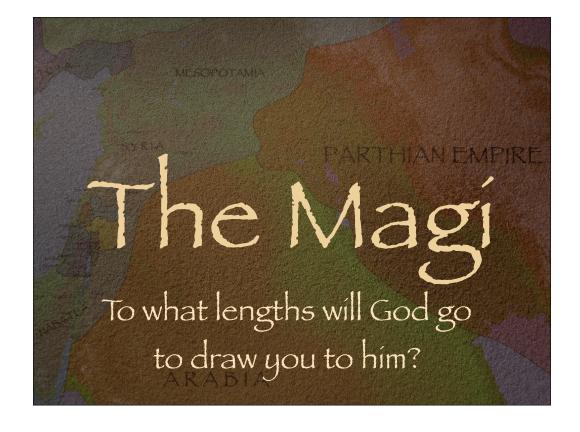


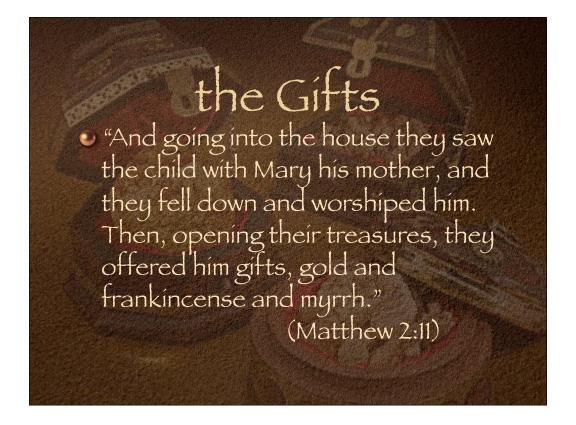
If you have a Bible, please open it to Matthew ch. 2 and the story of the magi.



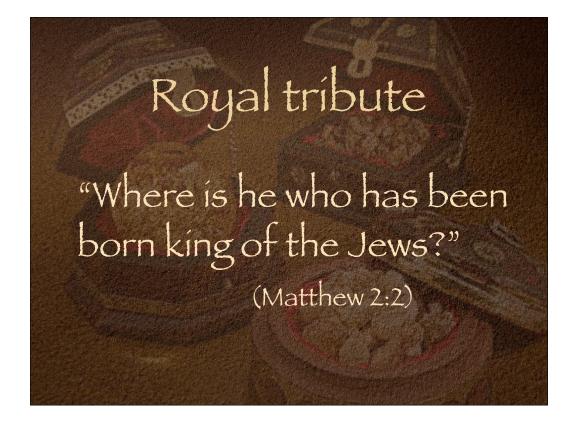
The theme of this story is: to what lengths will God go to draw you to him?



Let's begin with the original Christmas gifts. Did you get a piece of frankincense? If you rub it between your fingers, friction will warm it to release its aroma. Try it. You can also take it home and put it in a candle to add fragrance as it burns.



Matthew 2:11 says: (read). The magi worshipped the baby Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Centuries of readers have been quick to speculate about the gifts, but actually



Matthew indicates the significance of the gifts in v. 2 (read). All three gifts were royal tributes.

Royal tribute

• "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon... She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones.... Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon."

(1 Kings 10:1-10)

These same gifts were offered to King Solomon by the Queen of Sheba. Back in 1 Kings, ch. 10, we read: (Read) The Queen of Sheba story anticipates the visit of the magi. The magi brought a similar royal tribute from afar.

"Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her. And she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness." Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon." (1 Kings 10:1–10 ESV)



Is anyone here wearing gold? Gold, we're all familiar with, as a tribute to a king.



Frankincense and myrrh are less familiar, but both are resins, produced by trees. Resins are like sap. They are gummy secretions of small trees, frequently used in incenses and perfumes. Two familiar examples of resin are pine sap and maple sap.

- Amber is the fossilized form of a sap from the Hymenaea tree.
- •Frankincense comes from the Boswellia tree.
- The Balm of Gilead
- •and Myrrh both come from different species of Commiphora trees. Resins are harvested by cutting the trunk or branches of the tree, and then coming back later to collect the resin that seeps out.



Frankincense has a lighter color, and a very pleasant aroma. It was widely used for incense and as a perfume.

Incense, peace

"What use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land?" (Jeremiah 6:20 ESV)



How can you tell the difference between frankincense and myrrh? Myrrh is darker - I remember this by comparing myrrh with maple syrup. Myrrh is the same color as maple syrup. Remember myrrh and maple both start with "m." Myrrh is also less fragrant than Frankincense. • Its value in the ancient world was 6x greater than gold by weight.

- Myrrh is a powerful antiseptic and anti-inflammatory, still used for these purposes in many parts of the world today. No wonder it was a common burial spice.
- In Egypt, it was an embalming agent, and appears in the handbook of Egyptian medicine, the Ebers Medical Papyrus from 1550 BC.



We pass out real frankincense, real myrrh and fake gold beads to anyone who visits our home during this time of year. We hope that the three original Christmas gifts may call people back to the wonder and joy of the Christmas season. As long as they last, please take home with you a packet of these for each kid you might welcome into your home this Christmas season. It makes a good stocking stuffer.



But now if we set aside the gifts, there are at least four more parts to this intriguing story: (CLICK) What does Matthew say? Who were the magi? How much is our understanding embellished with legend and later folklore? What was the star?

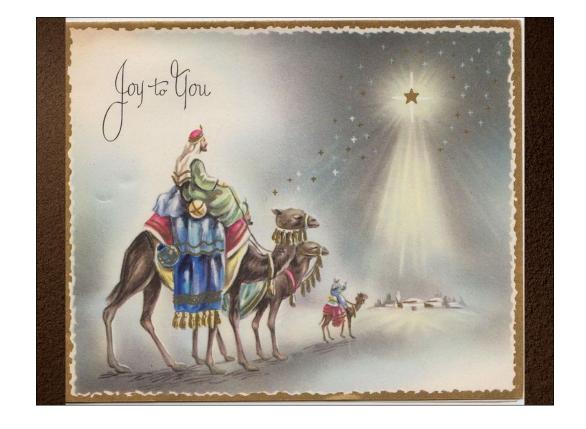


We're going to save discussion of the Star for a visit to the History of Science Collections in early January. • Hold the date: Jan 7, at 3 p.m., down in Norman.

