

Matthew 2:1-18

For a lot of people, this time of year is a very sad time. I used to work investigating suicides, and my workload would increase five-fold every December. I really think we ought to take this problem more seriously than we do. Churches are so busy at this time of year, with meeting schedules and carol services and so on, and I think we tend to ignore what's really going on.

People become so stressed at this time of year, that, for whatever reason, they seriously attempt to end their lives. That can't be what Christianity is all about. Jesus Christ didn't come into the world to put pressure on people like that. Christ said, *"My yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:30), and *"If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"* (John 8:36).

So, at this time of year, it's good that we should rejoice at the birth of the Saviour, but we shouldn't forget our concern for anyone who's under pressure at this time. The true message of Christ, underneath all this Christmas glitter, is that He came to lift all this off our shoulders.

Another problem I've got with this time of year is with regards the historical events surrounding Christ's birth. So many traditions have been introduced over the years, that have either changed, or at least embellished the real account of what actually happened. As a result, the true message of Jesus Christ has been obscured.

We need to get all our knowledge of what actually happened from the Bible. That's the only completely infallible source of information we have.

2 Timothy 3:16

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

圣经都是神所默示的（或作凡神所默示的圣经），于教训，督责，使人归正，教导人学义，都是有益的。叫属神的人得以完全，预备行各样的善事。

So, we need to get rid of all our preconceived ideas. Don't think about three kings, on camels, coming to a stable. It's all nonsense. I want to look today at the real story of the wise men.

1 "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem"

当希律王的时候，耶稣生在犹太的伯利恒。有几个博士从东方来到耶路撒冷，说，

The wise men weren't with Jesus at the same time as the shepherds, as our nativity scenes seem to tell us. They arrived in Jerusalem some time **after** Jesus was born in Bethlehem. We read that the angel said to the shepherds:

Luke 2:11

*“For unto you is born **this day** in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”*

因今天在大卫的城里，为你们生了救主，就是主基督。

The shepherds saw Christ on the day He was born. They were local, they didn't have to travel far. They were given a sign that they'd find a baby lying in a manger, or an animal drinking trough. Now, that could've been in a stable, but there's no mention of a stable. It could've been in a cave, or out in the open, although we assume Mary and Joseph would've tried to find some sort of shelter for the birth, after finding all the guest houses were full.

The wise men, on the other hand, arrived a bit later on. By which time, Joseph and Mary had found a house to live in, as we see from v.11.

Now who were the “wise men” exactly? The NIV uses the word “*Magi*,” but I don't like using that word, because it's not a real word in English at all. It's a transliteration from the Greek “*magos*,” and it's where we get our word “magician” from. It could mean somebody who practices magic, but it could equally mean a doctor or a wise man.

Christians should by all means be wise men:

Proverbs 4:7

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”

智慧为首。所以要得智慧。在你一切所得之内，必得聪明。（或作用你一切所得的去换聪明）

Proverbs 9:10

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”

敬畏耶和华，是智慧的开端。认识至圣者，便是聪明。

But Christians should never have anything to do with magic. The book of Revelation says that, amongst other people,

Revelation 21:8

“...sorcerers.... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

行邪术的，... 他们的分就在烧着硫磺的火湖里。这是第二次的死

Some people suggest that the wise men were astrologers, and they get that from the fact that they saw a star. They see one star and it's assumed they were experts in these things. But that can't be true. Anyone who gets involved with witchcraft, sorcery, astrology, fortune-telling and the like, will never

come to the truth by practising those things. In fact, the more they practise their evil arts, the darker their minds'll become.

But unbelieving kings can't tell the difference between a truly wise man and an evil magician. So, when a king chooses his closest advisers, it would be a mixture of magicians, astrologers, fortune-tellers and other people whom Christians should have nothing to do with, together with truly wise men.

In Daniel's day, the king had a dream and needed help in understanding it.

Daniel 2:2

"Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams."

王吩咐人将术士，用法术的，行邪术的，和迦勒底人召来，要他们将王的梦告诉王，他们就站在王前。

These were the king's closest advisers. Not just evil men, such as magicians and astrologers, but also truly wise men. Daniel himself was one of them. In Daniel 5:11 he's actually called the "*master of the magicians*."

Think of these wise men as a bit like Daniel. They were probably close advisers to the king of the land, but they weren't kings themselves. They would've probably had access to the libraries and colleges of the land.

We see they came from the East. We're not told exactly which country they came from. Neither are we told how many there were. We know of three gifts, but that doesn't necessarily mean three people. Tradition says they were from Persia. They could be Persian, but they could also have been Babylonian. They could've been Indian or Chinese, we don't know. All we know is that they came from somewhere east of Jerusalem. So they weren't European or African.

