



Around the Word
Bible Study
 Epiphany, 2017

The Light of Christ
 St. Matthew 2:1-12

On the Magi:

"Let us then also follow the magi, let us separate ourselves from our barbarian customs, and make our distance from them great, that we may see Christ, since they too, had they not been far from their own country, would have missed seeing Him. For so the wise men, while they were in Persia, saw but the star, but after they had departed from Persia, they beheld the Sun of Righteousness."

—St. John Chrysostom
(The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. X:47:6)

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Introduction: *A star, a star dances in the night!*

Stars are a part of God's creation, and on the Fourth Day they came into being along with the sun and the moon. These lights are separate from the light created on the First Day, but they are no less servants of their Creator. At the birth of Jesus, a supernatural star comes late in time, but no less points to the true Light of the World: the Word made flesh.

Opening: Psalm 72:1-11

¹Give the king your justice, | O God,*
 and your righteousness to the | royal son!

²**May he judge your people with | righteousness,*
 and your poor with | justice!**

³Let the mountains bear prosperity for the | people,*
 and the hills, in | righteousness!

⁴**May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
 give deliverance to the children of the | needy,*
 and crush the op- | pressor!**

⁵May they fear you while the | sun endures,*
 and as long as the moon, throughout all gener- | ations!

⁶**May he be like rain that falls on the | mown grass,*
 like showers that wa- | ter the earth!**

⁷In his days may the righteous | flourish,*
 and peace abound, till the moon | be no more!

⁸**May he have dominion from | sea to sea,*
 and from the River to the ends | of the earth!**

⁹May desert tribes bow down be- | fore him*
 and his enemies | lick the dust!

¹⁰**May the kings of Tarshish and of the coast-lands
 render him | tribute;***

may the kings of Sheba and Seba | bring gifts!

¹¹May all kings fall down be- | fore him,*
 all nations | serve him!

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
 and to the Holy | Spirit;
 as it was in the be- | ginning,*
 is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read St. Matthew 2:1-12

v.1: Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of

Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east came to Jerusalem;

Three things are presented to us immediately: person (Jesus), place (Bethlehem), and time (the days of Herod the king). Thinking also about the 2nd Article of the Creed, why do you suppose these things are important to mention? See also 1 John 1:1.

The shepherds who had heard the Gloria in Excelsis (Luke 2:14) were Jews. The Wise Men, or magi, as Scripture calls them, were gentiles. Jesus' light shines both upon the unlearned and the unjust; to reveal Himself to the foolish and to call sinners to repentance. The Jewish shepherds had the angels, but who do you suppose informed the magi? See Numbers 24:17 and Psalm 12:6.

v.2: [The magi said], "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

No other type of person except a great king could be heralded by a sign from heaven. Of course it must be a king, and, as we read in Numbers, it is the king of the Jews, the people God had chosen. Yet, the stars are not gods to worship (Deut. 4:19), but something else. Read Psalm 148:3, 104:4, and Job 9:7. Is this star a god or a servant?

The star serves the Morning Star, as we sing in "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" (LSB, 395). In Advent, we sing an old favorite, "O come, O come Emmanuel" (LSB 357). In that hymn we hear that one of the Great Antiphons of the Church is "O Dayspring" (*Latin: "O Oriens"*). What does the day-spring, or morning, have to do with this "star in the east"? (see Ezekiel 43:1-2)

v.3-4: When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ

was to be born.

Of course Herod was troubled. He was king and none other. Of course Jerusalem was troubled. Herod was a bloody king and had bought his way onto the throne of David. An unholy covenant, to be sure. And yet, he assembled all the right people with all the right answers. Why were they not looking for Jesus as the magi were? See Matthew 23:4, 13; 2 Cor. 4:4.

The star led the magi to the wrong place? They ended up in Jerusalem, which makes sense: when you look for the king you go to the throne room. However, the light of the star was not what was important. Herod knew what was important, though to his detriment. What did the chief priests and the scribes bring him? Why is this significant for our magi? See Psalm 119:105.

v.5-6: They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: '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.'"

The quote is from Micah 5:2 in the Old Testament. The light we were anticipating in Advent comes into the ears of the magi. The star is overshadowed by the light of holy Scripture. Why is it so important that the magi hear the Word of God, instead of just following signs? See John 5:24 and Rom. 10:17.

We don't just have words in an Old Testament book and we don't just have signs in the sun, moon, and stars. What do we possess today that is greater than these? See 2 Peter 1:19.

v.7-8: Then Herod summoned the magi secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

Here we see the only power evil has: to lie and to cover and hide the Word. Herod secretly meets with the magi and devises his murderous schemes. If he were to tell everyone, they would revolt. By keeping his plan secret, the element of surprise is retained.

What is this darkness that Zachariah sings about in St. Luke 1:79 and Isaiah in 60:2? See also Psalm 82:5, 88:6, 143:3; Isa. 5:20.

What does the darkness do to Jesus? See St. Luke 22:53.

Bible Study

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What did Jesus do to the darkness? See St. Luke 24; Rev. 22:5.

v.9-10: After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Light shines brightly in the darkness. After hearing the king's evil, the light of the star seems brighter in the light of the words of Micah. The magi were hoping to find a king, but what does God's light reveal about us? See Psalm 90:8.



In God's light, wrath and judgment against sin is shown to us. However, what do the magi find at the end of this light? See St. Matthew 1:21; John 1:5, 9, 14; 2 Cor. 4:4-6.

v.11-12: And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

These 3 gifts that could probably buy the kingdom back

from Herod! Thus, the word "worshipped" is not to be taken lightly. This wasn't a son of a king nor was He born in a palace. Who alone is worthy of worship? See Deuteronomy 6:13-14; Joshua 5:14; St. Luke 4:8, and St. John 20:28.

What does this say about the boy Jesus? See Romans 9:5; Heb. 1:6; 1 John 5:20.

In light of this epiphany, is Herod a king to be trusted? Is Herod even the real king?

Closing: O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright (LSB 395)

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