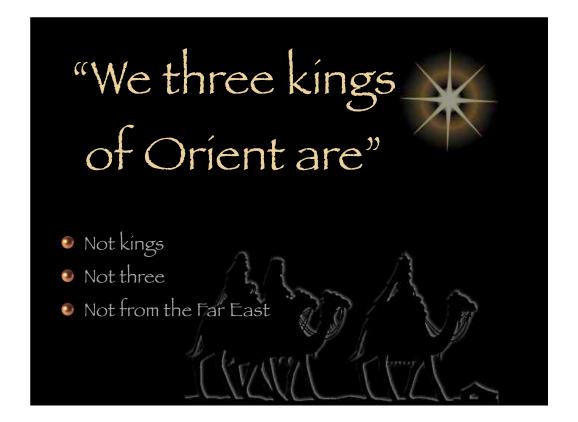
• So this morning, our focus will be on Matthew and the magi...



but first, the Lore. The journey of the magi did not end in Bethlehem. They have traveled down to our times far and wide through story and legend... [CLICK] Just as the 4th-century Bishop of Myra who was the original St. Nicholas (CLICK) bears little relation to the modern Santa Claus, (CLICK) so our visions of the magi have been shaped through centuries of affectionate embellishment.



Here's a picture of the magi as imagined on one vintage Christmas card. The way we understand this story has been shaped by hundreds of years of retelling.



How many times have we heard "We three kings of Orient are"? • According to Matthew, the magi were wise men; he does not call them kings.

- Matthew says there were three gifts; he does not say how many magi. For all we know, there may have been 60 or 70, with an armed military escort.
- And if we think of the Orient as the Far East, like China, we need to know that the word "orient" just means east of Jerusalem, in this case the Near East, as in Mesopotamia.



Longfellow's poem, The Three Kings, makes a wonderful family holiday readaloud. Its delightful rhythm evokes the lore of the magi. Longfellow wrote: "The star was so beautiful, large and clear, that all the other stars of the sky, became a white mist in the atmosphere..." Yet this is not what Matthew actually says! "The kings of Tarshish and distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him..."

— Psalm 72:10-11 (NIV)

Psalm 72:10 was interpreted by early Christians as a prophecy of the Messiah fulfilled by the magi. (Read) The idea that the magi were kings, and that there were three of them – as well as the lands of origin attributed to them in later legend – were invented by later writers who embellished verses like these.

Source	King	King	King
Syriac, 6th	Hormizdah,	Yazdegerd,	Perozadh,
	Persia	Saba	Sheba
Greek, 6th	Melchior,	Balthasar,	Gaspar,
	Persia	Arabia	India
Irísh, 8th	Gold	Myrrh	Incense
Marco Polo, 13th	King	God	Sacrifice
Hadramat,	490 AD	Milan, Italy	1164 AD
Arabía	Constantinople		Köln (Cologne)

We can see the legend of the magi already developing in a 6th century Syriac writing, The Cave of Treasures, which named the three magi and designated them as kings of Persia, Saba and Sheba. Mike-Paul-Johnny: would you mind pronouncing these names for us?

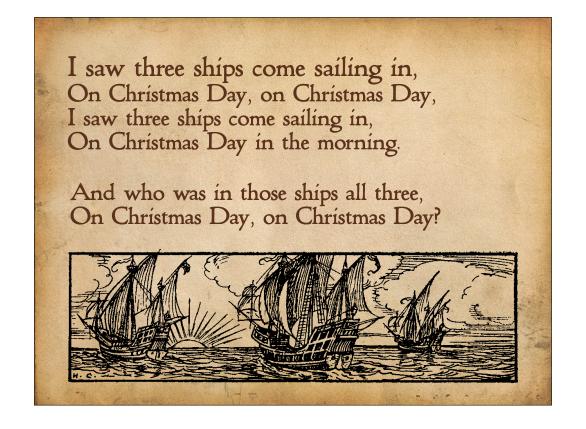
Melchior, Balthasar, and Gaspar are names for the magi that may be more familiar to us. These names derive from a Greek tradition dating back to the 6th century. Melchior was said to come from Persia; Balthasar from Arabia, and Gaspar from India. These names were popularized in the 19th century novel, Ben Hur.

An Irish tradition from the 8th century used the same names, and interpreted the meanings of their gifts as pointing to the Messiah as King, God, and sacrifice. When Marco Polo traveled across Persia in the late 13th century, he reported visiting tombs of the magi near present-day Tehran.

Other claims to the tombs of the magi were asserted within Europe. From the town of Hadramat in South Arabia, the Roman emperor Zeno obtained what were believed to be the bones of the



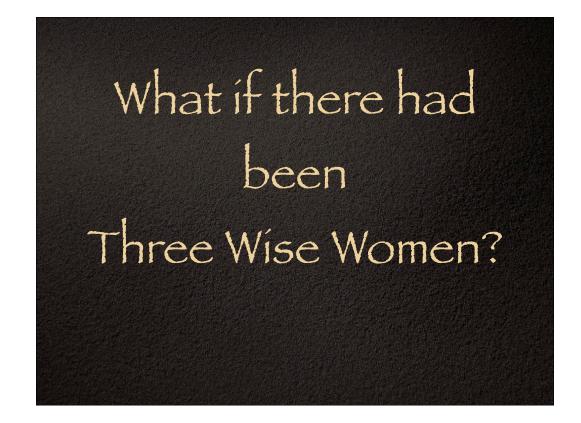
Cologne is located in Germany on the Rhine river near the west border with France. CLICK This is the largest Gothic cathedral in northern Europe. CLICK The gold-covered shrine holding the relics is the largest reliquary in Europe. The relics arrived there in jubilant procession in 1164.



And we commemorate their final journey in one well-known Christmas carol. (Sing) In the original version of this carol, the three ships referred to the three magi arriving in Cologne via ships sailing on the Rhine.

http://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/i_saw_three_ships.htm

"The legend about sailing into landlocked Bethlehem can be traced back to the 12th century when three ships brought the relics of the purported Wise Men to Koln, Germany. From this story evolved the English folk carol "I Saw Three Ships," which, it is thought, comes from the 15th century. The "three ships" refers to the belief that there were three Wise Men — which comes from the number of gifts, although the number of Wise Men has been estimated from two to twelve over the centuries. Over the passage of time, the Holy Family was substituted for the Magi."



