



# Writing Life Faith



## The First Advent-ure: The Magi

### Unlikely Candidates.

*"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem." (Matthew 2:1)*

How often have you heard these phrases?

*"We should put the wise men next to the shepherds for our nativity scene..."*

*"We three kings of orient are..."*

*"Immediately after the shepherds left, the Magi arrived..."*

*"The three wise men..."*

Allow me to apologize in advance if I'm about to ruin your nativity scene. By this point I think we know that the Magi were not present at Jesus' birth. If they were, why would Herod order all baby boys aged *two and under* to be killed? From the wise men's report, it's clear that the star only appeared at or shortly before Jesus' birth. The Bible also says nothing about *three* wise men, only that they gave three gifts.

Now that we've straightened our nativity scenes out, let's decipher who these so-called wise men (or kings, or Magi) were.

### Who were the Magi?

Like the shepherds, we don't know the names of the Magi. I fully believe this is by God's design, because the Christmas story isn't about shepherds and wise men. It's about His son. Matthew 2 tells us the wise men were from eastern lands, and your guess is as good as mine as to where that is.

But this is beside the point. The Magi were wealthy, high-ranking rulers who left their home country and travelled for up to two years because of a star. That's some faith. When these men found who they were looking for, they bowed down and worshipped the King.

### What do the Magi teach us about God?

The wise men's journey began when the star appeared. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, like Mary and Joseph, like the shepherds, when God sent a sign, the wise men listened.

Yes, their journey was long, but they embarked on it nonetheless. All their worldly fame and riches could wait; this was something special.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they made their one mistake: telling Herod about Jesus. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, in a sign of humility and reverence, they worshipped Jesus and gave Him gifts. Then they packed up and went straight home via a different route. God warned them of Herod's ploy, and this action may have saved Jesus' life (but God always has multiple plans).

The contrast between the visitors I referenced last week and the visitors from this week is striking: *first* come the lowly shepherds, *followed* by the kings. There's probably significance in the order.

## Takeaways from the Magi.

By now, as we've reached the final post in this Advent series, I hope you've seen traces of repetition in my action steps. I assure you this isn't laziness; it's my way of showing you that everything is part of one grand story. God called different people, but He gave them the same assignment: obey Him, persevere, and humbly submit to the new King. Here's how the Magi did it...

### 1. Dedication.

*"...The wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was."* (Matthew 2:9)

We've talked about perseverance, but this is next level. Who travels up to two years so they can see Jesus once? (Yet in the most paradoxical sense, doesn't a Christian travel their entire life just to see Christ once?) Most of us don't want to travel two hours for a one-evening event.

That said, knowing the stars as well as they did, the Magi must've known this was special. They left their riches and achievements, exchanging them for an opportunity to visit Christ. Cue the first New Testament example of living completely for Christ: surrendering possessions and riches before Him. Will we do the same and give Christ our figurative gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

### 2. Humility.

*"They entered the house and saw the child with His mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."* (Matthew 2:11)

As recorded in Scripture, there are a few notable differences between the shepherds' arrival and the wise men's arrival (aside from Matthew and Luke's respective choices to include or not include them). I'm going to ignore the financial aspect and focus on their posture before Christ. While the Bible doesn't record the shepherds kneeling before Christ - which isn't to say they didn't do so - it does record the wise men bowing in submission.

This isn't a shot at the shepherds, although perhaps it takes me back to a previous point I made about Gabriel's response to Zechariah's doubt. The more we know God, the more evident He will be in our lives. The shepherds were kinda oblivious to Jesus' birth (it did take all of God's angels to get their attention). On the other hand, the wise men came at the beckoning of a star.

When the Magi met Jesus, their first response was to humbly bow in worship. The more we get to know God, the more we'll come to appreciate Him as the wise men did.

### 3. Reverence.

*"Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We saw His star as it rose, and we have come to worship Him."* (Matthew 2:2)

People often use Jesus' name flippantly. They toss it around, curse with it, use it to condone sinful practices, etc. If we want to use Jesus' name with reverence, let's start by showing Him the respect He deserves.

This may be me extrapolating, but in the entire Christmas story, only Gabriel actually speaks Jesus' name (Luke 1:31). Other than a third-person reference to Joseph naming Jesus, neither parent speaks His name. The shepherds don't say it, nor do the wise men. His name just is the holiest Name above all names, and should be treated as such. This Christmas season, let's show Jesus the reverence He deserves in the way we speak and act.

### In Summary.

In the last four weeks, we've looked at the first Advent(ure) from four unique perspectives. We began with Zechariah and Elizabeth and the miraculous conception of John. From there, we moved to Mary and Joseph and their obedience to God's call. We then saw God choose the shepherds as the first people to see Jesus. Today we finished with the arrival of the kings, who came from afar to see the King. (Someone give this director a handful of Oscars.)

I hope that you've seen God's intentionality in all of this, walked out by flawed human beings. God certainly didn't pick the best of us. He didn't have to. He just had to pick those who would best obey Him; those who were willing to believe.

So allow me to ask the final question: do you believe?

As Luke 2:19 reads, *"But Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often."*



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