

**Theme:** Characters of Christmas

**Title:** – The Right Response - Matthew 2:1-12

**Aim:** Explore the characters of the Magi & Herod & the chief priests.

**Intro:** There are, of course, familiar stories around Christmas – not just stories but Biblical accounts. 2 weeks ago, we considered the account of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist – how the angel Gabriel appeared to him in the temple to tell him that he & his wife Elizabeth would have a son who would be the forerunner of Christ. Then, last week we looked at the account of the shepherds who were told by the angel that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem. Today, we will consider the Magi – wise men who had seen a new star & took it as a sign that a King had been born. Of course, as we consider the Magi, we are made aware of other, not famous but infamous characters, like King Herod & the chief priests & scribes of the Jews as well. Our Advent theme is “Characters of Christmas” & today’s characters are the Magi.

**Matthew 2:1-12** [READ] I) **The Magi** – wise men. I read a mime lately which said “If it had been 3 wise women, they would have asked directions (instead of following a star), arrived on time (instead of months after the birth of Christ), helped deliver the baby, brought practical gifts (tho we’ll see that the Magi did bring practical gifts), cleaned the stable, made a casserole, & there would be peace on earth.” According to Strong’s, the name Magi was a title given by Babylonians, Medes, Persians & others of that area, to wise men, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, etc. These Magi may have actually been of Jewish heritage, because many Jews exiled to Babylon stayed there – didn’t go back to Israel. We certainly don’t know for sure but the evidence points that way, as least in my thinking. If those wise men were indeed from the area of old Babylon, & especially if they were of Jewish heritage, they would have heard or read the words of the prophet Daniel who was one of the Hebrew

young men captured & taken to Babylon by the army of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel became a Magi – wise man of Babylon & a ruler 2<sup>nd</sup> only to the king. Daniel was given a vision of the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14): ***“I saw in the night visions, & behold, w/the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, & He came to the Ancient of Days & was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion & glory & a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, & languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, & His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”***

Commentator Adam Clarke wrote, “Being from the East (even if they were not of Jewish heritage themselves), they would have been among Jews who were exiled from Judah & Israel centuries before. That many Jews were mixed w/this people there is little doubt; & that these eastern magi, or philosophers, astrologers, or whatever else they were, might have been originally of that class, there is room to believe. These, knowing the promise of the Messiah, were now, probably, like other believing Jews, waiting for the consolation of Israel.” So, these Magi, not kings, but highly regarded servants of kings, may well have anticipated a special king’s coming onto the world’s scene & being from Judea. We’re not told how many they were – the number 3 probably comes from the 3 gifts mentioned. They were probably a larger entourage. They were astronomers/astrologers who studied the stars & they discovered a new one they had not seen before. David Gudzik points out that “There are different suggestions concerning this natal star: some suppose it was Jupiter & Saturn aligning; others suppose it was other planetary conjunctions, or a supernova, or comets, or a specifically created star or celestial sign. The point is, however, that God met these astronomers in their own medium. They were guided by a star, which is a fulfillment of Numbers 24:17” - ***“...a star shall come out of Jacob, & a scepter shall rise out of Israel...”*** Charles Spurgeon wrote: “A star begins as soon as

Christ is born. He has not spoken a word; He has not wrought a miracle; He has not proclaimed a single doctrine; but when Jesus was born, at the very 1<sup>st</sup>, while as yet you hear nothing but infant cries & can see nothing but infant weakness, still His influence upon the world is manifest. When Jesus was born, there came wise men from the east, etc. There is infinite power even in an infant Savior.” So, these Magi, seeing His star, most likely at the very time of His birth, began to discuss its meaning & then began preparations to go see this newborn king themselves. How long it took them to prepare & then to travel, we don’t know, but their arrival in Bethlehem could have been up to 2 years after the birth of Christ, according to the timeline they revealed to Herod. So, they don’t belong in a manger scene. By the time they arrived Joseph & Mary & the baby were dwelling in a house. II) **Herod & the Chief Priests & Scribes**. These Magi traveled 1<sup>st</sup> to Jerusalem, supposing that a royal child would be there or certainly those in power would know of this child & where they could find Him. They began to ask, “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?” This piqued the interest of King Herod when he was told & “he was troubled & all Jerusalem w/him.” D.A. Carson wrote of Herod: “He was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, & clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb & his building projects (including the temple, begun in 20 BC) were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted heavy taxes on the people, & resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty & in fits of rage killed close associates.” Herod called for the chief priests & scribes of the Jews to see if they knew where the Christ (Messiah) was to be born. And they knew! They quoted to him the prophecy of Micah (5:2), ***“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least***

***among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.***” Note that these religious leaders responded to the news of Christ’s birth w/indifference, perhaps the worst response there could be to Jesus. I’m afraid that many – not just here but throughout the world - who are even in church today because it’s something you do at Christmas, many of those (you?) are indifferent to the birth, life, death, resurrection, coming again of Christ. May believe in your head that it’s true, but it hasn’t touched your heart nor made a difference in your life. All this to your peril. Those whom Jesus doesn’t save (because of unbelief) He will judge & destroy. I urge you to come to faith in Christ today. Surrender your life to the Lord Jesus. Embrace Him as the Savior you need. Herod summoned the Magi & asked them when they 1<sup>st</sup> saw the star & then sent them on to Bethlehem. He deceitfully said to them, ***“When you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come & worship Him.”*** He said this, knowing what He was going to do. When the Magi were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, & when they returned to their own country by another way, Herod was furious & he ordered that all the male children 2yrs & under, in all the region of Bethlehem, be killed. His response to Christ was that of hostility. The one who killed his own sons & wife wanted to snuff out any threat to his throne. In our world today there are many who are indifferent to Jesus, but there are many others who are hostile toward Him & His Church, hating everything He stands for, because He threatens their way of life, power, & so-called freedom.

III) **The Magi had the right response to Christ.** As they headed to Bethlehem, the star, which evidently had gone from sight – certainly due to daylight & perhaps because of clouds, reappeared & went before them & then “came to rest over the place where the child was.” It “stood” over the house where Jesus was. They went into the house & saw the baby, by now 6-18 mos old & they worshipped Him. They gave

Him gifts fit for a king. Gold, which symbolized royalty, Frankincense – incense – symbolized divinity & myrrh – a perfume used in embalming – symbolizing death – certainly prophetic. These were very much practical gifts. God provided for Joseph to be able to take Mary & Jesus to Egypt & be able to live there until they could come back to Nazareth, in Israel. F. B. Meyer commented: “The Heavenly Father knew what their needs would be, & met them by anticipation.” These Magi had the absolutely best response to Christ. They worshipped Him, bowing before Him in humility. They may have had Jewish heritage, they may have been fully Gentiles, but they recognized & surrendered allegiance to the King of Kings & Lord of Lords. What is your response to Jesus? Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Those who look for Jesus will see Him; those who truly see Him will worship Him; those who worship Him will consecrate their substance to Him.” “Come, let us worship & bow down; let us kneel before the Lord...” “O come, let us adore Him!” Worship Christ the King!