But if we ask... (read). They would have... Asked for directions; arrived on time; helped deliver the baby; cleaned the stable; and made a casserole. So the story of the magi has been embellished with fanciful and spurious tales.



Let's go back to Matthew. For if we cut behind all the folklore, the magi of Matthew's day were historical figures, not legendary.

• 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?

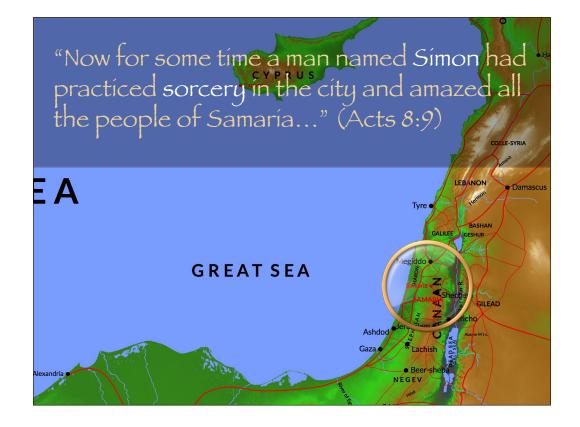
(Matthew 2:1)

Let's start with verse 1 of ch. 2 (read). Where were the magi from?

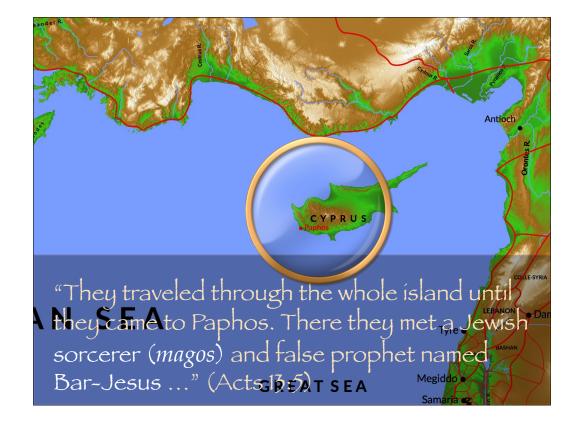
• After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

(Matthew 2:1)

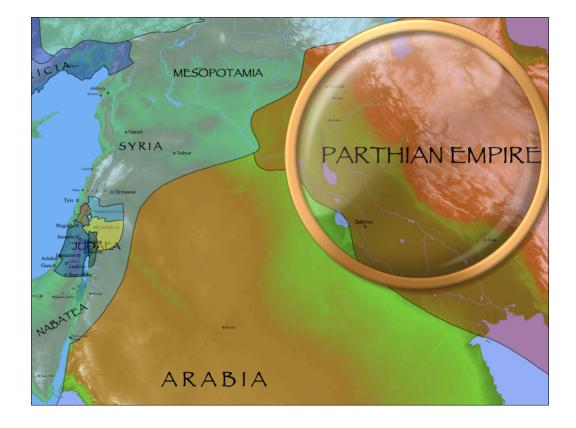
From the east, from east of Jerusalem.



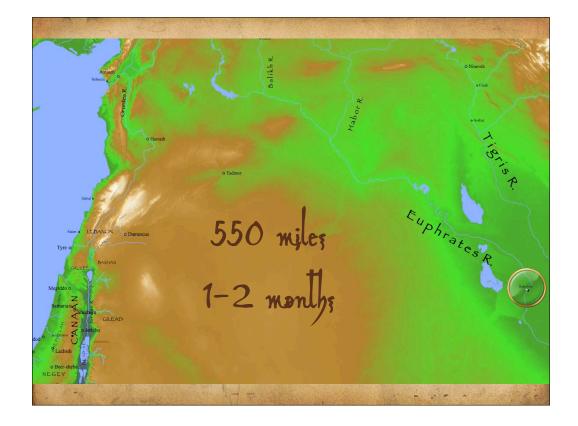
Matthew's magi were not like the magi spoken of elsewhere in the New Testament, such as Simon Magus, described in Acts ch. 8, who was from Samaria. Samaria is north of Jerusalem. Matthew's magi were from the east, which means they were not from the Roman empire.



Nor were Matthew's magi like the sorcerer Bar Jesus, spoken of in Acts 13:5, who was from Cyprus. The term magi had many meanings at this time, which can lead people astray, but Matthew is clear in stating that the magi who came to worship Jesus were not from the Roman empire. Descriptions of magi located within the Roman empire simply do not apply to the magi in Matthew's account.



Matthew's magi came from Rome's powerful rival, the vast Parthian empire to the east.

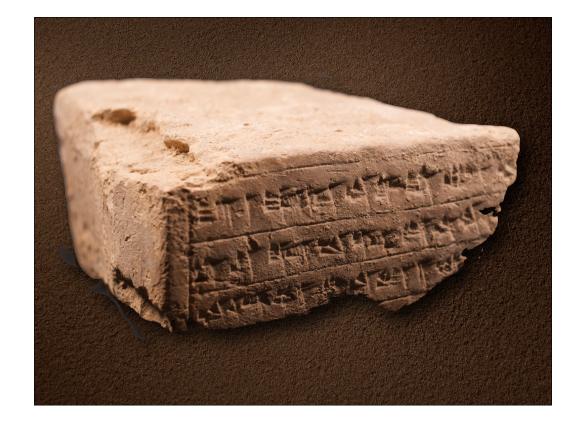


We do not know with certainty, but one likely possibility is that Matthew's magi were from Babylon. At this time, Babylon was the most important center for the practice of astronomy.

