

Christmas Special 01-12-24

We're going to take a little time here this evening on Christmas Eve to think about the story of Jesus' birth, and one particular part of it especially. So as we prepare to take a look at God's Word, let's pause for a moment and ask God's blessing on us as we study His Word together, shall we pray? Father, we thank you for this season of the year when we celebrate the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for His work on the cross on our behalf, which was the reason for which He came, and we know that He is even now seated at your right hand, making intercession for us and awaiting the day when He will come and return and take us home to be with Himself and begin our life with you for all eternity.

We pray tonight as we study your Word together that God the Holy Spirit will help us to understand it and see the meaning and the application that it has for us as we live each day. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. We're going to be looking tonight briefly at a section of the Christmas story that's found in Matthew chapter 2. You hear this quite often, and I think you'll find it familiar.

I'm going to read this section to you from the New King James, Matthew chapter 2. You remember that there's already been a Matthew chapter 1, and it talked about the genealogy of the Lord Jesus and the fact that Mary was quite surprised to discover that she was going to be the mother of the Savior. And then a Christmas or two ago, we studied the story of the shepherds. Remember the shepherds that were out abiding in their fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night, and an angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid and so forth.

And we took a look in some detail at the message that came to the shepherds and how they then went immediately to find the baby Jesus lying in the manger with Mary and Joseph. And it was the very same night that Jesus was born. If you look at many nativity scenes, you have Joseph and Mary, and you have the baby Jesus in the manger, and who do you have standing around? You have shepherds and sheep and goats and donkeys and cattle and things, and you have the shepherds, and then who else do you usually have? You have the wise men.

Many times we just have them all kind of standing around admiring Jesus in the cradle. Well, pay attention now as I read this portion from Matthew chapter 2 and see what details you notice. 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, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet.

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. That was an Old Testament passage. Those were verses that they had in their Bible even back in that day.

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also. When they heard the king, they departed.

And behold, the star which they had seen 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 exceedingly great joy. And when they had 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 gifts to him. What were the three gifts? Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Well, one of the first things we notice here is that Matthew tells us about what time this was. He says, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king. Well, when you look at this in Greek, there is a very familiar principle, which is that the action of the main verb always comes after the action of the aorist participle.

So, one thing comes after another. And the aorist participle in this verse is, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. So a good way to translate this is, now Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.

So he had already been born when the rest of these things take place. And we're going to see that this does not happen on the night that the shepherds came or that the angels told them the story. It's sometime later.

So, Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judea. You know why it says Bethlehem of Judea? There was another Bethlehem in Israel. It was up in the region of Zebulun.

And you find that in Joshua chapter 19 and verse 15. It's mentioned up in the cities of the far north. But this is Bethlehem of Judea.

And it was known as the city of David. The reason it was known as the city of David is that that's the town where David grew up. One thousand years before Jesus was the time of David.

And the promise of God was that David would have a son, which is actually a great, great, great, great grandson, who would sit on the throne of David. And so it's fitting that Jesus would be born in the same region that David himself was born in. And it was also prophesied.

Now this happened in the days of Herod the King. There were several different men named

Herod. But this was Herod the Great.

And Herod the Great was the first man to be called Herod that is prominent in history. And he was around in the time of Antony and Cleopatra, if you've ever seen those stories. And he came to power in about 33 B.C. And Octavian, who came to power after Antony and Cleopatra and all of that, confirmed him as the king in Judea.

But he had to take it away from a man who was a Hasmonean. There was a family called the Hasmoneans. And Herod had to sort of fight them in order to gain control.

But they were very popular. And all the people resented Herod for taking the land away from the Hasmonean family. So he married a lady named Mariamne, who was a daughter of the Hasmoneans, trying to sort of get back into their good graces.

So it would be sort of like coming into a town and wiping out the mayor and wiping out the mayor's wife and wiping out the mayor's brother and anybody else that was related to the mayor so that you could be the ruler of the town. But then you say, well, the mayor has a daughter. I'll marry her, and that'll make everybody more happy with me.

But they weren't really happy with him, and he became suspicious of them. And he had two sons with Mariamne. And long about the time that Jesus was born, just within a year or two before the time that Jesus was born, Herod got so suspicious that his sons were going to be put back on the throne of Judea by the people who really liked the Hasmoneans, he had them killed.

He had his own two sons executed. He also ended up having Mariamne executed. This was years before.

He had her executed when he'd only been the king for a few years. But he sent his sons to Rome, and he thought, well, they'll raise them as good Romans, and they'll come back and be loyal to you. But they weren't.

