



Idea: The coming of Christ is THE defining moment in all of history; therefore, the decision of what to do with His coming is the defining moment in each person's life.

Intro: Christmas...It's the most wonderful time of the year! This season is marked by parties and laughter, dinners and friends, gifts and family, and cards and messages. There is a lot of labor involved, a lot of miles to be traveled, and much money to be spent.

In some ways it resembles the first Christmas season. Joseph was a member of the tribe of Judah, and just before Mary was to give birth, he and her had to travel to Bethlehem to register in the census that had been ordered. They left Nazareth in Galilee and traveled roughly eighty-five miles south to Bethlehem in Judea. While there in that small town, Mary went into labor. Due to the census, the town was crowded with out-of-town guests, so the only lodging Joseph was able to secure was a stall in a stable. It was there in that stall that Mary gave birth to her son (Luke 2:1-7). Joseph would name him Jesus just as he was directed by the angel (Matt 1:21, 25).

In the fields outside of Bethlehem, there were shepherds watching over their sheep that night. Suddenly, a mighty angel appeared to them in much glory, declaring the birth of the Savior. The angel directed the shepherds where to find this baby and what to look for. Then he was accompanied by celestial choir praising God. The shepherds went at once to find this Savior who had been born. And when they found Him, they were forever changed (Luke 2:8-20).

There were others who heard about the birth of Jesus, and they too traveled to see Him.

[Read Matthew 2:1-3.](#)

Inquiry: The wise men or magi are a bit mysterious. First, they weren't necessarily kings but a combination of astrologer and priest. They combined astronomical observation with astrological speculation. They were students of the stars. Don't think of them as members of the local astronomy club though. These men would have been well respected, with roles in both religion and politics. They would have held a high-ranking position, which is evidenced by the type of gifts that were offered. Tradition tells us that there were three magi who visited Jesus at the manger. However, the Bible doesn't tell us how many magi came. It only tells us that three gifts were presented. There could've been 10 or 30 magi.

Matthew tells us the magi came from the east. There's no way to know for certain from which nation they came. What we do know is that they saw a star while in the east. The magi, then, followed that star toward the west.

The reference to seeing "His star" in verse 2 is a reference to a "star" mentioned in Numbers 24. There we find Israel journeying through the wilderness toward the Promise Land. Israel was gaining strength and defeating every nation that opposed them. Balak, the king of Moab, called for a seer named Balaam to come and pronounce a curse upon Israel. God, however, commanded Balaam not to curse but instead to bless Israel. Balaam blessed Israel three different times. Listen to his final oracle.

*16 the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most High,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:
17 I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel... – Num 24:16-17*

The last two lines speak of a scepter arising from God's people and a star coming out. This prophesied King associated with a star is one who will, as the passage declares, deliver the people of God from their enemies (24:17-19). The Old Testament promise in Numbers was given by a man from the east, prophesying of a star and a King among the Jews. Here in Matthew we find men from the east following a star to the King of the Jews. Isaiah magnifies this prophecy further. [Read Isaiah 60:1-6.](#)

Isaiah promises that nations will come to the light of God's people and that they will bring gifts of worship. This reality makes what Matthew records that much more striking. He wrote to a Jewish audience, but the first people he mentioned as worshiping Jesus were magi from the nations. Matthew's point was to show that God is drawing the nations to the Jewish Messiah. Jesus is not only the King of the Jews; He is King of the nations.

The magi traveled hundreds if not thousands of miles to find the One the star pointed too. Upon entering Israel, it was natural to stop in Jerusalem. There King Herod was notified of the arrival of the wise men and what they were seeking. Verse 3 says that Herod was "troubled" by the news that a King of the Jews had been born. He was greatly distressed. Herod was the King of the Jews. The Roman emperor had given him control over Judea in 37 B.C. He was a great builder of public works and a shrewd diplomat with Rome. He heavily taxed Israel and forced many Jews into hard labor. Herod was also a very paranoid king. He executed numerous sons, wives, and others close to him whenever he feared a plot to overthrow his reign.