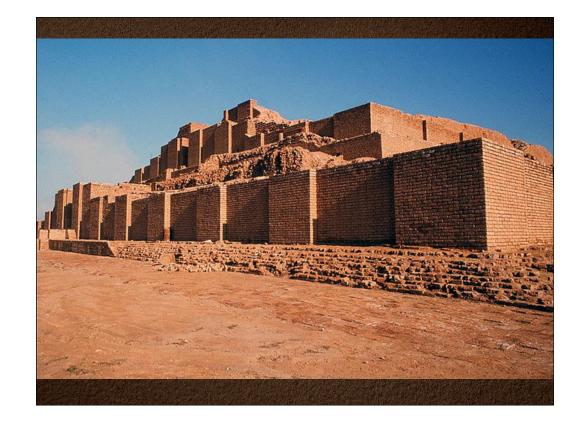
Click: The journey along ancient major roadways would have been about 550 miles, and required perhaps 1 to 2 months.



In a 45-minute video called Stars over Ancient Babylon, I describe in more detail the birth of mathematical astronomy in ancient Mesopotamia. The magi used the ziggurat of Babylon and worked in Babylon's great Temple of Esagila up through the first century AD.



Their ancient tradition of mathematical astronomy is found on clay tablets in cuneiform script. This cuneiform brick, which you will see during the visit in January to the History of Science Collections, dates to around 1300 BC. It comes from the ziggurat of Choga Zanbil, near Susa, in southwest Iran. The ziggurat was faced with baked bricks like this one, usually inscribed with dedicatory prayers.



The ziggurat of Choga Zanbil is now a World Heritage site. It is the best preserved ziggurat of antiquity.



The Mesopotamian astronomers, working in ziggurats, were more advanced in astronomy than their Greek and Roman contemporaries. They were the original source of quantitative methods in ancient mathematical astronomy. Mesopotamian astronomy was transmitted to Greek, Roman, Islamic and Hindu cultures. However, our knowledge of them is fragmentary: most of our knowledge of their accomplishments comes from cuneiform tablets dating 3 centuries before the birth of Christ. They were published in three volumes; here's one of them. (Hold up volume III, pass around.)

What did the magi know?

- 12 signs of the Zodiac, equal lengths
- Perfection of luni-solar calendar
- Prediction of Lunar eclipses
- Prediction of Solar eclipses
- Determination of planetary periods
- Mathematical calculation of the times of important events in regular planetary cycles
 - Heliacal risings (first appearance after daytime invisibility)
 - Retrograde motion, stationary points, etc.

From the cuneiform tablets that have been recovered so far, here is a short list of what they knew, all achieved in this cuneiform scientific tradition by no later than 300 BC. We'll have more to say in January about predicting lunar and solar eclipses, how planets move, including their retrograde motion and stationary points, all of which the magi in Babylon not only watched and recorded, but could predict many years in advance.



But more important than scientific ability was their knowledge of Jewish belief in a coming Messiah, a conquering king, [CLICK] because of Hebrew settlements in Babylon after the exile under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. I believe that one of the most effective ways to gain a sense of who these magi were, and what they may have been thinking on the journey to Bethlehem, is to read a book each of us already owns – the book of Daniel.

"Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him rulence over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men." (Daniel 2:48)

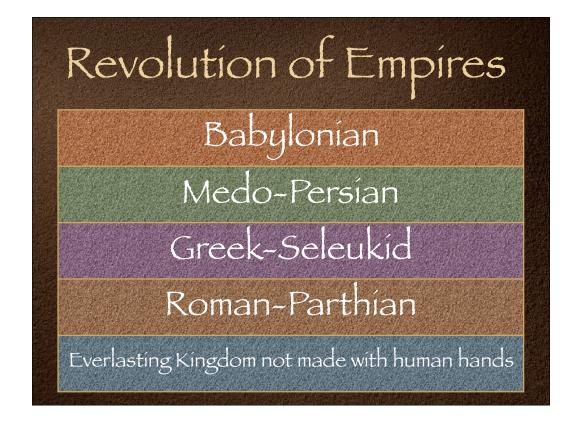
According to that account, Daniel himself became the head of their order in Babylon. (Read)

"There is a man in your kingdom who has
the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the
time of your father he was found to have
insight and intelligence and wisdom like
that of the gods. Your father, King
Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of
the magicians, enchanters, astrologers
and diviners." (Daniel 5:11)

And again, in Daniel 5:11, someone spoke, addressing the Babylonian king, about Daniel himself (read). I believe the magi knew the book of Daniel and its prophecies.

Revolution of Empires	
Sumerian	3000-2350
Akkadian	2350-2100
Ur	2100-2000
Old Babylonian	1700-1600
Assyrian	700-609

For two millennia, the business of the magi in Babylon had been to advise the King on the revolution of empires. Their chief concern was the succession of rulers. The book of Daniel reflects this preoccupation. In Daniel's famous interpretation of the dream that troubled Nebuchadnezzar, he asserted that the God of heaven gives dominion, not the stars.

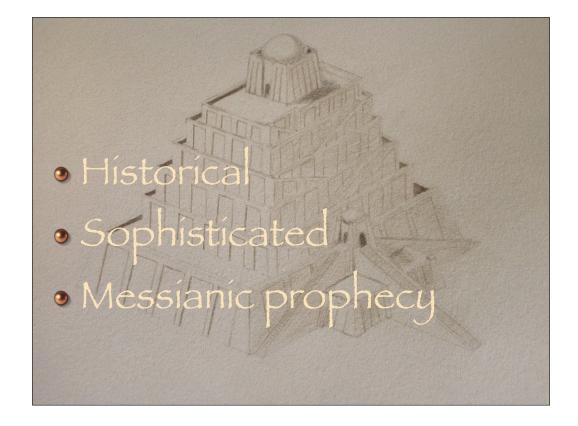


Daniel explained that there would be four more empires until God's everlasting kingdom arrived. These next four empires would last 70 weeks, or 490 years from the decree to restore Jerusalem, and (CLICK) then the Messiah's everlasting kingdom will come. Unlike the long succession of Mesopotamian kingdoms, the Messiah's kingdom will never be destroyed, and all nations of the world will worship him. When this everlasting kingdom arrives, divination by the stars - the way of life of the magi - will pass away.