They were plotting against their father. So he had them killed in about 7 B.C. Well, Jesus was born in about 6 B.C., so Herod was already in the child-killing business. Of course, his sons were probably in their late teens or early 20s by that time, but he already had had this ruthless frame of mind where he would kill anybody that was a threat to the throne, even if they were his own children.

So you can imagine, if he would kill his own sons, he wouldn't hesitate to kill anyone else that might threaten his throne there in Judea. And later on, he would have several other of his family members killed. So he was a very ruthless man and very anxious to hang on to the throne.

Well, it was in the days of Herod the King. Now, Herod the Great died in the year 4 B.C. Okay? 4 B.C. Well, I thought that the years, when we say 1999 or 2001, that that was from the birth of

Christ. Anno Domini means the year of our Lord.

Way back hundreds of years ago, somebody tried to calculate when Jesus was born because before that, the dates were from the founding of Rome. All of the years were measured. It was in the 332nd year from the founding of Rome or the 115th year from the founding of Rome.

Well, as Christianity took hold, people said, we don't want to measure our years from the founding of Rome. We don't want to put that on our coins. We want to measure it from the birth of Jesus Christ.

So a man sat down. His name was Dionysius Exiguus. Dionysius Exiguus.

And he sat down and did his best to calculate when Jesus was born. He said, from now on, let's all count our years from that. Well, he did a pretty good job, but he was off a little bit.

He was off by about four years. And later on, when people had more information, they said, oops, old Dionysius kind of made a mistake. So actually, Jesus was born before Herod the Great died.

Herod the Great died in 4 BC. Well, Jesus had to have been born even before that, probably around 6 BC is the time that Jesus was born. And that's important because what was the year that Herod killed his own sons? 7 BC.

So he was already in the business of killing anybody that might be a threat. Well, also it says, in the days of Herod the what? Herod the Great. But what's his title? In Matthew, if you had your Bible there, it says, in the days of Herod the King.

Herod is the king of the Jews, at least on paper. So when the wise men come from the east and they come to Jerusalem, do you know where Herod lived, where he ruled Judea from? Jerusalem. He had a palace built right on the Jerusalem wall on the west side.

He had a big luscious palace. He's the same guy that rebuilt the temple. He started rebuilding the temple in something like 13 BC, and they continued doing that all during the time that Jesus grew up.

And there's a well-known passage later on where Jesus said, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. And they said, wait a minute. It's taken all of these years to build this temple, and you say you can do it in three days? But he wasn't talking about the temple.

He was talking about his own body. Anyway, Herod ruled in Jerusalem. So these wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and they said, where is he who has been born what? King of the Jews.

Where is he that has been born king of the Jews? Well, how do you think that made Herod feel? He's the king of the Jews. It says Herod the king right there in the passage. So why did he assign any weight to the question that these men asked? Well, when it says wise men, the Greek word

for wise men there is magoi, M-A-G-O-I.

It's the same root that we get the word magic or magician from. The magoi in the ancient world were men who were possessed of special wisdom. They knew the hidden things.

Some people call them the magi, but there's no G sound in Greek. It's a hard G. So a Greek person, if you heard them talking, they would say magoi, the magoi. A magus would be a single one and magoi would be more than one.

How many wise men were there? No, we don't know. We don't know, do we? People think there were three and say there were three because there are three gifts mentioned later on, the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But it's far more likely that because of the length of the journey that there was a large group.

You can imagine if there was a group of wise men and they wanted to see this king, there was probably a pretty good crowd of them. There might have been 10 or 12 or 15. We don't know.

It doesn't say. Anyway, these magoi came from the east. Now, where is the east? East is a real interesting direction in Israel.

When we want to orient ourselves, when you look at a map, which way is up on a map when we look at it? How do they always make a map? North is always up, isn't it? Well, guess what? In the ancient world, whenever they thought about the world and were orienting themselves, they always faced east. East was their orienting point because that's where the sun rose. So the east was the most important direction for them.

Just like north is real important for us because we think about the North Pole. Well, these wise men were from the east, and the east was the place where Israel had been taken into captivity hundreds of years before. In about almost 600 years before this, Israel had been captured by the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar and hauled away into captivity.

Can you think of some people's names who were in that captivity to Babylon? Andrew? Daniel? Remember his three friends? They are sometimes called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but I like to think of their original names because those were their captivity Babylonian names. Those were their slave names. What were their real names? That's right.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. And each of those names has a great meaning, but we don't have time to talk about it. But any name that ends in L in Israel, just like Israel itself, Yitzra means prince, and L means God, prince of God, Yitzra'el.

