



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

Behold the Wondrous Mystery - Christmas 2018

Shutting out the Noise of Christmas

Matthew 2:1-12

12/02/2018

Main Point

We can shut out the noise of Christmas by looking for Jesus, worshiping Jesus, and giving to Jesus

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of the many hassles and struggles that come with Christmas in our culture?

How do you manage to find joy during the holiday season despite these many struggles?

For many, Christmas is truly wonderful, but that is not to say that it doesn't have its headaches. Traffic becomes more and more congested. People become more on edge as the demands of life intensify. Just when we're supposed to be reflecting on peace and quiet, life brings noise and anxiety. There are, of course, some fixes we can put in place to protect ourselves from the insanity of the holidays, but nothing can shut out the noise of Christmas like focusing on Jesus. When we look for Him, worship Him, and give our lives to Him, we shut out the noise of Christmas.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 2:1-2.

The phrase "wise men" in this passage comes from the Greek word magos. That is why some English translations refer to the wise men as magi. It's the same word used in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, in Daniel 2:2, when the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar gathered men skilled in religious and magical arts to interpret his strange dreams. Although we know little about the wise men in Matthew 2, we can assume based on their profession that they weren't Jews. But because of their knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies and their interest in the star, they sought out the newborn Messiah.

What do you think motivated the wise men to journey so far from home to investigate another religion's Messiah?

How are the wise men another example of God revealing His truth to unlikely people?

The wise men were learned, familiar with the Jewish prophecies and astronomy. We cannot know the exact circumstances from which they went looking for Jesus, but look they did, and look we must. We have to make the conscious choice to pursue Jesus, especially during a time in the year intentionally set aside for this purpose.

Having been given the location of the birthplace of the King of the Jews, the wise men continued their journey. What the magi recognized as divine guidance filled them with joy (v. 10). Upon seeing Jesus, they did what they set out to do—they prostrated themselves before Him and “worshiped Him” (v. 2, 11). The wise men were in awe of Jesus.

Note the responses of the wise men upon seeing Jesus. How was their reaction to Jesus both similar and different to the response Christians make to Christ?

How did God use pagan wisdom to lead them to ultimate wisdom—His Son?

How can worshipping Jesus help insulate us from the noise that the Christmas season brings?

The wise men were the first Gentiles mentioned to worship Jesus. Upon finding the One they’d been looking for, they didn’t merely gawk or stare. Rather, they gave themselves to Him, in full recognition of the fact that He was no mere child, but God incarnate. Remembering the deity of Jesus and worshipping Him during a season in which our culture likes to marginalize Him goes a long way toward shutting out the noise of the holiday season.

But the wise men did not merely worship. They also gave.

Look at verse 11. What three gifts do the wise men give Jesus? What is the significance of these gifts?

The gifts used to honor Jesus were associated with royalty. Because Matthew has not yet introduced the theme of Jesus’ death, it is not likely that he is implying it here, even though myrrh was a spice often used in embalming. (Additionally, unbeknownst to her, Mary used myrrh to anoint Jesus for His burial in Matthew 26:7.) Gold, then and now, was a precious metal prized for its beauty and value, an appropriate regal gift. Frankincense and myrrh were

fragrant spices and perfumes equally appropriate for such adoration and worship. Similar visits of magi to royalty are described in other Greco-Roman literature of the time, but more significant here is the Jewish background.

In what sense can we give more meaningful gifts to Jesus, especially during the Christmas season?

In your journey toward Jesus, how are you like the wise men? How are you unlike them?

How we respond to the information we have about Jesus determines what impact our relationship with Him will have on our lives. Just like Herod and the wise men, we're presented with information about the Messiah. How we respond determines how our relationship with Christ will impact our lives. We can pursue an intellectual faith only, one that consists of studying facts about Christ but never letting that knowledge change us. We can let that knowledge make us insecure and cause us to wonder what we'll have to give up to follow Christ. Or, like the wise men, we can risk everything for Christ and choose to worship Him—and do so with overflowing joy.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

For the wise men, God used a star to point them to the Messiah. What kinds of events does God use to point others to His Son today?