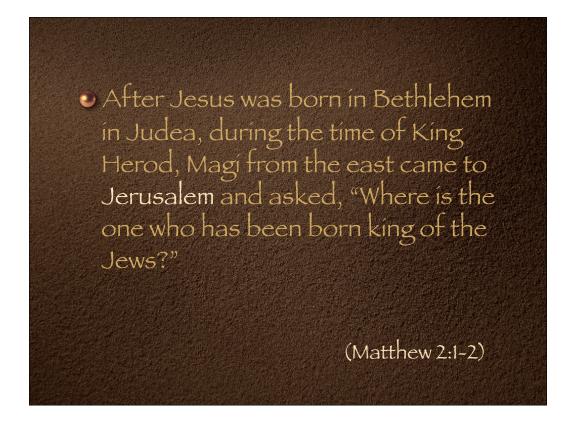
"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

The book of Daniel describes the one whom Matthew's magi were seeking: (read). Through Daniel, God prepared the way to bring the magi, centuries later, to worship Christ at his birth. [The magi show how the coming of Jesus was the joy and desire of all nations.]

[&]quot;I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)



We have now seen that the Magi were definitely historical, not legendary; that their astronomical knowledge in the first century B.C. was sophisticated, not trivial; and we have surmised that they were familiar with Jewish prophecies of a coming Messiah.



Let's return to the passage in Matthew, ch. 2: When the magi arrived in Judea, where did they go first? (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?"

(Matthew 2:1-2)

Why did the magi go to Jerusalem? (Expecting a new king, in the capital city)

• 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 when it rose ..."

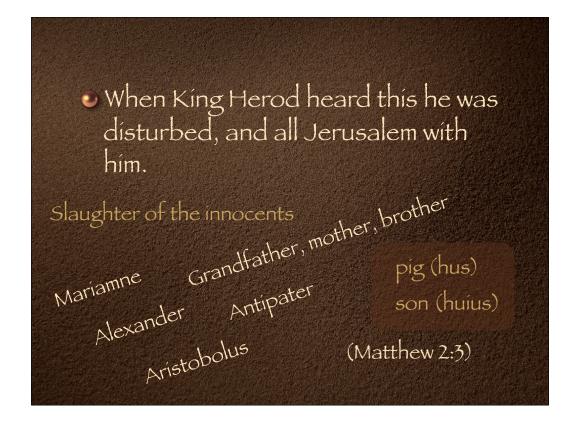
(Matthew 2:1-2)

Matthew continues that: "We saw his star when it rose..." Evidently the star did not lead the magi to Bethlehem. Nor was the star obvious enough to have been noticed by people in 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 when it rose and have come to worship him."

(Matthew 2:1-2)

But let's not get distracted by the star. The important thing is this: What were they planning to do when they would meet the new king? (Worship him) This is our purpose, too, to worship him in all we do.



Let's read v. 3: (read). Was the magi's visit a secret? (No; others besides Herod knew of the magi's visit). Why were they disturbed? (Herod was the original Grinch.) CLICK He murdered his wife Mariamne, their two sons Alexander and Aristobolus, Mariamne's grandfather, mother and brother, and his eldest son by another wife, Antipater. CLICK Matthew's account of the slaughter of innocent children in Bethlehem, just before Herod's own death, bears the ring of truth. CLICK Augustus Caesar once quipped that it was better to be Herod's pig (hus) than his son (huius). Since pigs were not eaten in Judea, Herod's pig might have a longer lifespan than Herod's son.

• "But why was Jerusalem troubled? Surely the prophets had foretold him as the Savior, Benefactor and Deliverer who would come from above... Although troubled, they nevertheless did not try to understand what was happening. They did not follow the wise men or even take any particular notice. To this extent they were... careless."

(John Chrysostom, 4th cent.)

The early church Father Chrysostom wrote: (read)

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah 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 shepherd my people Israel.'"

(Matthew 2:3-6)

Let's read verses 3-6. (read) If it wasn't the star that led them to Bethlehem, then how did the magi know to go to Bethlehem? (Matthew quotes the Old Testament prophecy from Micah 5:2.)

• When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah 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 shepherd my people Israel."

(Matthew 2:3-6)

The real Messiah will be the Shepherd of his people, not anything like Herod.

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 search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

(Matthew 2:7-8)

Let's read verses 7-8 (read). What was the exact time? (2 years) What were Herod's true intentions? (Murder, slaughter of the innocents) Why did Herod not go himself? (Unbelief? Fear of the Parthians?) Why did the chief priests and teachers of the law not go to Bethlehem along with the magi? (Unbelief? Fear of Herod?)

Thomas Merton

• "It is good that somewhere in the world there are men who realize that Christ is born. There were only a few shepherds at the first Bethlehem, and it is the same now. The ox and the ass understood more of the first Christmas than the high priests in Jerusalem. And it is the same today."

Thomas Merton mused: (read). It is fitting that there were no newspaper headlines (show scroll). God led the magi to his son by obscure paths, just as it was to obscure shepherds in the hills that the angels appeared. If we are attentive, we will find that he is with us in hidden ways even today.

• After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

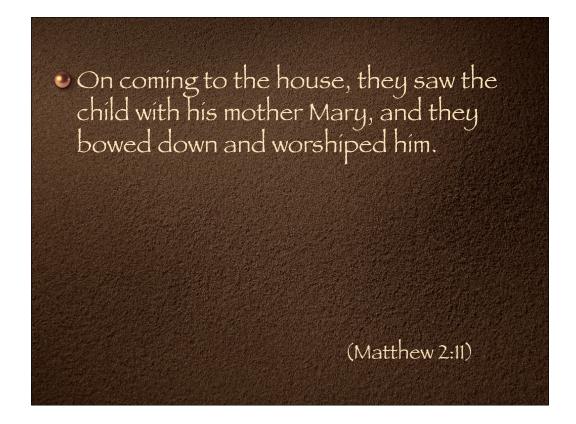
(Matthew 2:9-10)

Let's read verses 9–10. (read) Why did the magi rejoice? The magi expected to find a child in the royal palace. They were amazed that he was not there. But they determined to search and not give up. They had come too far to turn back empty–handed. Despite the disappointment they experienced in Herod's household, the star was a sign that the prophecy really was coming true and, perhaps against all hope, that they would see it fulfilled. The belief of the magi who came from so far away puts to shame the unbelief of the religious scribes just up the road in Jerusalem.

