

## God Reveals Our Salvation to Us

Grace, mercy and peace are yours, from God our father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you were to travel to Phoenix, AZ tomorrow, how would you go about it? Even though it's almost 750 miles away, there really isn't too much that goes into that long of a trip nowadays. Sure, you need to buy the plane tickets, pack a bag or two, but then you hop on a plane, and just a few hours later you touch down in Phoenix. Simple as that! The wise men made a similar trip to Jerusalem just over 2,000 years ago. However, they didn't have the luxuries of jet engines and those little packs of peanuts. The distance from ancient Babylon to Jerusalem is about 750 miles. According to Google maps, it would take about 10 days to walk that distance, and that's if you're following well-established roads! When you take into account the camels and supplies and everything else that these men would have brought with them, this trip seems more and more incredible. The bigger question is...why. Why would these men have braved the desert, and all the dangers it held, to travel to Jerusalem? They were following a promise, and a star, hoping to find salvation in the king who had been born!

Thankfully, we do not need to board airplanes or cross deserts on camels to search for our salvation as the wise men did. In our lesson for this morning, we see how God reveals our salvation to us; by the star the wise men followed, by His Word, and by the wise men who worshiped Jesus.

### I. BY THE STAR

After Jesus was born, something incredible happened. A special star appeared, and it led several men all the way to Jerusalem. **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? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."** These foreign travelers who came to Jerusalem are often called "Magi." That title actually comes from what they're called in the Greek. *μάγοι*. Who were these *μάγοι*? A *Magus*, the singular of "Magi," was a Persian, and then Babylonian wise man and priest. They practiced astrology, claimed to interpret dreams, but mainly were priests in their own culture, interested in all things religious.

So how did the wise men come to Jerusalem? They didn't have Siri to tell them directions from the backs of their camels. Instead, they were led to Jerusalem by something that could be described as supernatural. A brand-new star that moved across the sky.

But how did they know that this star was special, or that they should follow it? Who of us could look at the stars and get so much information from them? Because they were priests, and interested in all things "spiritual," they easily could have learned of Numbers 24 from the Jews, where the prophet Balaam prophesies about the coming Messiah, **I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel.** The prophet Daniel spent much of his life in Babylon and was even the head of a group of these wise men. Was he the source of their knowledge about the star and the coming Savior? Perhaps, but maybe the answer is simpler. Many of the Jews lived in Babylon and remained there even when the remnant returned to Israel. The *μάγοι* easily could have learned about the Messiah from their next-door neighbor!

Because of the star that God provided, the wise men were certain that the king was born. God's salvation had been revealed to them. However, they still didn't know exactly where he was born! To fix this, they went to the "religious center" of the Jews; to Jerusalem.

### II. BY THE WORD

We continue in our text. **When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 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. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: " '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.' "**Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 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.”** God revealed the answer to the wise men through his prophet Micah.. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem! You’d expect the news of the long-awaited Messiah would have been met with joy. Instead, we see a troubling response from Herod, and from the chief priests as well.

Our lesson says that Herod was disturbed. The Greek verb is even stronger than that. He was terrified! This baby king was a threat to Herod’s throne, and needed to be dealt with! Herod was not known for dealing with these threats lightly. He even had two of his own sons executed just because he thought they *might* be conspiring for his throne. When the *μάγοι* arrived proclaiming the birth of a new threat to his throne, he was horrified.

Even more surprising are actions of the chief priests and experts of the law. When asked about the Messiah, they knew exactly where he would be born. Maybe they had heard the report of the shepherds who had visited the Christ child. Maybe they hadn’t, but you would think that this inquiry about the Savior would have been worth checking out. But the chief priests and experts did nothing. They didn’t think it was important. They had been blinded by their own pride!

What about us? How have we reacted to the news of our Savior’s birth? The Magi came running to find Jesus. Do we come to church, or approach our time in the Bible with this same eagerness? Herod was terrified that a king was born. Does Jesus and God’s Word threaten our way of life/desire to live in our sinful ways? The chief priests looked away from Jesus for salvation. Do we ever look for our own solutions for our salvation? Instead of looking to God and his salvation, we sometimes focus on “salvation” from our problems on earth. Horoscopes in the newspaper offer all the answers based simply off of your birthday. Fortune tellers claim to know the future. But none of these things offer any long-term solutions from our problems on earth, and they certainly do nothing for our salvation!

The ironic thing is that we don’t need to search for salvation. God has already revealed it to us in his Word. All that we need is the Holy Spirit to open our eyes. When we want more than God’s holy, revealed Word, we’re not trusting in God. That misplaced trust damns us to hell. Thankfully, God has caused His Light to shine in our hearts already so that we too can marvel at the manger like this Magi. As God opens our eyes, he drives out the darkness of sinful self-centered pride that looks elsewhere for salvation... and he replaces it with faith in Jesus, whom we now get to joyfully worship each day!

### III. BY THEIR WORSHIP

In the final portion of our text, we see this same joyful worship in the wise men. **The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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.**

Finally. Their journey was over. They had found the king of the Jews! Notice their reaction to the baby King. They didn’t address his mother or father. They weren’t even fazed that he was a baby. They bow down and worship their king and give Jesus the respect and honor that deserves as the king of all creation! More than this though, they also give him three gifts. These gifts were “fit for a king,” traditionally offered by a visiting party when they knelt before a king. Here we see the power of God at work. Pretty soon after this visit, Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt from the wrath of King Herod. What better gifts to pay for a journey than gold, frankincense and myrrh!

These gifts that the wise men gave show that Jesus was no ordinary baby. Nor was he only the king of the Jews. He was, and is, the king of all of creation! Jesus was born as the Savior for all people. His sacrifice would pay for the sins of all people. The gospel message is meant for all people. The wise men were from a foreign land. They weren’t a part of the “chosen people,” but Jesus was born to save them. We’re even farther away from Bethlehem, but Jesus was born, lived, died and rose for us too!

This is absolutely something to rejoice in! The wise men rejoice “a very great joy” when they saw the star, which led them to the Savior. We rejoice when we see God’s salvation! God shows us the Light that was born on Christmas through His Word, and when we receive the sacraments. God, and no one else, directs us to our salvation! We are free from the guilt of sin and death to worship our Savior and offer him our gifts and

offerings that are fit for the King, fit for the one who is our Savior! Everything that we offer to our Savior, our time, our talents, even our offerings in church or gifts to one another, all of these give glory to Christ as our King!

Thankfully, we do not have to make a 750 mile trip or even fly across the world every Christmas to worship the king who was born in Bethlehem. God revealed the king to the wise men through his special star. He reveals our King to us now through his Word, and we worship the king with joy in our hearts for what he has done for us. Each day, let us bring to him our gifts of love, as we live in the joy of the Epiphany. Amen.