So Azariah, Ezra means help, like Ebenezer. Eben is stone, and Ezra is help, stone of help, Ebenezer. Well, Azariah means my help is Yahweh, my help is the Lord.

So Azariah has a wonderful meaning to it, and the other names do as well. Anyway, those men went to the east, didn't they? Did they know much about God? Azariah and Mishael and

Hananiah. Hananiah, Hanan, is the Hebrew word for grace.

Hanani is my grace, and Yah is Yahweh or the Lord, so my grace comes from the Lord, Hananiah. Well, they knew a lot about God. That's why they were so strong and faithful, even while they were torn away from their homes and their families.

And Daniel was one of the wisest men who ever lived. He spent years and years and years living in Babylon, and he taught other men about the wisdom from God. He taught them about the Bible.

He had copies of the Hebrew Scriptures. So years and years and years later, this is how the wise men knew that there had been a king born in Israel. If you looked up in the sky and just saw a bright light, what would make you think that there was a king born in Israel? There's no way to know that, is there? Why would you think just because there was a new star in the sky? Oh, because there was all kinds of countries.

Syria and Egypt and Greece and all kinds of places. Rome at that time. There were many, many countries.

So if a bunch of wise men way off in the east there, in Chaldea, if they looked up in the sky and they saw a new star, why would they think, Oh, there must be a king in Israel. Let's go to Jerusalem. They had to have some... Well, they had to have some information to tell them that that star meant that there was a new king in Israel.

And we know this, that over in Numbers chapter 24 and verse 17, when Balaam was hired to come out and curse Israel, instead he gave a prophecy of blessing. And he says, I see him now, but not near. I behold him, not near.

A star shall come out of Jacob. Remember, this is Numbers. These are in the books of Moses, the oldest part of the Old Testament, that even Daniel had a copy of.

Numbers 24, 17. I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near.

This was 1,400 years before the birth of Jesus that Balaam said this. A star shall come out of Jacob. A scepter shall rise out of Israel and batter the brow of Moab and destroy all the sons of Tumult.

Well, these wise men, one of the pieces of knowledge they had was how to read the skies. And they had constellations of stars, just like we have Orion and the seven sisters and the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper and things like that. Well, they had constellations in the sky also.

And the constellations were associated with different nations that were on the earth. And it was well known. And so, at some point, they looked up in the sky and they saw a new star.

And it was in the constellation associated with Israel. And then it moved out of the constellation of Israel and it went over and went into the constellation of Moab. And they said, my goodness,

don't we have those scriptures from Daniel? Didn't he talk about a star that would rise up out of Israel and smite the brow of Moab? And so they went back and they read Numbers 17 and they said, you know what? A scepter will rise out of Israel.

There must be this long-awaited king must have been born in Israel. They got that information out of their Bible. That's how they knew to travel.

Well, if there was a king born in Israel, what town would he most likely be found in? Well, what's the capital city of Israel? Where do the kings of Israel rule from? Where is the current king of Israel? Herod the king is in Jerusalem, isn't he? So what town did they go to? Jerusalem. It just makes sense. Now, what I find interesting is they went to Jerusalem and we don't really hear much about the star after that.

We saw his star in the east and so we have come to Jerusalem to worship him. They did not follow the star from the east to Jerusalem. They saw his star when they were in the east.

When it says we have seen his star in the east, it doesn't mean the star was in the eastern sky. It means back when we were in the east, because they're wise men from the east, they said when we were in the east, we saw his star and we have come to Jerusalem to worship him. The star would not have led them to Jerusalem, would it? Because the star is going to take them to Bethlehem.

But they figured, well, this is the star of the king of Israel, so we'll go to Jerusalem. And that's what they did. And so when they came, what's the natural question to ask? Where is he that has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east.

And this is an aorist tense in Greek. Aorist means it's a simple, almost a point in time in the past. We saw his star in the east and we came to worship him.

That's why we're here. Well, what do you think happened when Herod the king heard this? It says he was troubled. Now, the reason he was troubled is because they didn't just ask this question once.

The caravan of wise men, and there was probably a lot of them, a big train of camels, it takes a lot of equipment to make a long trip like that in the ancient world. You can't just pack a sack lunch and get all the way from Chaldea all the way over to Jerusalem. This was a trip that would have taken them months on foot.