His history of paranoia and executions explain why he assembles the chief priests and scribes in verse 4. Herod wanted to know who and where to look for this new threat. The priests knew the prophecy of Micah 5:2, so they told him that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. It is interesting and tragic that the priests believed and understood the prophecy. However, they were indifferent to Jesus. Matthew gives us no indication that the priests sought out the Messiah. Here we see that mere knowledge of the Scripture is not enough. You can know the Word and miss what the Word says. The priests did nothing with the news of Jesus' birth.

Micah's prophecy outlines that the Messiah would be born in the line of King David (vs. 6). He would be born in Bethlehem like David was, and he would be from the same tribe. The Messiah would also shepherd Israel much like David did.

Matthew 2:7-8 lays out Herod's scheme as he kindly asked the magi to let him know where the King was so that he could come and worship. The magi believed Herod and followed the star to the home of Joseph and Mary (vs. 9).

The star led the magi like the pillar of fire led Israel in the wilderness. They found Jesus' home and were overjoyed (vs. 10). Notice that Jesus was in a house and not in the stable. There's no way to be certain how long after Christ's birth this event took place. But the fact that Herod sought to kill young boys less than two years of age, means that Jesus could have been two years old when the magi arrived (vs. 16).

In the presence of the King, they responded in the only appropriate way: "They fell down and worshiped" (vs. 11). These prominent men from the east, nobles of nations, bowed down and worshiped a young child. You only bow down when you are in the presence of one far superior to you. They knew that they were in the presence of the King. Thus, the reason they obeyed the angel's words in a dream rather than Herod's.

The magi after bowing before King Jesus worshiped by offering gifts. This practice was customary in the ancient East. They offered Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We don't know for certain if these gifts symbolize anything. We do know they were costly. Some have connected the gifts to possible symbols of Jesus.

- **Gold – Jesus' royalty**
Gold is associated with royalty throughout Scripture. One of the thrusts of Matthew's gospel is to show Jesus' kingship.
- **Frankincense – Jesus' deity**
Frankincense was used in the OT not only for royal processions but also in various offerings to God. It was kept in the sanctuary and used in worship and service to God.
- **Myrrh – Jesus' humanity**
This was basically a perfume that was used in different ways. Myrrh was associated with the anointing of man. It is interesting that Jesus was offered myrrh in the cradle. Then he was offered wine mixed with myrrh while hoisted up on the cross. Matthew's point is that He is both King in a cradle and King on a cross. Jesus' body was also anointed with myrrh following His death. Jesus was born into this world as a man in order that He might die for man.

We discover in this Christmas story that everyone involved had to decide about Jesus. We see here that the coming of Christ is THE defining moment in all of history; therefore, the decision of what to do with His coming is the defining moment in each person's life. There are three different types of responses here.

3 Responses to the Coming of Christ:

1. Casual Indifference (vs. 1)

Neither Matthew nor Luke record the responses of everyone in Bethlehem that night or even in the days to follow. They only describe the major events and characters who were visited by angels, followed the star, and tried to kill Jesus. What about the others who were in Bethlehem that night? Where were the people who were around the stable when the shepherds visited? What were the people in the inn thinking when Joseph and Mary tried to get a room? What were the residents doing in Bethlehem during the weeks following Jesus' birth? What was the response of those who were there when the magi visited?