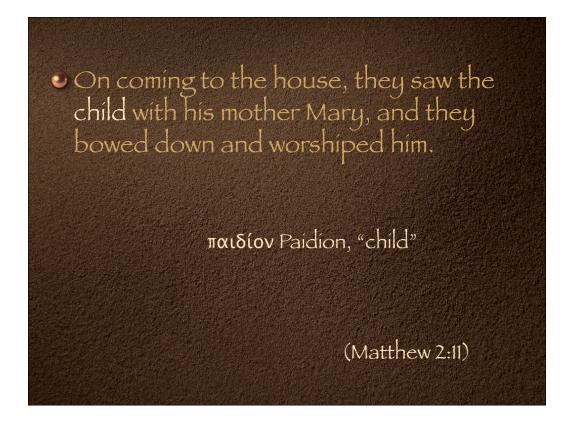
• "they rejoiced exceedingly because they had not been deceived in their hope... If then they had been seeking a king of this world... they would have undertaken the effort of so great a journey for nothing. Yet because they were seeking the heavenly king, even if they saw nothing regal in him, they were nevertheless delighted, content in the testimony of the star.... They adored him and returned home."

(Anonymous early commentator)

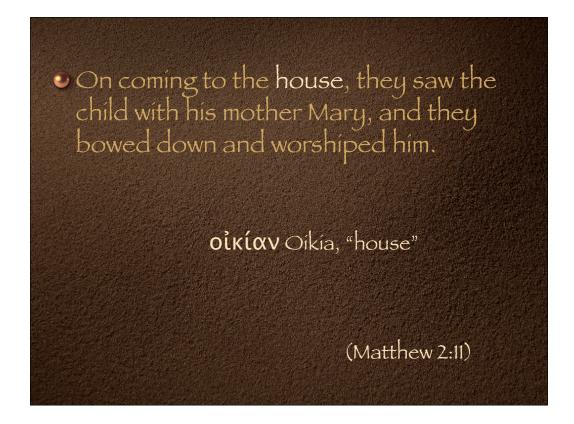
An anonymous early commentator wrote: (read)



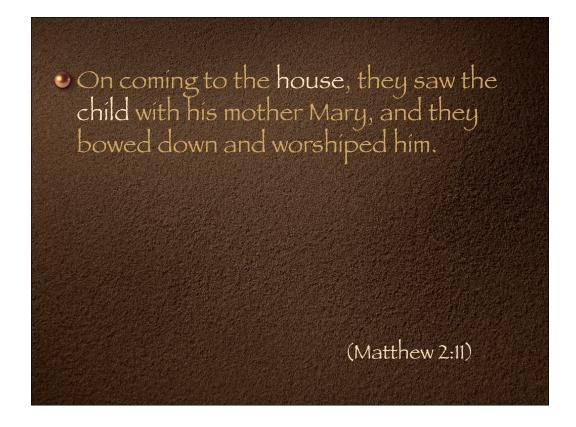
Let's read verse 11 (read). Did the magi find a new-born baby?



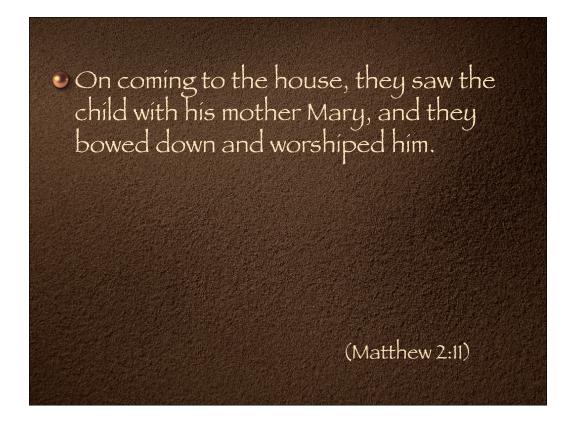
Did the magi find a new-born baby? (No, a child.)



Did they find him in a cave or stable? (No, a house.) Some months later. This is why our daughters always placed the magi far away from the Nativity set in the beginning – to the east, of course. Each week they would journey closer to the nativity, finally arriving in early January.



How old might Christ have been at the time of the visit? (Younger than two years.)



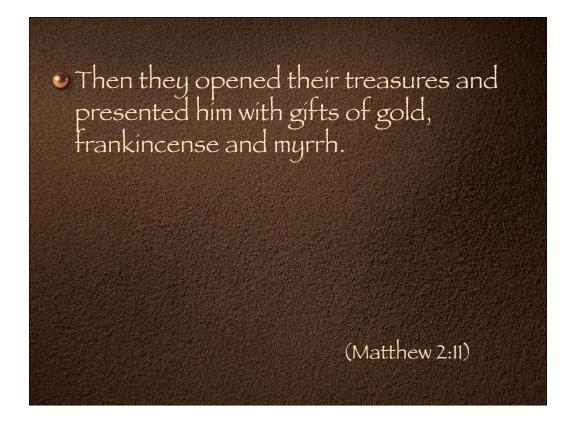
Was this little child of a poor family in an obscure village what they had expected? (NO) Nevertheless, did the magi do what they had come for? (To worship him, despite everything turning out contrary to all that they had expected.) What about us? Do we worship when everything turns out contrary to what we are expecting?

"A boy he is, but it is God who is adored... The Son of God, who is God of the universe, is born a human being in the flesh. He permits himself to be placed in a manger, and the heavens are within the manger. He is kept in a cradle, a cradle that the world cannot hold...

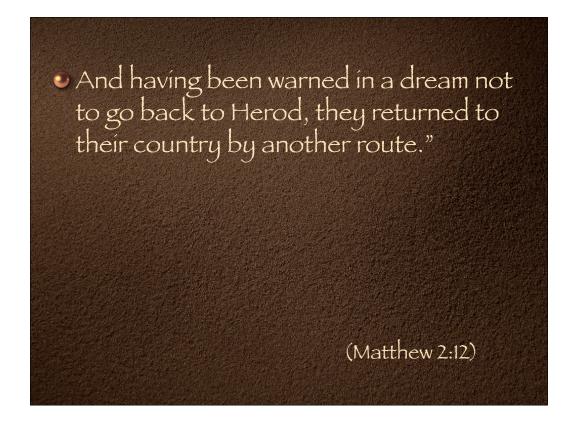
Thus he is the One, the God of Glory and the Lord of majesty, whom as a tiny infant the magi recognize."