So they had a large retinue, and they must have been very well-to-do. They had camels and servants to take care of the camels and the donkeys and the beasts of burden and all of the food they had to bring along. So this is a big caravan that came into town and everybody said, Oh, look, wonder what this is.

Look at this special caravan. Look how exotic the saddles are on their camels. They're obviously not from around here.

Well, these men were asking. The Greek word here that says that they were saying, Where is he that has been born king of the Jews? It's a present tense. It meant they kept on asking.

They would come up to people and they would say, Have you heard about the king that's been born to the Jews? Where is he? We've come to worship him. They didn't get an answer. Nobody knew about it.

So they would go to the next person. They were asking this question all over town. Well, pretty soon, Herod with his soldiers and his emissaries and his sub-rulers out there, they were all coming up and saying, Herod, there's a great big caravan of rich men out here from a far country, and they're saying there's a new king that's been born to the Jews.

So they kept on saying this. Well, when Herod heard that, he was troubled. And the word for troubled means, it literally means he was shaken up.

Sometimes it means stirred up when it talks about a liquid or water. James Bond, he used to have a drink and he said, I'll take that shaken and not stirred. Well, Herod was shaken and stirred.

It made him deeply troubled because he's the king and he's already killed his sons so that they wouldn't take the kingship away from him. And now he hears these strangers, and people were superstitious about Magoi because they had hidden wisdom and secret wisdom. And these men came and said, these Magoi have said that there has been a king born in Israel.

Well, he's deeply troubled. He's been killing people to try to hang on to his throne. So he was deeply troubled.

And all Jerusalem went with him. When it says all Jerusalem, it doesn't mean every single person. These are the rulers in Jerusalem.

These are Herod's sub-rulers because it's kind of like in your house, if your parents are deeply troubled, pretty much everybody in the house is troubled, aren't they? If there's a storm cloud with the people in charge, there's usually rain down on the people below, right? So once Herod got troubled, well, he made sure everybody else was troubled also. Now, what do you think Herod did? Did he call up his Roman guards and say, I want you all to go do an investigation? This is what I find very interesting because Herod had become a Jew. He wanted to try to get along with the people.

He wanted to try to be popular. He married Mariamne. And Mariamne was a Hasmonean, which was a Jewish family.

To marry a Jewish lady, he converted to Judaism. He claimed to be a Jew. And he studied the Scriptures.

So guess what? Once he heard that there was a king born to the Jews, he didn't go to the

Romans. He didn't go to the secular wise men. He called up the chief priests and scribes of the Jewish people.

Herod had an idea that this was the promised Messiah for Israel. And he must have believed that there was something to the Scriptures because he called his Bible experts in. He said, you Bible experts, you scribes and Pharisees, come in here.

And he inquired of them. And this word for inquire is the same word they used when they would question someone under torture. And it's used of asking anybody a question where you're really serious about getting the answer.

It doesn't mean he tortured them, but he really wanted to know. And he questioned them closely. And he watched them while they answered.

And he said, hey, where is the Christ to be born? Where is the prophesied son of David supposed to be born? And they told him. Now, if you believed that the son of David and the Messiah was born in Israel, and you knew Herod, and you knew that he had just slaughtered his sons last year, and you were looking forward to the Messiah coming to Israel, would you tell the evil king Herod where he was? Do you think that this sort of tells us something right off the bat about the scribes and Pharisees in Israel? That they were so willing to tell Herod exactly what they knew about the whereabouts of the anointed one of Israel? If they had any love for God's Word and if they had any love for the promise of God, they should have been willing to die rather than reveal that secret. And they just piped right up, oh, well, he's in Bethlehem of Judea, because it's written in the prophets.

And this is found over in Micah 5, verse 2, where it says, In you, Bethlehem, the land of Judah, you're not the least among the rulerships of Judah, because from you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Well, Herod found this out. Is this accurate information? Is that where the king was born? It is, isn't it? Well, Herod secretly called the wise men.

So he had dismissed them and called in the scribes and Pharisees and found out where the Christ was to be born. Very interesting. He wasn't looking for a son of Octavian or some other secular ruler.

He figured this was the one that was prophesied. I think he knew in his heart that God's plan was moving forward. So he called the wise men back in secretly.

This means he didn't tell the scribes and Pharisees that the wise men had come and that they had seen his star, because he didn't want the scribes and Pharisees to get too excited. But he called the wise men, the Magoi, and he inquired from them what time did the star appear. This literally in Greek says, What was the time of the appearing star? Because he figured the star would not have appeared before the child was born, so how long ago? Because it's taken them months to come from their country and they saw the star way back in the east.