It seems that many if not most of them were casually indifferent. They were busy with life. If they were aware of what had happened, it made no lasting impression on them. These people had heard the stories the shepherds had told about angels lighting up the sky and pronouncing the arrival of the King. They might even have heard of how Simeon and Anna had blessed and prophesied over Jesus when He was presented in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38). They would have seen the star the magi had followed to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the message these signs declared fell on their deaf ears. Their casual

indifference caused them to miss the gift of God that was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Today, the message of Christ's arrival often falls on deaf ears too. It is easy to go through religious motions and forms of worship without grasping or even caring about their purpose. The magi asked those in Jerusalem, "*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*" Their response was a simple shrug of the shoulders and "Yeah, I don't know man." There was no excitement about what that question could actually mean for them personally and nationally...only casual indifference. Today, here at Christmas the same message is being sounded, "The King of the Jews has come!" Sadly, most people shrug their shoulders and go back to their Christmas shopping list and preparations.

2. Hostile Rejection (vs. 3)

King Herod was threatened by the thought of another king being born in Israel. His response to the news of the Messiah being born was violence. He purposed to eradicate the threat before the boy got out of diapers.

Herod wanted nothing to do with someone taking his throne. This same sentiment is true of many today as well. The thought of bowing down and submitting to Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior is offensive. It flies in the face of sinful humanity who decided in the Garden that man's way is superior to God's way (Gen 3).

The genesis of the growing war on Christmas in our culture is our hearts. The Lordship of Jesus over our lives threatens our own reign; it troubles us. Therefore, our sin will do everything it can to eliminate the threat.

3. Extravagant Worship (vs. 2)

The magi were anticipating the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. When they saw signs that those prophecies were being fulfilled, they came seeking the Christ child. They came to worship Him. These men of renown and wealth came to bow down before a baby boy and offer Him gifts of worship. First and foremost, they offered themselves to Jesus. Then, they offered their best in worship and adoration of Jesus. They offered extravagant worship.

The celebration of Christmas reminds us of the incredible gift God has given to humanity (John 3:16), and it should lead us to worship Him extravagantly...with our whole self.

Conclusion: The way in which you respond to a gift says a lot about what you think about the giver of the gift. In Christ, God has given us the greatest of all gifts. He has given us a Personal Savior in Himself. How have you responded? How will you respond today?

The coming of Christ is THE defining moment in all of history; therefore, the decision of what to do with His coming is the defining moment in your life.

John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. They probably spent many days playing together as boys. John was called by God to a special ministry. He was to go before and prepare the way for the Messiah. He preached a simple message of repentance and faith, calling people to express it through baptism. Hundreds if not thousands of people responded to John's preaching and were baptized. His ministry was growing. One day Jesus came to where John was baptizing. When John saw Jesus, a decision had to be made. What was he to do with Jesus?

John directed the crowd to look upon Jesus, declaring “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). In that moment, he expressed his own personal faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. He chose Jesus and declared the news of the gospel to the people.

Good News – You are loved by God. He designed you. You were made by Him and for Him (Col 1:16). You were designed to perfectly relate and to be in relationship with Holy God. God’s design for your life was holy and perfect.

Bad News – Sin has broken God’s design. The sinful nature that overcame Adam and left God’s design in him broken has been passed on to us. It has separated us from God. Today, in our sin, we are on the wrong side of the great chasm. Our sin condemns us before God, so that we are deserving of His judgment. This brokenness should not surprise anyone; because if we are honest with ourselves, we recognize it. We feel it in our anxiety, fears, and broken relationships. We know there is a deep need that we cannot meet ourselves.

Best News - The gospel declares that God the Son has paid the penalty for our sin so that we can be set free (Rev 1:5). He offered His life as a substitute for you and experienced the wrath of God the Father against your sin. So that now, you can experience forgiveness for sin by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You are given a choice to make?

As a follower of Jesus, you have experienced His grace and forgiveness. And thankfully you can never exhaust His grace. Forgiveness is always available if you will turn to Him in faith and repentance of all sin.

What have you done in response to the coming of Christ? Have you turned from your sin and experienced forgiveness through relationship with Jesus? If not, what prevents you from coming to Him in faith and repentance today?

Are you a believer living in sin who has been walking at a guilty distance? Come to Jesus in faith and repentance.