God's Word to the end and experience the exuberant joy of salvation in Jesus daily and be used as true worshipers of Jesus.