2 "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

那生下来作犹太人之王的在哪里？我们在东方看见他的星，特来拜他。

They asked an unusual question. They knew that a child had recently been born who was the "*King of the Jews*," and they were asking where He was.

Now, how did they know that? And why did they find a Jewish King of such importance that they travelled a long distance across the desert to Jerusalem just to see the child for a few hours and give Him such expensive gifts?

Like every one of us, they would've been born into the religion of their country. They'd have grown up in that religion. But in their search for wisdom, having access to the libraries of the land, they must've come across something that changed their lives completely.

The Bible says about itself:

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

神的道是活泼的，是有功效的，比一切两刃的剑更快，甚至魂与灵，骨节与骨髓，都能刺入剖开，连心中的思念和主意，都能辨明。

They must've come across some part of the Holy Scripture. Only that can change lives in such a way. Ordinary literature can't change hearts. It might be able to move people emotionally, but it can't change hearts. Only the Holy Scripture has the power to change hearts, because it's living and powerful.

When they came across a part of Scripture, they realised it wasn't like any other literature they'd ever come across. It stopped them in their tracks. It changed them in their hearts. It changed their lives forever. So much so that they renounced the religion of their fathers, and came to trust in the one true living God, Lord of heaven and earth instead.

And this can happen to us today too. Read the Bible. We too can get out of this miserable life we're in, and become new creatures. We too can be saved from the sinful nature we're born with. Do we really want to carry on living this life, living for self all the time? What's the point? Let's be finished with it. Repent of sin, cry to God for mercy. He'll hear every genuine heart that cries to Him. He'll change them, make new creatures of them, and save them from the judgment to come. The Bible has the power to change every one of us forever.

Now, what had they found out? They found out that a Jew was going to be born who was the prophesied Saviour. They also knew the approximate time of the birth, namely about then. And they also knew that this Holy Person would be a Saviour not just for Jews but for Gentiles (i.e. themselves) also.

There's one book in the Old Testament that contains all that information. And that's the book of Daniel. That's the book they probably came across in one of their libraries. Daniel spent his life in exile in Babylon. Babylon was subsequently taken over by the Persian Empire. So it wouldn't have been unusual for a copy of the book of Daniel to have found its way into a library in that part of the world. Which is where the wise men found it.

They didn't have had access to all the Scriptures though, because they didn't have the book of Micah. Micah would've told them the exact place of Christ's birth, Bethlehem. But they didn't have that information when they set out on their journey. They just headed for the capital, Jerusalem. Micah was written in Israel, so there wouldn't necessarily have been copies of it in the east.

God had shown them through the Scripture that the time was fulfilled for the birth of His Saviour. So when a peculiar star appeared in the sky, they immediately knew it was a sign from God that this time had finally come.

So they set off towards Jerusalem. It was going to be a long journey, only to see a baby for a few hours, but their lives had been changed. Living for the things of God was now their only love. Is it our only love? Or are we still quite keen on having our own lives and status in this world? May our love for the Saviour be like the love of these wise men for Him.

Tradition says they followed the star, but that's not true. The star appeared once in their home country, which told them it was time to set off on their journey. After they'd set off it disappeared, and only reappeared later after they arrived in Jerusalem. We're told the star appeared "in the east." That could mean it appeared to them when they were in the east, or, it could mean it appeared in the eastern part of the sky. But if that was so, they couldn't have followed it, because they'd have ended up in China. Jerusalem's the other way.

They went to Jerusalem, because it was the capital, and they assumed it would be full of true believers who were also as excited as they were at the coming of the Saviour. But they were wrong.

I know a church in the north east of England, in a town where there's a training centre for people in the oil industry. Once, a group of Nigerian Christians came to train there. They set off from Nigeria under the impression that England was a great Christian country, and they assumed everybody would go to church. So they were very excited to have the opportunity to study in England for a few months. But when they got here, they found out that nobody goes to church. They asked people in the street about local churches, and nobody knew anything or was at all interested.

That's like the way the wise men were thinking. They thought everybody in Jerusalem would be so excited that the king of the Jews had been born. They thought they'd have no problem finding Him. But when they got there, they found out nobody knew anything at all about a Saviour. Nobody was particularly interested either. The wise men started asking around "*Where is he that is born king of the Jews?*" And nobody knew. But word got to Herod that some foreigners were asking about another king instead of himself.

3 "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

希律王听见了，就心里不安。耶路撒冷合城的人，也都不安。

Herod got annoyed. He thought he was king of the Jews. The idea of some foreigners coming and saying that another king had just been born, disturbed him. And in turn, if Herod was disturbed, the rest of Jerusalem would be disturbed too, because he was crazy and nobody knew what he'd do next.

4 "And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born."