(Chromatíus, ca. 400)

The Church Father Chromatius commented: (read). It's hard to recognize God as present with us, when circumstances are not what we expect. But the magi worshipped Jesus, as they found him, as a little child in the humblest and remotest of circumstances.



Back to verse 11 (read). They were certainly wealthy and brought a tribute fitting for a king. Though what they found was contrary to all their expectations, they presented their gifts anyway. As we saw earlier, there were three gifts, not necessarily three magi; there may have been several dozen magi, with an armed escort. Very likely, the magi were an imposing delegation on an intimidating visitation from the powerful Parthian kingdom.



The story concludes in verse 12 (read). What went through their minds on the journey home?

[Gregory the Great commented, "As they were advised to take another way, so are we."]

T. S. Eliot "Journey of the Magi" "We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, With an alien people clutching their gods..."

T. S. Eliot's poem "Journey of the Magi" ponders how different the magi had become, because of this strange journey. (read) Were the magi changed by their encounter with the king of the universe, revealed not in pomp and circumstance, but as the little child born in poverty in Bethlehem? Did they remain satisfied with their own high stature, privilege and wealth? Did their vast learning and knowledge of astronomy seem the same?

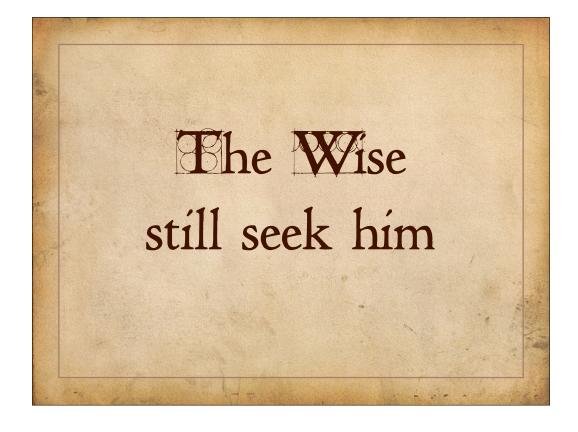
T. S. Eliot "Journey of the Magi" "We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, With an alien people clutching their gods..."

Life soon came to an end for the magi in Babylon. Their temple and ziggurat were destroyed one or two generations later. Just as the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., and brought an end to the system of sacrificial worship, so the cuneiform tradition of astronomy carried on by the magi also died out, about the same time. The magi's way of life ended. Their work was forgotten for nearly 2,000 years, only to be recovered in the last century and a half with the rediscovery of astronomical cuneiform tablets.

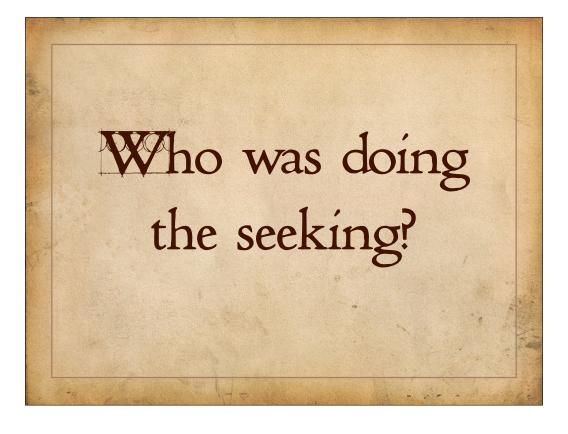


So where does this leave us; what do we really know?

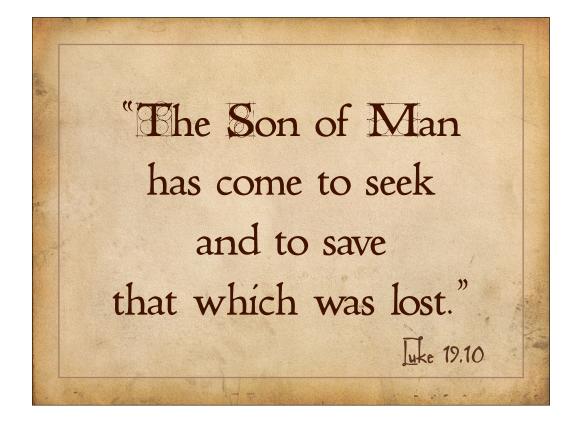
Actually, Matthew didn't need astronomy or history to tell us what is most important. His narrative is simple and more profound than that. An amazing wonder lies inextricably at the heart of this story, where men from afar seek out an obscure birth in one of the poorest families in all Israel...



"Wise men still seek him." Have you seen a Christmas card with this saying on it? Did the religious leaders or palace advisors in Jerusalem seek him? So far as we know, not one of them bothered to travel the 6-mile journey south to Bethlehem along with the magi. (Pause, breathe) I fear I am like those leaders, too distracted and preoccupied to seek him, particularly in a hectic holiday season. Yet...



the most important point is not whether I am seeking God, but that he is seeking me. Who was doing the seeking?



I know of no other story in the gospels that shows more clearly the meaning of the words of Jesus, when he said that (read). Paradoxically, the babe in the manger was seeking the wise men, more than they were seeking him.

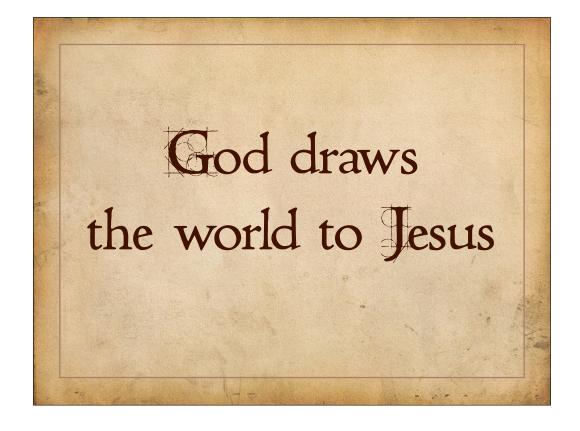
"I have been an arrogant fool, young one. I have boasted all my life of being a seeker of truth—I, always me. When I saw that star I knew in an instant... that star is an invitation. You see, Wisdom is seeking us. And He has sent that star as an invitation to come to Him, yes Him."

