

THE WISE MEN AND THE NATIONS

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INTRODUCTION:

This part of the Christmas story is not a stand alone story. In the narrative, we find a type of how all the rulers of this world will eventually come to kiss the Son.

THE TEXT:

"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, 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. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him . . . 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 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. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way" ([Matt. 2:1-3, 9-12](#)).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

After the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, certain wise men from the east appeared in Jerusalem (v. 1), and they were looking for Him (v. 2). The one they were looking for was King of the Jews because they had seen His star in the east, and intended to worship Him (v. 2). Herod heard about this and he was troubled, along with all Jerusalem (v. 3). After Herod gets some information from his rabbis, he deceitfully sends the wise men on their way. After they left Herod's presence, the star they had seen back home led them to the right house in Bethlehem (v. 9). Seeing the star gave them great joy (v. 10). They came to the house (not the stable) where they saw the young Jesus along with Mary, His mother (v. 11). From the age of the boys murdered by Herod, we can infer that the wise men arrived sometime within two years of Christ's birth. They fell down and worshipped Him, and presented their famous and costly gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh. We don't know there were three wise men, this being simply an inference from these three gifts. God warned the wise men in a dream, and so they went home by another route (v. 12).

WE THREE KINGS:

Now these men are not described as *kings*, but there are good reasons for treating them as members of the ruling aristocracy, as men who could decide to go to visit a king. First, in the Old Testament, this kind of person was frequently found at court (magi, wise men). Second, these men were dignitaries of sufficient rank to have their questions attract the attention of a king, and to be summoned to his court. Third, their gifts to the young Christ were kingly gifts—the kind of gift that kings would receive from princes. Fourth, the text draws attention to a comparison between their eagerness to worship Christ, and Herod's false willingness to do so. Fifth, not only did God want the reader of Matthew to know that a king was born in Bethlehem, God wanted *Herod* to know that a king had been born there. And He wanted him to know it on the kind of authority that he would accept.

FORESHADOWING:

So what is this story doing here? The clear intent is to show us that Christ is a king, and He is the kind of king who receives legitimate worship from nobles. This is a proleptic story, meaning that it is prophetic. If the toddler Jesus receives this kind of honor, what will He receive later? He receives hostility at the beginning (from Herod) and He receives prostrate worship from Gentile noblemen at the beginning. This is an *a fortiori* situation, and which one will win out?

HONOR AND GLORY:

Paul says that God wants all kinds of men to saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth ([1 Tim. 2:4](#)). This "all kinds of" includes kings and those in authority ([1 Tim. 2:2](#)). In this matter, Paul practiced what he preached. When he had opportunity to present the gospel to kings and rulers, he did so ([Acts 26:28](#)). Kings are told to kiss the Son, lest He be angry ([Ps. 2:12](#)). While we are to fear both God and the king ([Prov. 24:21](#)), the king is to fear God particularly ([Dt. 17:18](#)).

But sin being what it is, this is not something that kings like to do. The gospel being as powerful as it is, however, means that the kings of the earth *will* come. They all will bring their honor and glory into the Church ([Rev. 21:24, 26](#)). They do become nursing fathers to the Church ([Is. 49:23](#)), submitting themselves to the Church, and being disciplined by the Church. The phrase "nursing fathers" can be misleading, making us think the Church is somehow subordinate to the State—which is the opposite of what the passage says. In the restoration of Israel's fortunes that is the Church, what does it say? "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers [lit. nourishers], and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." The leaves on the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, and they cannot be applied without the nations *actually getting better* ([Rev. 22:2](#)).

TRIBUTE AND AUTHORITY:

There are two ways to give. One is an act of authority and the other is an act of submission. There are two ways to receive—and not surprisingly, one is an act of authority and the other is an act of submission. Telling the two of them apart is perfectly clear for the humble, and opaque to the proud. Were the wise men placing Jesus and Mary in their debt with these very expensive gifts? Or were they showing their indebtedness? When our federal government today cuts a check, are they exercising authority or showing submission? This is not a hard question. This story right at the beginning of Christ's life shows us the pattern that we should expect and require. Christ will not receive (and His Church must not receive) any money whatever from the state unless it is accompanied by prostration before Christ and true worship of Him.



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