

December 31, 2023
People of Hope on a Mission
All About Angels Series

Text: Selected Scripture

Introduction: Show Video – What Was the Star of Bethlehem?
From [gotQuestions.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ4jrbkELIM)

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In our video presentation today from gotQuestions.org, we received a good overview of the account of the wise men as found in Matthew 2.

- *Wise Men (Magi)* – Men who studied the stars; were also possibly part of a priestly order (Zoroastrians).
- *His Star* – The wise men described the star as uniquely the king's; this may indicate it was unlike other stars they had observed. Pastor Nelson introduced the idea that the star may have been an angel or even the shekinah glory of God. This star not only alerted them to the King's birth but would also direct them to the very dwelling place of the family.

Prophesied in **Isaiah 60:1-3**.

- *Bethlehem* – Because of an Old Testament prophecy of Micah, Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem in search of the child. Most Bible scholars believe Joseph had secured housing for his family, possibly with some relatives, after the birth, and had not returned to Nazareth.

There is considerable debate on the age of Jesus when the wise men found and honored Him with their precious gifts. Some believe Jesus could have still been a small infant, while others believe He was a toddler as old as two.

Rather than grapple with the many debatable questions, I suggest we simply consider *the wise men* who were convinced that someone special had been born on the earth and went to considerable expense and risk to seek out this child.

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I. Their Search Was Significant. **Matthew 2:1-2**

The wise men were from the *East* – many times in Scripture this indicated the land of Babylonia and Persia.

If this is the case, it would be what we know today as Iraq. Would have taken a route like Abraham took from Ur to the Promised Land.

Darius the Great constructed a highway (Royal Road) which would have headed north around the desert and would have met up with the King's Highway which led down to Jerusalem. Probable months of travel to get to Jerusalem in their quest to find the king (some have suggested 4-6 months of travel).

II. Their Gifts Were Extravagant. **Matthew 2:11**

We might conclude that the gifts were chosen to fulfil prophecy.

See **Isaiah 60:6b**.

Early church fathers understood the gold to be symbolic of Christ's deity; the frankincense of his purity; and the myrrh of his death since it was used in embalming.

A. Worthy of a King.

In today's dollars, a pound of frankincense would have cost \$500. A pound of myrrh - \$4000. (Today purchased for \$15/lb) Gold would have been valued at \$600/lb. (Yesterday's value in U.S. was \$33,000/lb.)

Frankincense means *pure incense*. The gum-resin was used by the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans for religious rites. Egyptians of all classes burned frankincense in their homes and temples. Frankincense was chewed to fight bad breath, soothe sore gums, skin infections and to dress wounds. Today, frankincense is considered to have antiseptic, anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory properties. It is also used in relieving the discomfort of lung infections and asthma.

Frankincense is pale and sweet, which probably explains why it was more popular than myrrh. However, myrrh did become quite a status symbol, and its price much higher than frankincense. Just a drop of myrrh oil put into a cheap perfume would double its price. Myrrh was used by Egyptians to embalm royal mummies.

Myrrh was prescribed for a much wider range of ills than

frankincense. It was mixed with a mother's milk to cure diaper rash. Arab men drank vinegar and myrrh to cure baldness. It was said that Jesus was even given "wine mingled with myrrh" as an anesthetic during his crucifixion.

Gold was believed to have supernatural healing powers and was worn around the neck to keep sickness at bay. Gold was dissolved in acid to cure appendicitis. At one time patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis were injected with gold. Ancient Greeks and Egyptians, who began experimenting with different chemicals to create gold from other metals, gave birth to the science of alchemy, the predecessor of modern medicine.

(Information from Williamsport Sun-Gazette | <https://www.sungazette.com> |
252 W. Fourth Street, Williamsport, PA 17703 ~ December 30, 2023)

B. Accompanied by Reverence.

The wise men first fell down before Mary and the young child and worshipped Him.

III. Their Dream Attested to Deity. **Matthew 2:12**

Whether it was an angel who spoke to them, we do not know.

We don't know if they each had a similar dream.

What we do know is that they "obeyed God rather than man" (if I might steal from the apostles) and never returned to Herod, traveling home, staying clear of Jerusalem.

So What? *How might the Wise Men encourage us today?*

They were men of hope, not only searching to find a king,
but also intent on worshipping this king.

We are people who have been entrusted with a sacred hope,
but it is not just for ourselves ~ it is to be shared
with the world.

What will that require of us in this new year?

- Our Time ~ **Romans 12:1-2**
- Our Treasure ~ **Matthew 6:19-21**
- Our Unwavering Trust ~ **Matthew 6:33**

Questions to Ponder Through the Week
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1. Read Matthew 2:1-12 again. Do we know why this account of the wise men is only found in Matthew's gospel? What prophecies were fulfilled because of their visit to Judea? Read about the horrors wrought by Herod when the wise men never returned to him in verses 16-18. Did God know this would happen?

2. Meditate on the gifts given by the magi to the Christ Child. What meanings have you heard placed on these gifts? Although the gifts were precious and may have been costly, did they afford luxury to this young family?

3. Every person has 24 hours everyday while on this earth. We each have 7 days in a week to accomplish what we call life. Think about time – what frustrates you the most in this realm? What tools have you found help you most in managing time well or at least help you feel like you are using time well?

4. We live in a time when treasure abounds or at least many would like to think that it does. How might someone make a case that we are the wealthiest people of all time? How might someone be correct to say that we are the poorest people of all time? List five ways a person can lay up treasure in heaven. What might destroy that treasure?

5. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. What is man's responsibility? What does the wise author promise? What hinders a life of trusting God? What threatens this kind of trust in our world?

Sermon Topic for January 7:

Christ's Preeminence

The Book of Colossians

For the first three Sundays of January, we will be in Colossians. Paul's letter to the church at Colossae has been divided into four chapters with a total of 95 verses. It will show us all that Jesus has to offer us and will call us to holy living. Take time to read the entire letter in one sitting – it will probably take you less than 15 minutes. Write down any questions that come to mind and give them to Pastor Kevin.