How can we be more alert to God's work in drawing our attention to Himself this Christmas?

What things need to change in your life this holiday season in order to seek, worship, and give to Jesus?

Pray

Ask God to make it normative for you to seek after Jesus with your whole heart. Ask God, like He did with the wise men, to help you leave everything behind in your pursuit of Him and His glory. Thank God for the opportunity to worship Him freely because of what Jesus did on your behalf.

Commentary

MATTHEW 2:1-12

2:1-6. The mention of Jesus' birthplace, Bethlehem of Judea, is significant in this passage especially because of the prophecy it fulfilled (see 2:4-6). Matthew is building his case. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophetic intentions of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. All the details apply, including his birthplace.

The King Herod in this passage, one of many Herods, is Herod the Great, mentioned here and in Luke 1:5. His father, Antipater II, was a Jew of Idumaeen descent (Edomite, related through Esau to Jacob) who gained influence under the Roman Empire. He was influential in his son Herod's rise to power, in a succession of positions over Galilee and ultimately Judea, where Herod ruled from 37-4 B.C. (Herod's death in 4 B.C. is one of the main reasons we know Jesus was born somewhat earlier than the traditional A.D. 1; see 2:19.) During this time Herod was given the title "king of the Jews" by the Roman senate. This partly explains his fear and aggressive murderous actions when he heard from the magi that another king of the Jews had been born (2:2).

These magi from the east (2:1) were likely from Babylon and were culturally influential students of the stars, not evil magicians of some sort. Their interest must have been aroused by the unusual star they observed. We do not know their number, but their entourage was probably substantial to make such a lengthy cross-continent trip and to cause such a noticeable stir in Jerusalem (2:3). How they came to connect the birth of the king of the Jews

with the strange star is a matter of conjecture. Some scholars believe they may have been responding, in an amazing display of faith, to a scrap of Scripture brought to their people centuries before through Balaam (Num. 24:17), who was a Mesopotamian himself.

The important point here is that God brought the birth of the king to the attention of these Gentiles, who probably journeyed many months (possibly one to two years) from Mesopotamia to Jerusalem. Matthew included this information to alert his Jewish readers to several realities: (1) the event of Jesus' birth had worldwide impact; (2) the Messiah was coming through Israel as a gift from God to all nations of the world, not just to the Jews; and (3) in contrast to the indifference of Jewish chief priests and scribes who should have anticipated the king's birth (2:4), these Gentiles were overwhelmed with joy!

The quote in 2:6 comes from Micah 5:2. Micah prophesied around the time of the Northern Kingdom's fall in 722 B.C. Through this man, the Lord used the lesson of the Northern Kingdom's fall to confront Judah's own covenant disobedience. He warned of Judah's future judgment, but he also gave cause for hope, foretelling his restoration of the remnant. It is in this context of hope that the words quoted by Matthew are written in Micah.

2:7-12. Herod called the magi into his chambers alone to try to determine when this new king, Jesus, was born. Because both the magi and Herod seemed to identify the appearance of the star with the birthdate of the Messiah, Jesus must have been at least a year old when the magi arrived. (This fact changes the traditional image of the magi visiting the young family in the stable where Jesus was born. Certainly the shepherds found him there, but Joseph would have found his family a home to live in by the time the magi arrived.)

Herod wanted to use the magi to determine the exact location of this new king. This was a self-serving strategy, not a generous desire to aid the magi in their quest. Herod had no desire to worship the new king. His goal was to locate him and eliminate this bud of growing messianic hope that he viewed as potential competition.

The magi likely followed this star very much as a sailor follows the stars to get to his destination. The text does, however, give every indication that this star was a supernatural phenomenon.

When the magi found where Jesus and his family were living, they were overjoyed. Their destination was not just a place—but a person—Jesus. Their response was the same response that Matthew wanted for his readers; they worshiped him. The gifts they gave to Jesus—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—were the most common mediums of exchange in that day. The gold and two forms of incense made it possible for the magi to cross through many different lands on their way to Bethlehem, much like people today use travelers checks when they are

traveling. These gifts would come in handy later for Jesus' family as they traveled themselves (2:13-15).