

## WE HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM

Matthew 2:1-23

Key verse 2:2

"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.'"

Today's passage describes the difficult journey of the Magi from the east who came to worship Jesus, and also that of Joseph, to whom God had entrusted Jesus' care. Although the details of their journeys are different, there are some common parts such as their faith, desire to follow God, and most importantly God's leading and protection from beginning to end. As we study about these events, I pray that we may be inspired by their faith and spiritual desire to follow God, and our spiritual eyes may be opened to see more clearly how God is guiding us in our own journeys of life.

Look at verse 1. "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem." The year was between 6 and 4 B.C. Herod was king and Jesus had been born in Bethlehem through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now at most two years had passed and some Magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They may have come from as far east as China. They were scholars who were expert in astronomy. They were advisers to kings and highly respected in society.

Why did they come to Jerusalem? Look at verse 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.'" The Magi were looking for the king of the Jews. How did they know about him? They saw his star in the east. A couple weeks ago, our family visited Nagasaki. One night I had the chance to look at the stars in the sky. They were so beautiful and countless. I guess that even if I looked at them closely every night, I still wouldn't notice if one was added or removed. But these Magi studied the stars intensely and saw that one extra star had been hung in the sky that night. According to Genesis 1, God placed stars and other heavenly bodies in the sky to mark seasons, days, and years. Most of these signs are regular and faithful, such as the rising and setting of the sun each day. Other signs are less regular and harder to detect. To most people, this star wasn't even noticed. But to the Magi who were watching the stars carefully, they saw it as a sign from God. Verse 2 says they came to worship Jesus. Although the Magi had great knowledge and high positions in the bottom of their hearts they were longing to worship something. It is because when God made us, he made us in his image. So everyone has a desire to be like God and have an intimate connection with him. The star was God's whisper to help lead the Magi to worship Him through Christ.

Sometimes people expect great miraculous signs from God before they decide to really seek him. But often God sends us only a small star as an invitation for us to follow His lead. Seven years ago, Tsukasa was invited by her very handsome boyfriend to move to Canada. Even though she couldn't see her future clearly, she felt in her heart that it was some kind of calling to go. Like the Magi, she left behind her secure job, family, and

friends and ventured to a new country in pursuit of a better life. God used this small desire in her heart to draw her to himself. When she followed the small star in her life, she was completely changed. God gave her salvation, hope, healing, and even called her back to her own country to tell many about what the Lord has done for her.

What about the Magi? Verse 3 says that when King Herod heard about this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. Herod didn't like the idea that a new king had been born because he thought it threatened his position. Herod recognized it was a religious matter, so he called together the chief priests and teachers of the law to ask them where the Christ would be born. How did they answer? Could someone read verse 6 for me? "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." God prophesied not only the birthplace of Christ, but also that he would be a shepherd of the people. At the time, the Jews were oppressed under Roman rule. The idea of a shepherd who would come to bring them freedom and hope of eternal life should have been good news. The religious leaders lived in Jerusalem, very close to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Yet they made no effort to go there. In contrast, the Magi left behind their homes and travelled a great distance to find Jesus. Their spiritual desire and faith were really great. After talking to Herod, the Magi saw the star again until it stopped over the place where the child was. How did they feel? Look at verse 10. "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." When the Magi followed God's leading by faith, they experienced a new joy they never imagined before. It was because they knew God was with them, and God was leading their lives.

In our materialistic society, it is easy to think we need many things such as money, career, and respect from others to be happy. But the truth is that even though we have all these still we won't be happy. There is a story about Fanny Crosby, the famous American hymn writer. Fanny Crosby was born blind. Sometimes people thought it was a pity that God didn't bless her with sight as she was such a wonderful person. Do you know what she responded? She said if she had one request to God at the time of her birth it would be that she would still be made blind. In that way, when she goes to heaven the first face she will see will be Jesus, her Saviour. Fanny Crosby had a hard situation humanly, but inwardly she was happy because she knew God and longed to spend eternity with Christ.

How did the Magi express their joy? Look at verse 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." The Magi were men of high standing, but they humbly bowed down and worshiped the baby Jesus offering him gifts like a king. When the Magi experienced spiritual joy, they freely offered their hearts and best things to God. Worship and offering is the natural response when we have tasted God's love. Without even being told by others, we just want to give everything we have to God in thanks and service to him. Let's pray to worship Christ freely and openly like the Magi, and offer our best things, such as our time, with faith and thanksgiving to God. Then we can be really free and happy because we keep our heart on God first. Actually, this is the main reason we gather here on Sundays. It is to worship God like the Magi.

When Herod found out that the Magi had escaped without telling him where Jesus was, he became very upset and decided to kill all the young boys less than two years old in Bethlehem and its vicinity. Of course, Joseph who was living quietly in his home would have no idea about this. So the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to get up and move with his family to Egypt.

How did Joseph react? Look at verse 14. "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt." Joseph was sleeping peacefully with Mary. Their son, Jesus, was at most two years old, so a little smaller than Nobuto. Maybe Jesus had just finished his bottle of formula and had fallen asleep. Mary felt a huge sigh of relief and began to quietly wash the dishes and check her email and favorite internet websites. But suddenly Joseph came and said, "honey, we need to move to Egypt, now!" I guess Mary must have been pretty shocked and wanted to wait until the morning. They still had food in the fridge and nothing packed. But they were God-fearing and ready to obey God at any time and in any way. So they woke up little Jesus, packed up some things, and began travelling to the distant land of Egypt by walk and donkey. Joseph and Mary were small town folk and I guess they never imagined going to Egypt in Africa. Despite this hard situation, Matthew saw that even this was used by God to fulfill a prophecy: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Just as God had sent and rescued the Israelites from Egypt, now he was sending his son to this very historical place in God's history.

We guess Joseph and his family were only in Egypt for a short time because Herod died in the spring of 4 B.C. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream again and told him to go back to Israel because it was safe. Joseph could have argued, "but we just got here and the pyramids in Egypt are spectacular and the life here is good." But Joseph was a pilgrim and relocated his family again in faithful obedience to God's will. When Joseph heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, was reigning in Judea he was afraid to go there. Again, the Lord guided him and told him to go to Nazareth in Galilee, fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. It is in Nazareth that Jesus grew up and lived until he began his public ministry.

Through Joseph's life, I personally learned the importance of obeying God's leading step by step. Now our family is living comfortably in Oita with a paid mansion and secure job. There is a good school for the boys nearby. But if it is God's will, we should be ready to relocate at any time. We should be ready to move closer to a campus and more actively serve campus ministry. Yesterday, when I visited APU I felt that the environment is very different from Oita University. Of course, there are more foreigners there and I felt that it was more friendly, open to talking, surrounded by beautiful scenery, and a potential tool which God can use for sending out missionaries to all nations of the world. I'm not sure if it is God's leading yet, but let's pray earnestly to listen to God's voice and be willing to obey and follow God freely at any time like Joseph and Mary.

Another point is that God protected and guided Joseph and the Magi from the beginning to the end of their journeys. At important junctions, God always sent a message in the form of an angel or a star to help lead his servants. Sometimes our journeys seem to have

many questions and uncertainties. It is not easy to see the future in how God will work or how God will provide. But God is faithful. The Bible says He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Jesus said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." God wants to lead us on a journey which will completely transform our lives and use us in a big way in his history. He is a loving Father who wants to bless us with the best gifts. The Magi gave expensive material things, but God wants to give us himself as our treasure. May God give us faith to walk a life with God, trust in His direction, and worship Him at every step.