In a modern re-telling by Michael Card, Melchior speaks to Gaspar:

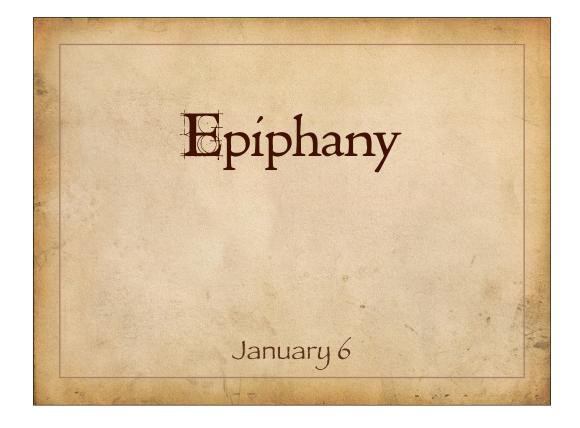
Then the old man's entire frame shuddered, as a tear glided haltingly down his cheek and was lost in his beard. "All my life He has been seeking me. He is the one who has given to me and to you our hunger for him. And now this star is a precious gift. I have sold all that I have for the journey and for gold to offer when I meet Him.... Tonight I leave...."

Michael Card, The Promise (Nashville: Sparrow Press, 1991)

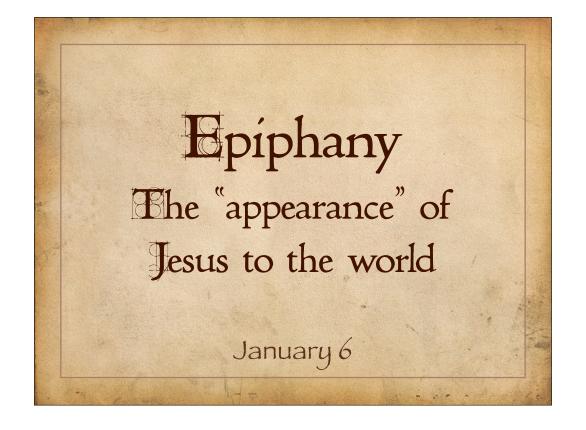
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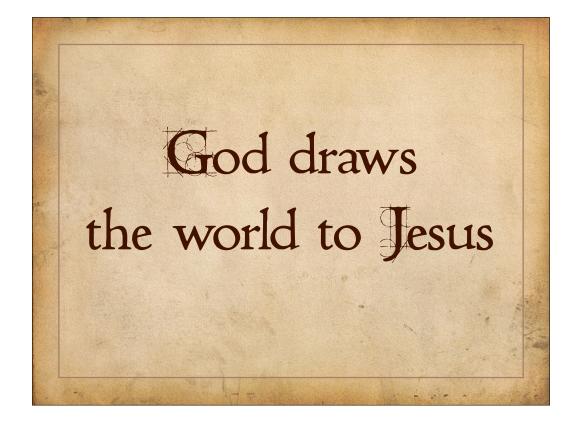
God draws the world to Jesus. Wisdom consists in recognizing that the One who drew the wise men to Himself is also drawing us.



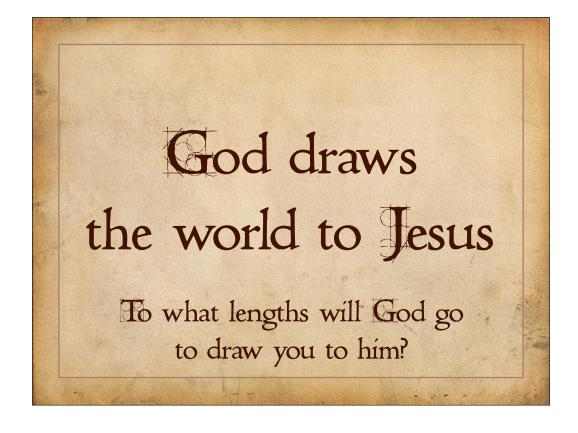
The arrival of the magi to worship Jesus is celebrated in many church traditions around the world on the holiday of Epiphany, January 6. This celebration is older than the tradition of celebrating Christmas on December 25th.



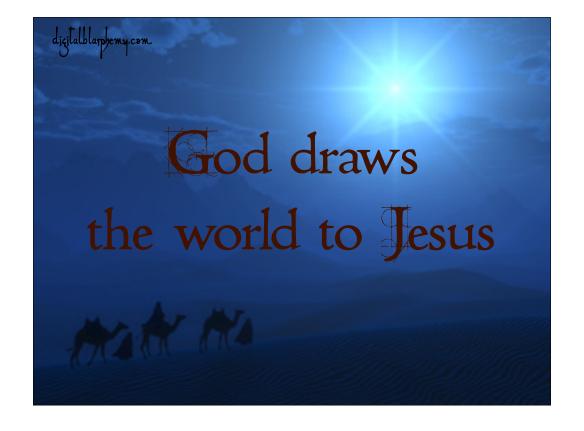
Epiphany is a Greek word that means "appearing," that is, the appearance or showing of Christ to all the nations of the world, represented by the Magi. The Messiah's work is of universal scope, for the whole world and not merely the house of Israel. Here at the beginning of the Incarnation story, the Messiah is revealed to the world. Through long centuries, from the days of Daniel, God prepared the way to call the magi to Bethlehem. The prophecy of the everlasting kingdom the magi heard in Daniel's visions became revealed to them, manifest as it broke into the world in the birth of Jesus.



SLOWLY (conclusion): God draws the world to Jesus. God is even now at work, hiddenly, all around us. All your life, and for countless generations before you were born, God has been seeking you and preparing the way for you to know him.



(slowly) "To what lengths will God go to draw you to him?" This is the message of Epiphany and the story of the magi. This holiday season, let's attend to the ways in which God is working to draw each of us to know him in a fresh way.



Join me in prayer. We praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. We thank you drew the magi to Jesus and so made them as little children. We thank you for giving these wise men as an example for us, that like them we might also become like little children, and recognize you as King and God and Sacrifice. Draw us near to you this Christmas season. Open our eyes that we may see you as you are, as the child in Bethlehem, the Lord and Savior of the World, and worship you in unexpected ways. Amen.