

CHRISTMAS SURPRISES



Surprise Worshippers

Key idea:

In a stunning Christmas surprise, the Magi - pagan scholars skilled in religious texts, dreams, and the stars - become the first Gentile worshippers of Jesus, foreshadowing God's plan to call followers from every nation.

Key text:

Matthew 2:1-23

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." ⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. ¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." ¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." ¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt

²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Key points:

1. The term Magi referred to wise men who were priests trained in texts, the interpretation of dreams, and studies of the heavens.
2. It appears the Magi observed unusual phenomena in the skies that reminded them of some of the religious texts they had read which spoke of a coming King in Israel Who would initiate God’s Kingdom and draw worshippers from every nation. Some of texts texts might have included Numbers 24:17, Genesis 49:10, and the dreams and visions recorded in Daniel 2 and 7, which are summarized in Daniel 7:13-14.
3. The Magi offered joyful worship and costly obedience when they encounter Jesus.
4. The Magi respond with joyful worship, even being willing to travel great distances to find and worship Jesus.
5. The Magi are the first of many Gentile worshippers of Jesus - a key theme in from the very beginning to end of Matthew’s Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

1. What surprised you most about the actual biblical account of the Magi versus traditional Christmas stories? (Consider: their number, occupation, journey length, etc.)
2. The Magi were trained in a mix of astronomy, astrology, dream interpretation, and ancient texts—practices most Jews would have found questionable. What does it say about God that He used their studies to draw them to Jesus?
3. Read Numbers 24:17, Genesis 49:10, and Daniel 7:13-14. How might these Old Testament prophecies have influenced the Magi's journey? What does this teach us about how God prepares people's hearts?
4. The teaching emphasized that the Magi's worship involved "costly obedience"—a long, dangerous journey with expensive gifts. What are some costs associated with genuine worship today?

5. The Magi chose to disobey Herod's command after being warned in a dream, risking their lives to protect Jesus. When have you faced a situation where obedience to God required disobedience to human authority or cultural expectations?
6. Compare the response of the Magi (joy and worship) with Herod (fear and rage) and the religious scholars (indifference). Which response do you find most challenging in your own spiritual journey? Why?
7. Bret quoted C.S. Lewis: "In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere — 'Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,' as Herbert says, 'fine nets and stratagems.' God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous." Share a story of how God surprised you or someone you know by using unexpected circumstances to draw them closer to Him.
8. Bret stated: "If you are here, if you are even listening... God is actively at work calling you to himself." How does this truth encourage you regarding your own spiritual journey? Friends or family members who seem far from God?
9. What signs of God's work have you noticed recently in your own life, BRCC, and our broader community? What signs of God's work in calling the nations to Himself can we see around the world even now?
10. The Magi were willing to take a long, difficult journey to worship Jesus. What practical step can you take this week to make worship more of a priority? Protecting Sunday mornings from other commitments? Creating a daily time for worship and Scripture? Inviting someone to a church worship gathering? Serving in a ministry area?
11. To consider God's work in calling the Magi, listen to the song [We Will Find Him](#) by Michael Card.