

Come and Worship Christ the King

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[0 : 00] I love how little children tend to take words that are familiar, at least to us, and then reform them, right?

Like we three kings, we three kings have Oreo stars. Or we three kings of oil and tar. We three kings of porridge and tar.

That's what little kids, they hear things and they hear it differently, don't they? An Armenian tradition says that the three magi, they knew the names, Baltasar of Arabia, Melchior of Persia, and Gaspar of India.

And how they knew that, we really don't know. But that was their tradition. It was a long-standing tradition that happened just maybe 100, 200 years after. Jesus was born.

Ancient historian Herodotus said that these leaders, these kings, they were more like a sheik. They were more like those who were, they were priests, but they were also leaders.

[1 : 14] They were tribal leaders of some sort. And he said they were from a clan of Medes in Persia. They became specialized priests in that clan, kind of like the Levites were to the Jews.

Their skills were in philosophy, medicine, natural science, astrology, and of course all that mixed with magical arts. They were truth seekers. They were after truth in all its forms, in every way that they could explore and find and discover.

But really, we know very little about them except that they came to visit Jesus. But what Matthew wants us to know is not who they were, but what they did.

And how they responded to Jesus, the God who became man, the little king who was born in a manger. There was a universal belief at the time that there was a great savior king who would arise to bring everlasting peace.

That wars would cease. That things would go well. And that was an accepted thing, not only in Israel, but it was accepted in Rome and all throughout the empire.

[2 : 27] It was accepted in Persia. It was accepted in the east and the west and the north and the south, as far as it went. Roman historian Suetonius said, There spread all over the orient an old and established belief that it was fated for men coming from Judea to rule the world.

The Roman historian Tacitus said, There was a firm persuasion that at this very time the east was to grow powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire.

So it was kind of a common understanding, a prophetic voice that rippled throughout all of Rome. It wasn't just merely in Jerusalem.

And it wasn't just merely with the Jews. It was accepted. And how it came about, we're not sure. Because there's nothing in scripture that says it except in the Old Testament.

And whether that was the influence or not, we don't know that either. But the first thing that we want to see here is that these wise men, these kings, and by the way, scholars believe that they weren't just three.

[3 : 43] There were probably more. And it wasn't just the three of them. There probably came with about 200 others in the entourage that followed with them. But the wise men sought out the king.

And from their perspective, they sought out the king of kings. The one who was going to bring peace to the world and not just to the Jews. It moved these wise men.

And they were seer kings to seek out the universal saving king. God revealed himself through nature. And they understood that this is natural revelation as we understand.

But it always takes more than just natural revelation. It takes special revelation. It takes the word of God. And they had to get the rest of the directions from God in special revelation.

They knew probably because they had read the scriptures. Deuteronomy 17 said that there would be a wise and holy king who would rule from God's word and his law.

[4 : 46] Zechariah 9 said he would be a royal leader of God's covenant who would achieve true peace. Psalm 2 and Psalm 45. That he would be a ruler of righteousness and a hater of wicked.

Isaiah 9 that we saw in the worship. And then Micah 2 which is repeated in this particular passage. There are a lot of predictions about this king who was going to come.

And so they knew that. They apparently had read it and studied it. But it wasn't until the natural revelation that God led and directed them by this star. This mysterious star that hovered above and led them to Jesus.

It takes God's word, special word, to specifically direct us to the king of kings. To the shalom, the peace, the righteousness and joy that's promised.

And the meaning of Christmas, of course, is not in the giving of gifts. But of God giving the greatest gifts to you. King Jesus who gives peace, righteousness and joy.

[5 : 51] So Christmas, as we see it and as scripture speaks of it, essentially is, and the Christian life is about coming to the king.

Just as these wise men did. The second thing that we can see here is the wise men really sacrifice for the king. They sacrifice for the king. And this is a very essential, important part of worship.

What genuine worship is, is offering our whole lives up as living sacrifices before the Lord. Think about this. In Matthew 10, Jesus will later say in verse 37, He who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

He who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. In Mark 10, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left his house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands.

For my sake and the gospel's sake, you shall not also receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters, mothers and children and land and persecutions.

[6 : 59] Of course. And in the age to come, eternal life. What did they do? They left their home. They packed their bags. They didn't have a van, but they had a caravan.

And they traveled a great distance, probably anywhere between one and three months. That's a long time. They probably went to an unknown place to them, unless they had visited there before.

They risked their lives on the way. And even when they arrived, because that was, you know, they didn't have I-25. Heading west for I-70 going that way. They had to go through a trail.

And there were always marauders and pirates and thieves and people to steal from them. That's why they went in such a big group. But here they were, as a good disciple.

They left their lives to follow after Jesus. So Christmas is really about sacrificing for the king in worship.

[8 : 05] Thirdly, when they found him, they worshiped him. You know, there are two reasons in Scripture for genuine worship, heartfelt worship, because of who the person is and because what the person has done.

In God, we worship him because of who he is and because of what he's done. Who is he? If our focus is upon a little child, merely a little child, we won't worship him, because a little child, as cute and sweet and precious as he is, is still a little child.

But if our focus is on this little child and we realize that this universal-sized gift to us, packaged in this little tiny body, wrapped in swaddling clothes, is the gift meant for us who would grow up to be the king, but also our savior, then we will worship him.

