

Advent: Week 3 Study Guide

3. The Proclamation — Matthew 2:1-12

The visit of the Magi reveals another major theme in Matthew: the inclusion of the nations. The “wise men from the East” were likely Gentile scholars — astronomers who studied the heavens. When they saw the star, they interpreted it through ancient prophecy: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). Even distant nations were being drawn toward the light of Israel’s God.

For Matthew’s readers, this was a radical statement. The Messiah wasn’t only for Israel — He was for the whole world. The Magi’s journey mirrors the prophetic vision of Isaiah 60: “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” They represent the joyful response of those who recognize and worship the true King.

Culturally, their gifts carried symbolic weight: gold for royalty, frankincense for divinity, and myrrh for sacrifice — foreshadowing both the cross and resurrection. In contrast, Herod’s fear and the religious leaders’ apathy expose hearts unmoved by God’s revelation.

Through these scenes, Matthew portrays a world divided by its response to Christ — some resist Him, some ignore Him, and some rejoice and worship. The true joy of Advent is found in recognizing Jesus as the fulfillment of all longing and the Light for all nations.

Cross-References for Matthew 2:1-12

Old Testament Fulfillment and Imagery

- Numbers 24:17 — “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”
- Psalm 72:10–11 — Kings from distant lands will bring tribute and bow down.

- Isaiah 9:2, 6–7 — The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; the child who will reign in peace.
- Isaiah 49:6 — A light for the Gentiles, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.
- Isaiah 60:1–6 — Nations and kings drawn to the light, bringing gifts and praise.
- Micah 5:2–4 — Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Shepherd-King.
- Psalm 98:1–4 — All nations rejoice in God’s salvation.

New Testament Connections

- Luke 2:8–20 — The angelic announcement to shepherds: “Good news of great joy.”
- John 8:12 — Jesus declares, “I am the Light of the world.”
- Acts 10:34–35 — God welcomes all nations who seek Him.
- Ephesians 3:6 — The mystery revealed: Gentiles are heirs together in Christ.
- Revelation 21:24–26 — The nations walk by the light of the Lamb.

Word Study: Magi

Key Verse: “*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?’*” — Matthew 2:1–2

The term **Magi** comes from the Greek word **μάγοι** (*magoi*), derived from an ancient Persian word referring to wise men or priests known for studying the stars and interpreting dreams. These men were scholars—likely astrologers or advisors—who served in royal courts in regions such as Babylon or Persia.

In the ancient world, the Magi were respected for their knowledge of the heavens, but their inclusion in Matthew’s Gospel carries profound theological meaning. For a Jewish audience, Gentile astrologers traveling hundreds of miles to worship the Jewish Messiah was shocking—and deeply symbolic. The nations were coming to the light, fulfilling prophecies such as *Isaiah 60:3*: “*Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*”

Their journey shows that God’s revelation is not limited by geography or culture. God used a star—their language of understanding—to draw them toward the true Light of the world. When they found Jesus, they responded not with analysis but with **worship**—bowing down and offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts revealed who Jesus truly is: **King, God, and Savior.**

Reflection

The Magi remind us that true wisdom is not found in knowledge alone but in recognizing and worshiping Christ. They were seekers who became worshipers—outsiders who were drawn in by grace. Their journey invites us to follow the light of God’s leading with humble hearts and joyful devotion.

Study Focus: The Star of Bethlehem

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem asking, “*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him*” (Matthew 2:2), they brought with them a mystery that has captivated both scholars and believers for centuries.

For Matthew’s audience, the appearance of a star held deep symbolic and prophetic meaning. In the ancient world, celestial signs were often seen as indicators of divine activity, especially the birth or death of great rulers. The Magi, likely scholars or astrologers from Persia or Babylon, were trained to study the skies for such signs. Their journey reveals that God met them within their own world of understanding — using the stars they studied to lead them to the Light of the world.

1. Old Testament Background

Matthew’s account of the star echoes **Numbers 24:17**, a prophecy given by Balaam centuries earlier:

“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”

In Jewish thought, this “star” became a symbol of the coming Messiah — a ruler who would bring justice and peace. By highlighting the star, Matthew signals that **this prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus**. The “scepter” (a symbol of kingship) and the “star” (a symbol of divine revelation) come together in the birth of Christ.

2. Cultural and Historical Insights

In the first century, astronomy and astrology were deeply intertwined. Babylonian and Persian scholars — like the Magi — kept detailed records of celestial events. Ancient texts mention remarkable astronomical phenomena around the time of Jesus’ birth:

Planetary conjunctions — Jupiter (symbol of kingship) aligning with Saturn (linked to Israel in ancient astrology) in 7–6 B.C.

Comets or novas — bright “new stars” that would have caught the attention of sky-watchers in the East.

While scholars differ on what exactly the Magi saw, the more important truth is **theological, not astronomical**: the heavens themselves bore witness to the arrival of the King.

3. Theological Meaning

Matthew’s inclusion of the star shows how **God reveals Himself to all nations**. To Jewish shepherds, He sent angels speaking their language of Scripture and covenant. To Gentile scholars, He sent a star speaking the language of creation and wonder.

The star guided them first to Jerusalem (the city of kings) and then, through Scripture (Micah 5:2), to Bethlehem. In this, Matthew demonstrates that **true revelation requires both general revelation (creation) and special revelation (Scripture)**—the star got them started, but the Word of God brought them to Jesus.

When they found the child, the star no longer mattered. The light of heaven had taken on human form.