So this will tell him how old the child must be by now. Then, having found that out, he sent

them to Bethlehem. So isn't it ironic that the wise men who love the appearing of Jesus and are anxious to see him and genuinely want to worship him, they get the final piece of information of how to find him from an evil man, from a man who has bad motives.

And one of the things to remember is that the truth is good and beneficial no matter where you find it. Here's Herod, the evil king, telling them the truth of the scripture that the king will be born in Bethlehem and this helps them find him. He sent them to Bethlehem.

That's exactly where they needed to go and where they wanted to go. Well, how could they be sure that this was good information if it came from Herod the king? They might already be a little bit suspicious of his motives. Well, he sent them to Bethlehem.

He said, Go, search carefully for the young child. When you've found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also. Do you think that's what Herod really meant? Or was he... He's insincere, isn't he? He's not really wanting to worship.

He's wanting to do to him what he did to his sons last year. Well, when they heard the king, and this is another one of those aorist participles that precedes the action of the main verb, they, having heard the king, departed. And behold, the star which they had seen in the east and they hadn't seen it since, reappeared and went before them, until, and here's another aorist participle, having come, it was made to stand.

And it's a passive. The star was made to stand over where the young child was. So that star didn't have a mind of its own.

It was made to stand there by God. So God sent them a confirming sign that they were going the right direction. There's another great principle there that if you really love the truth and you want to know God's will and you want to know God, God will make sure that you get the information that you need.

There is a great promise there for us because sometimes we think, well, there's so many different churches, there's so many different people talking about God and talking about the Bible. How do I know which one's telling me the truth? Some of them look like they might even be evil. And if he says something and he's evil, does that mean that everything he ever said is evil also? God will confirm to us if we're hungry for the truth.

It doesn't matter where you find it. You could find the truth written on the bathroom wall. You could find a tract laying on a table somewhere.

You could hear it on the radio. You could hear it on TV. You could find it in a book.

The test of whether something is true is not necessarily the source that communicates it to you. It's whether or not it reflects what God says in His Word. And if you're hungry and if you're looking for what God says and you really want to know it, God will make sure you find it.

And He'll help you know that it's right and that it's true. And so even though Herod is the one that told them that the child was in Bethlehem, that would make me suspicious. I'd probably go anywhere but Bethlehem.

God sent the star to confront to them that that was the right place to go. Well, when they came into the house... Now, where did the shepherds find Jesus? There was no room in the house. There was no room in the inn, right? But here it says, when they came to the house that the star led them to in Bethlehem.

Now, Bethlehem is about five miles south of Jerusalem. It's also interesting to me that all of these scribes and Pharisees knew that the child was to be born in Bethlehem. It was only five miles away.

Not a single one of them went to Bethlehem. Herod himself didn't bother to go to Bethlehem. He just sent the wise men.

They came to the house. They saw the young child with Mary, his mother. Who did they not see? It doesn't say that they saw Joseph.

So if we were going to set up our own little nativity scene for the wise men, we would just have Mary, the baby, and some wise men inside a house instead of a stable, wouldn't we? We'd have to take all the rest of the animals away. But they fell down and worshipped him. That was what they came for.

And when they got there, they did the very thing that was appropriate. He is a royal child. He's the king of the Jews.

But the other thing is, after they heard from Herod, I'm sure they were somewhat troubled as they were trying to go to Bethlehem, but it says, when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. What did the angels tell the shepherds? Behold, I bring you good tidings of what? Great joy, which shall be to whom? All people. Well, do you think that these magoi are Israelites? They're not.

They're men from the east, aren't they? All of the Israelites in Jerusalem, the scribes and the Pharisees and the Bible experts, did they get to see the new king of Israel? Did they get to fall down and worship him? All of the people who should have known, who were the Bible experts, who should have been watching for him all that time, who are the first ones to come and worship after the shepherds, of course? Who are the ones to come? They're foreigners. They're Gentiles. I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

And it kind of foreshadows the fact that even before Israel comes to recognize Jesus as their king, except for a faithful few, just like the shepherds, and the few that were in Jesus' day, like the disciples, but most of Israel missed it, just like most of Israel missed this. It says, all Jerusalem was stirred up, but nobody went to Bethlehem, except the Gentiles. So they were rejoicing with exceedingly great joy.

They came into the house, they fell down and worshiped, and they opened their treasure and presented gifts to him. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Well, if you go over to Psalm 72, verse 10, way back in the time of David, it talks about the fact that the king of Israel will have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before him, and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts.