他就召齐了祭司长和民间的文士，问他们说，基督当生在何处

Herod tried to find out more information about this other king. So he “*demanded*” an answer from his religious advisers, the “*chief priests and scribes.*” He particularly wanted to know the place of the birth, so he could quickly get rid of him. Herod’s advisers knew exactly:

5 “And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,”

他们回答说，在犹太的伯利恒。因为有先知记着说，

6 “And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”

犹大地的伯利恒阿，你在犹太诸城中，并不是最小的。因为将来有一位君王，要从你那里出来，牧养我以色列民。

That’s a quote from Micah 5:2, the book the wise men didn’t have. It’s amazing that the wise men only had the book of Daniel, and their lives were completely changed by it. The chief priests and teachers of the law had the whole of the Old Testament freely available to them. And they knew it very well. They knew where to find the prophecy about the Saviour’s birthplace. They also had the book of Daniel, so they ought to have known that the time for the Saviour’s coming was near. But it didn’t bother them. They didn’t want to know. They’d got no heart to go looking for Christ. No interest in spiritual things. They were quite happy to be church leaders, with people looking up to them. But they had absolutely no time for God.

It’s amazing that Scripture can change some people’s hearts forever, like the wise men. But others can read it, know it backwards, but be totally unmoved.

7 “Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.”

当下希律暗暗地召了博士来，细问那星是什么时候出现的。

So, Herod then called these foreigners to see him. He did it secretly. He didn’t want anyone to know he needed anything, like information or advice. He asked them the exact time the star had appeared to them. They’d obviously told him about the star, and he’d reasonably assumed that the star’s appearance coincided with the time of Christ’s birth. The wise men innocently gave him all this information.

8 “And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”

就差他们往伯利恒去，说，你们去仔细寻访那小孩子。找到了，就来报信，我也好去拜他。

At this point, the wise men got the information they were missing about the Saviour's birthplace. And they got it from the most unlikely source – King Herod. He told them to come back and tell him exactly where the baby could be found, so he could worship him too. But that was a lie. He'd got no intention of worshipping the child. He wanted to kill Him. He wanted to be the only "king of the Jews." The wise men had no idea about any of this.

Herod lied to them, and He'd only told them what he wanted to. That's what the people of this world are like all the time. They think nothing of lying to people and cheating them for their own ends. But Christians shouldn't be like that. The wise men were genuine with Herod, even though Herod wasn't genuine with them. Being genuine is the Christian way to deal with everybody. Of course, we should also be fully aware that as a result of our behaving like this, people'll think we're simple, or a bit stupid, and try to use us.

Matthew 10:16

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

我差你们去，如同羊进入狼群。所以你们要灵巧像蛇，驯良像鸽子。

9 "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

他们听见王的话，就去了。在东方所看见的那星，忽然在他们前头行，直行到小孩子的地方，就在上头停住了。

Now, the star reappeared. Why didn't God just keep the star in the sky all the time, for them to follow from their homeland all the way to the house?

If He'd done that, the wise men would never have gone to Jerusalem. And they'd never have met Herod. God chose to do it the way He did. Our job is to simply follow the Lord every step of the way. God wanted them to go to Jerusalem first. Otherwise nobody in Jerusalem would have known about the birth of the Saviour. Their own church leaders weren't telling them. And God wanted them to meet Herod, as a testimony against him.

They couldn't possibly have known that their telling Herod the time the star appeared, and their not going back to see him afterwards, would lead directly to the killing of all the children under two years old in Bethlehem.

Sometimes we're too sensitive about what information we give away or what we do or don't do. And we can so easily blame ourselves for all sorts of things, which really aren't our fault. Our job is to be genuine, to tell the truth, to do what the Lord tells us, and leave everything else for the Lord to sort out.

10 *“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”*

他们看见那星，就大大地欢喜。

They were overjoyed at seeing the star again. So they must've missed it. During the long journey, do you think doubts may have come into their minds? Were they thinking perhaps, “We've not seen the star now for weeks. Maybe what we read about a Saviour wasn't true after all.” We don't know what they were thinking, but they never gave in until they reached Jerusalem.

This time the star moved. It went ahead of them from Jerusalem, the six miles south to Bethlehem, and stopped over where Christ was. The wise men knew that the star was the same one they saw in the east, yet somehow now, it was more local. It moved, and led them to the very place where the Saviour was.

11 *“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”*

进了房子，看见小孩子和他母亲马利亚，就俯伏拜那小孩子，揭开宝盒，拿黄金，乳香，没药为礼物献给他。

When the wise men saw the child, they knew to fall down and worship Him. The Bible tells us clearly never to worship another human being or angel. When men have done that, they've always been rebuked.

Revelation 19:10

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God.”

我就俯伏在他脚前要拜他。他说，千万不可。我和你并你那些为耶稣作见证的弟兄同是作仆人的。你要敬拜神。

But when people tried to worship the Lord Jesus, He didn't stop them. He allowed them to worship Him and didn't rebuke them. That's proof that He's God. He alone is worthy of worship, which no man or angel ever could be.