Reflection

The star that led the Magi reminds us that God is always drawing people to Himself, using the language they can understand. He still meets seekers where they are — through Scripture, nature, conversation, or divine nudging — and leads them to Christ, the true Light of the world.

Word Study: “King”

Key Verse: *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”* — Matthew 2:2

The Greek word for **king** is βασιλεύς (*basileus*), meaning *ruler, sovereign, or one who exercises authority*. In Matthew 2:2, this title carries enormous weight. The Magi’s question — *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”* — is both political and prophetic. It echoes God’s covenant with **David** that one of his descendants would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12–13) and fulfills Israel’s longing for a righteous ruler who would bring peace and justice.

Culturally, this question would have been startling. Herod, the current king, had been appointed by Rome — not by God. His throne represented earthly power built on fear and control. Yet Matthew shows that the true King arrives not in a palace, but in a humble home; not with armies, but with light.

Matthew repeatedly emphasizes **Jesus’ kingship** throughout his Gospel. The title “Son of David” links Him to the royal line; His parables describe the “kingdom of heaven”; and His final declaration — *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* — affirms that He reigns eternally.

Reflection

Jesus redefines kingship. His rule is marked not by domination, but by mercy; not by crowns of gold, but by a crown of thorns. The Magi’s gifts — gold, frankincense, and myrrh — recognized His authority and sacrifice. When we call Him “King,” we declare our allegiance to a kingdom of peace, truth, and love.

Study Focus: Jesus as the True King

From the first line of his Gospel, Matthew declares that Jesus is “*the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matthew 1:1). Every story that follows confirms this truth: **Jesus is the long-awaited King**—the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to David and the ruler of a kingdom not built by human power, but by divine mercy.

Davidic Line & Kingship Theme

God promised David an eternal throne: “*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me*” (2 Samuel 7:16).

David was a shepherd who became a king and united God’s people.

Many of Israel’s kings failed, leading the nation into exile and brokenness.

Earthly kings ruled through power, wealth, and armies.

The Magi sought “*the one born King of the Jews*” while Herod feared losing control (Matthew 2:1–3).

David prepared materials for a temple where God’s presence would dwell.

Fulfillment in Jesus

Jesus, born in David’s city of Bethlehem, is that eternal King whose reign has no end (Luke 1:32–33).

Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and unites all nations under His rule of peace.

Jesus reigns in righteousness—He restores what sin and exile destroyed.

Jesus rules through humility, servanthood, and sacrificial love.

True worshipers still seek Him; false rulers still resist His authority.

Jesus becomes the true Temple—the dwelling place of God with His people (John 2:19–21).

Summary Insight:

Matthew's portrait of Jesus as King overturns every worldly expectation of power. His crown is of thorns, His throne is a cross, and His victory is love. He reigns not over one nation, but over all creation—inviting us to live as citizens of His kingdom of peace and grace.

Reflection Question:

What does it mean for Jesus to reign as King in your heart, home, and community? How can you live under His kingdom values of humility, justice, and love this Advent season?

Study Focus: The Gifts of the Magi

After following the star, the Magi arrived in Bethlehem and “*saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him*” (Matthew 2:11). For Matthew’s Jewish readers, this was astonishing — Gentiles, not Israel’s own leaders, were the first to recognize and honor the newborn King. Their journey fulfills the words of **Psalm 72:10–11**:

“May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to him; may the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations serve him.”

The Magi’s visit was not merely an act of curiosity but a profound moment of worship. Their gifts — gold, frankincense, and myrrh — were costly and deeply symbolic, each revealing something about the identity and mission of Jesus.

1. Gold — The Gift for a King

Gold was the most precious metal in the ancient world, a fitting tribute to royalty. By offering gold, the Magi acknowledged Jesus’ kingship — not over one nation, but over all creation. This echoes prophecies of the Messiah as a royal son of David whose kingdom would never end (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6–7). Their gift proclaims: **“This child is our King.”**

2. Frankincense — The Fragrance of Worship

Frankincense, a costly resin used in temple offerings (Exodus 30:34–38), symbolizes **divine worship**. It was burned on the altar as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God alone. By presenting frankincense, the Magi recognized Jesus’ divinity — He was not only King, but God in the flesh. Their gift proclaims: **“This child is our God.”**

3. Myrrh — The Fragrance of Sacrifice

Myrrh was an expensive spice used in burial preparations (John 19:39–40) and for anointing oil (Exodus 30:23). Offering myrrh to a child may seem strange, but it foreshadows **Jesus’ suffering and death**. From His birth, His purpose was redemptive — to give His life for the salvation of the world. Their gift proclaims: **“This child is our Savior.”**

4. Worship That Costs Something

The Magi did not come to receive but to give — their time, their treasures, and their hearts. In bowing before Jesus, they modeled what true worship looks like: surrender, awe, and generosity. Their costly gifts remind us that **real worship always involves offering ourselves to God**.

Historical Insight

In the ancient Near East, presenting gifts to a ruler was a sign of allegiance and recognition of authority. The Magi’s actions would have been understood as an act of homage — the same way foreign dignitaries would honor a great king. But here, the King they worshiped was a child in humble surroundings. Matthew’s message is clear: **true greatness is not found in power or palaces, but in the presence of God among us**.

Reflection

The Magi came from afar to worship the newborn King. Their journey reminds us that worship begins with seeking, continues with surrender, and ends in joy. When we give Jesus our best — our time, resources, and devotion — we, too, join their act of adoration.