Yes, all kings shall fall down before him. All nations shall serve him. So this is sort of a foreshadowing of that.

And you see it even more clearly in Isaiah chapter 60, beginning in verse 1. You remember, what is it that marked out the place of the house? A star. What does a star do? That's its main characteristic. It shines, right? In Isaiah 60, verse 1, it says, Arise and shine.

Did you ever hear somebody say rise and shine in the morning? That's how Isaiah 60 starts. Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness will cover the people, but the Lord will arise over you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around and see. They all gather together.

They come to you. Your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side, and so forth. But there's a prophecy that the Gentiles are going to come to the light of the Lord.

And here you have the wise men from the east coming to the light. Well, they come and worship, and they give these gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And there's been a lot said about those gifts, but you know what they're associated with in the Old Testament? First of all, gold.

We already saw gold in Psalm 72, 15. The gold of Sheba will be given to him, it says there. And in Isaiah 60, in verse 6, it says that all of those from Sheba will come.

They will bring gold and frankincense and will bear good news of the praises of the Lord. Well, that's two out of the three gifts right there, isn't it? So it's another reminder that this is a fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. But here's the main thing.

Gold is a symbol of royalty and value. It's the highest valued thing that they had to make things out of. The furnishings of the tabernacle and later the temple were overlaid with gold.

The altar of incense was overlaid with gold. The table of showbread was overlaid with gold. The mercy seat was made of gold.

Well, frankincense, a lot of times they say that this had to do with the priesthood, and it does. They made anointing oil out of frankincense. God told Moses back in Exodus 30, verse 22, take for yourself quality spices, 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, sweet-smelling cinnamon, and sweet-smelling cane, and cassia, and olive oil, and make a holy anointing oil.

Anointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. And you put that all over the priests. You anoint Aaron and his sons with that oil.

A lot of times they say, well, myrrh was for embalming. Myrrh was a perfume that was used for anointing oil and a sweet-smelling savor. And frankincense made a sweet smell when it was burned.

It was incense, and it was added to the offerings and sacrifices in Israel. If you go to Leviticus 2, whenever Israel came to present a grain offering, they poured frankincense on it, on their grain offerings, to make it pleasing to the Lord. Well, why do you think these magoi, these wise men, brought these particular things, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh? They are associated with kingship.

They are associated with priesthood. They are associated with all of the highest things in Israel. Because Israel started out, and God was their king.

Even before David and before Saul, God was the king in Israel. And these things are associated with worship of God. And the king was supposed to be God's servant on earth, to shepherd his people Israel.

And the wise men understood this. So, when you think about the story of the wise men, here are a couple of things to remember. First of all, if you are interested in knowing the truth, God will show it to you.

It doesn't matter how far away you think you are. Here are men who are not even Israelites. They're not anywhere near the land of Israel.

But they had a hunger and a thirst to know the things of God. And God revealed it to them even though they were far away. He did a great thing in showing them the star.

And because they knew their scripture, they knew what it meant. And when they came to Jerusalem and were having trouble finding the king, God made sure they got the information to find him. And He also warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

So, He protected them. And He protected the Lord Jesus at the same time. He gave them just the information that they needed to do the things that were pleasing in God's sight.

Secondly, it's a reminder that when Jesus came, He wasn't just the baby in the manger. He came for a purpose. And His purpose was to... He had a double purpose.

He came to be the king of Israel, but He was rejected as their king. And He also came to be our

Savior. And we as Gentiles get to enjoy salvation from God because of that.

So, we learn a lot of things by looking at the story of the shepherds. We learn a lot of things by looking at the story of the wise men who came from the East. But it always encourages me to think about the fact that there's no reason to not know about God and not know about God's plan and what God is doing.

Because if you want to know, He will always find a way to let you know, whether it's through Herod or through a star in the sky. Those were supernatural. Some of those were supernatural things, angels and dreams.

But we have God's Word and everything we need to know is there if we just have an interest. The scribes and Pharisees could have known and could have seen Jesus, the promise of Israel, if they had just been paying attention. And they missed it.

And yet men who were far away got it and had the great privilege of giving Him gifts. Well, that's our review of the wise men. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank You for preserving the truth of Your Word. We thank You that it is meaningful to us and You've enriched our souls through teaching us in narrative as well as in the teaching passages of Scripture. And we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will constantly remind us that we have the opportunity and the responsibility to pursue an understanding of Your Word and live our lives in that light.

We pray that You will help us toward that goal through the presence of Your Spirit and the power of Your Word in our souls. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.