

December 26

Scriptures: Read Matthew 2 (Special Christmas Reading)

Key Verse: “And when they had come in the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11)

Overview

This story of the magi doesn't appear anywhere else in Scripture or in any other early Christian writing. It is unique and complex. And for those of us in love with a Christmas tradition or two, it may be a bit confusing.

The narrative begins, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem...” (v.10). In so doing it gives us immediate pause in terms of one of our cherished Christmas traditions. All the Christmas cards, pageants, and paraphernalia have the wise men coming to the stable — but here we have the word, “after”. How long after? That's exactly what paranoid King Herod wanted to know. “Give me the exact time of the star's appearing”, he demanded (v.7).

Apparently the star had first appeared two years previously — that's why Herod had all the two-years olds in Bethlehem murdered, and every child up to the age of two for good measure (after Joseph and Mary had made their escape —v.14). Herod wasn't about to be usurped by some would-be Jewish king, even if he was only two! Then, as we read in the key verse, they finally found Jesus in Bethlehem, now a “child” rather than a baby, living with his parents in a “house”, not a stable (v. 11).

The story is further complicated by four separate references to fulfilled prophecy. In verses 5 and 6 we see that Bethlehem was foreseen by Micah (5:2) as the birthplace of the Messiah. Jeremiah (31:15) is quoted as having forewarned of the slaughter (v.17, 18). Hosea (11:1) saw Messiah being called “out of Egypt”. And then there's a genuine reference to prophetic tradition that Messiah would be called a “Nazarene” (from Nazareth) (v.23). Messiah was a Nazarene, born in Bethlehem, called by God out of Egypt! Confusing?

But the key verse provides the tone, indeed the posture, for response to this unique, complicated, and intriguing story: “they bowed down and worshipped Him”. Beyond our traditions there is history — “God in man is now residing.” O come, let us adore Him!

Prayer

We too, Lord Jesus, bow down and worship You. Not the young child in Bethlehem, but the risen Christ at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Grant us the reality of the symbols of the wise men. We worship You as King, as the gold would denote, as our High Priest as the frankincense shows us, and as our substitute in death as the myrrh would teach us.