He is the God who came in the flesh, the God who became man. And if our heart understands that the little child, wrapped in this special Christmas wrapping, swaddling clothes, which some scholars say is the kind of linens that you would give or use when you wrapped a dead person before burial, placed there for you by the Father in heaven, under the shadow of this tree that would come, the cross.

If we meditate on that reality, then we will truly worship him. I think why Christmas might be so popular among those who aren't believers is because not only the fun gift-giving and, you know, the tinsel and the lights and all the fanfare and the wonderful celebration that they have, but because it's kind of like a shower for a baby.

[9 : 56] Innocent and sweet. There's nothing threatening. With a baby. But there is something threatening. With the God of the universe. The second reason we worship and people worship is because of what he does.

They only had, these three kings, a heavenly body to demonstrate the power, but scriptures speak of his promised work to come. And we have the historical fact of what he did for us.

They praised him and praised him, and they all fell down, just as Revelation 4 says about the 24 elders who fell down and worshiped him. Paul says in Philippians 2, So Christmas and the Christian life is about worshiping of the king.

And then fourthly, these wise men brought gifts to the king. We know that story well. We've seen it repeated in little children's demonstrations and plays.

When they come, bring in the gifts. The legend says that there were three magi, three leaders, because there were three main gifts. Maybe that's true.

[11 : 25] Again, we don't know. But Matthew's point, again, is not on the surrounding circumstances, but on the significance of the gifts. You see, people in his day would have understood their symbolism.

The magi did not merely see a humble infant in a shepherd's village, but they saw the embodiment of a cosmic savior king. They saw with eyes that were opened, and they reflected, and they brought gifts that recognized that, and displayed that, that were symbolic of that.

Gold, for example, was a gift fit for kings. If you wanted to give a good gift to a king, you gave gold. The babe is born a king. The babe is born in the royal city of King David, right?

The king would do more than just rule with power and politics. But gold was also a sign of loving adoration. This is one of the reasons why in our tradition we give gold rings.

We exchange the gold rings during weddings. It's a sign of adoration and love. It's a recognition that he would rule our hearts through love.

[12 : 36] His is an eternal royalty from heaven coming with an everlasting, unending kingdom. He's the king of kings and the lord of lords, deserving more than just gold, but gold he received.

They also brought frankincense, which was a common gift for a priest. And it was something that priests often used. Frankincense was a mixture of spice and oil.

It's used to anoint the priests of Israel. It blended with meal offerings. It was given to priests as a gesture of thanksgiving and gifts to praise God. It was never mixed with sin offerings because it was a symbol of holiness and purity.

It was also an expression of joy. And so invested in frankincense, people understood it was symbolic of the joy that would come when the Messiah came with his kingdom.

And the Latin word for priest, by the way, is bridge builder. However, Jesus is the great high priest who bridges God and man. He was the perfect sinless sacrifice offered to God.

[13 : 46] And then the last one is myrrh. It was a gift for the one who is dead. And the one, it was a symbol of death. It was a spice that was commonly used for funerals in dead people.

It was offensive that might be, it might have been offensive that these kings brought myrrh to a little baby. It would be like bringing embalming fluid to a shower, you know, for a little baby.

It's like, how dare you? It's through death, though, on the cross that Jesus would save his people from sin. Jesus, of course, means Joshua, where God saves.

Jesus, Jehovah saves. The Lamb of God born in Bethlehem from the sacrificial lamb would come on the day of atonement. So myrrh was also an expression of trust and faith in the one whose death would be redemptive and saving.

Nicodemus, by the way, used 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Well, these gifts reflected who and what Jesus is, the almighty king whom we love.

[14 : 59] The high priest in whom we have hope. The suffering, saving servant that we trust who would die for us. There's an expression of worship, true worship that brings your heart.

True worship that offers gifts and sacrifices. True worship of true believers who offer their entire lives. True believers who offer things in thanksgiving to the king.

The wise men came to bring gifts to the king. But the real story is that the king came ultimately to bring gifts to his wise men and women.

And that's rather incredible because it's just the reverse of what they did in the ancient world. Anytime a king came and conquered, they would have to give and lavish gifts to this king.

And if you were enemies or not, it didn't matter. If he conquered you, you had to give gifts. But Jesus doesn't do that. He comes conquering. And then as we know in Ephesians 4, he gave gifts.

[15 : 58] He himself gave good gifts to men. So Christmas in the Christian life is about giving to the king. When you comprehend who Jesus really is, you worship him.

If you understand who he is and what he has done, you worship him. It's not just on Sundays when we worship. It's every day. It's an expression of worship. Our king and savior, that wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace.

Those of us who have been impacted by Christ. That's what this occasion is and the story is. It's not so much about these three wise men, these three kings of Orient.

But rather the expression of who Jesus is. The little infant who would grow up to be our savior king. We're grateful for that. Thank you, Father.

May this year be a year where our lives are truly about coming and being drawn to the king. Sacrificing our lives on a daily basis for the king.

[17 : 04] And worshiping him and giving to him as we give to others. Thank you for this opportunity and occasion that we can gather as your people. In worship to reflect upon your word and to understand the beauty of it.

As it reflects more than anything our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Messiah who came for us. We thank you for that. We thank you for the meaning of Christmas.

And we thank you for the anticipation of Easter. That reflects and solidifies and verifies all that he came to do in his good work and in his death.

We praise you, Father. Amen. Amen. Amen.