And the wise men left their gifts. Gold, frankincense and myrrh. Christ is worthy of worship, and He is worthy of the most lavish of gifts.

We're reminded of two days before Christ's death. Another Mary broke a box of expensive perfume and anointed Christ's head with it. Some of His disciples complained that it cost more than a year's wages. But Christ rebuked them.

Mark 14:6

“And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.”

耶稣说，由她吧。为什么难为她呢？她在我身上作的是一件美事。

What's Christ worth to us? Is He so precious to us that we'd willingly give Him everything we have? Really?

12 "And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

博士因为在梦中被主指示，不要回去见希律，就从别的路回本地去了。

God gave the wise men a warning in a dream not to go back to Herod but to go home by another route. They followed God. They weren't scared of Herod.

13 "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

他们去后，有主的使者向约瑟梦中显现，说，起来，带着小孩子同他母亲，逃往埃及，住在那里，等我吩咐你。因为希律必寻找小孩子要除灭他。

And Joseph had a dream whereby God told him to flee to Egypt because Herod was wanting to find and kill the child.

This brings up the subject of dreams. I don't think we should be too bothered by this. The dreams we naturally have when we sleep, aren't visions from God. That's not what's going on here. These "dreams" were particular special revelations to the individuals concerned. They were a direct communication from God to tell them what they should do in their particular circumstance.

It's not necessary for us to worry about these things today. Let's just trust in the Saviour. Let's just deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, and not get all excited over visions and dreams and prophecies, as some people do.

In any case, Joseph, Mary and the wise men were all very godly people. They lived their lives close to the Lord, and were continually being guided by Him. Like all who closely follow the Lord, they would've had a spirit of discernment. Knowing the Lord's will for their particular situation.

If we stay close to the Lord in everything we do, we too can know the Lord's guidance in every circumstance of our lives. We don't need fuss or excitement. Just a simple trust in the Lord is all that's required.

14 "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:"

约瑟就起来，夜间带着小孩子和他母亲往埃及去。

15 *“And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.”*

住在那里，直到希律死了。这是要应验主借先知所说的话，说，我从埃及召出我的儿子来。

Joseph and Mary fled with the child to Egypt. That fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea (11:1).

16 *“Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.”*

希律见自己被博士愚弄，就大大发怒，差人将伯利恒城里，并四境所有的男孩，照着他向博士仔细查问的时候，凡两岁以里的，都杀尽了。

17 *“Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,”*

这就应了先知耶利米的话，说，

18 *“In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”*

在拉玛听见号啕大哭的声音，是拉结哭她儿女，不肯受安慰，因为他们都不在了。

And Jeremiah’s prophecy (31:15) was fulfilled in Herod killing all the children in Bethlehem under two years old. Do you think Herod woke up that morning and said to himself, “I’ve got to fulfil prophecy today”? No, of course not. He hadn’t a clue that his evil work was actually fulfilling a prophecy given by the Lord centuries earlier.

The fulfilment of prophecy is sure proof of God’s providential control over all things. Prophecy can only be fulfilled if God is ordering everything. Nothing can be outside of His control. Satan and evil men can do absolutely nothing unless the Lord has ordained it to come to pass in the first place.

Romans 8:28

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

我们晓得万事都互相效力，叫爱神的人得益处，就是按他旨意被召的人。

The problem today is that so many people think everything happens “by chance.” Even Christians are taken in by this idea. We worry about things far too much, because we’re always thinking in terms of probability and chance. But probability and chance don’t exist. God is in control. Christians shouldn’t worry about anything. And this brings us back to what we spoke about at the beginning, people feeling so pressured at this time of year.

We might think our friends’ll leave us if we don’t get them an expensive present, or if we don’t go to their parties. We’re always thinking to ourselves, “Probably this’ll happen,” or “Maybe that’ll happen.” Don’t you see how much worry that piles on us?

The wise men had a way of living that avoids worry altogether. And we can have this too.

Matthew 6:31-33

“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

所以不要忧虑，说，吃什么？喝什么？穿什么？这都是外邦人所求的。你们需用的这一切东西，你们的天父是知道的。你们要先求他的国和他的义。这些东西都要加给你们了。

All the friends we have in this world will let us down eventually. But there’s a real friend who’s altogether different from any friend we can have here. A friend who sticks closer than a brother. A friend who unconditionally loves His people and never lets them down. But to know Him, we need to renounce our old life. Get rid of it. It’s not worth anything anyway. Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. Then everything else will fall into place. He’ll take care of us, and make sure we get all we need.

Psalms 145:18,19

“The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.”

凡求告耶和华的，就是诚心求告他的，耶和华便与他们相近。敬畏他的，他必成就他们的心愿。也必听他们的呼求，拯救他们。