



Matthew 2:1-2

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 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.”

We feel like we know this story don't we? Chances are, you, like me, grew up singing Christmas carols like 'We Three Kings of Ori-

ent Times' or at the very least heard them in shopping malls, or on television, often enough to make you think you know this story. But the problem with that particular Christmas carol is that nowhere in the bible does it mention three kings visiting the baby Jesus in a manger. They weren't kings, they were Magi, who were part counsellors and advisors in the royal courts, part astrologers and part magicians. There weren't three of them, the bible doesn't say how many there were, and at this stage, Jesus, far from being a baby in a manger, might be as old as two, and verse 11 of this chapter says that Mary and Joseph and Jesus at this point in time were living in a house in Bethlehem, not a stable. We feel like we know this story but a quick check of the facts and we find that we've actually been misled.

And just as an aside, peoples' views of Christi-

anity and the Jesus can be a lot like this. They've heard some things, been told some things, read some things on the internet, seen some things in the newspaper or maybe experienced them in person, and have formed a view of Christianity or a view of Jesus that's quite innocently and understandably *very far from the truth*.

But true Christians are people of the book. We're people of the book, because we believe that God spoke, and the came universe into being, and right now God is holding the universe into being by the power of his word. And that same God who uses words so powerfully, chose to reveal himself to us in words, in the form of the bible. We even use God's word as a synonym for the bible. And so if we want to know the truth about Christianity and about Jesus we turn to the bible. God wrote a book and that's why Christians are known as people

of the book. That's how we can spend an entire year in the gospel of Matthew, some days we're only going to be looking at a single verse, because these are the very words of God, which means they are deep and profound and worth the effort if we truly want to get to know God.

But I can hear what you're thinking, 'OK, so sure, the carol's wrong, they're wise men and astrologers and not kings, Jesus is a toddler and they're in a house – but seriously a moving star?' And again, this come back to how we understand the bible. Yesterday we saw God the Son step down out of heaven into human history. And in fact, the bible as a whole is a record of God progressively revealing himself to humankind throughout human history. And so it is fair play, if it is possible, to reconstruct something of the historical situation in which these events occurred.

And in doing so we find that in the year Julius Caesar died, in 44BC, for a period of 7 days one of the brightest comets in history appeared in the sky, which as you can imagine really helped the astrology business for many years. And then we find that 3 times in the year 7 BC, the 29th of May, and the 3rd of October and the 4th of December there was an extremely rare conjunction of planets, Jupiter (thought to represent kings) and Saturn (thought to represent the Jews) against the backdrop of the constellation Pisces (thought to represent Palestine). And scholars date the birth of Jesus between 6 and 4 BC. So even with these historical scraps that have survived, plausibility is much higher than it first seems. You can imagine in a world without street lights how these blinding events in the heavens would have been the

talk of every one, from commoners to kings.

But all this is incidental. Matthew only just barely mentions the star. Because while the bible contains historical facts and events, its purpose was never intended to be a meticulous historical record. The bible is historical, but its purpose isn't history, it's purpose is theology. It was written by God not so we could know every little detail of history, but so that we can know him.

And so what do we learn about God in these two verses? Well Matthew is showing us that God the son, not even yet a two year old, is being worship by the wisest men in the culture of his day, who have come to worship him from far away nations. Whether God miraculously caused a star to guide them, or whether they followed a series of supernovas, whether their

methods were right or their methods were wrong, Matthew wastes no time on it because it's not the point. The point of these two verses is the wisest men on earth come from distant nations to worship a toddler. What the Jewish nation will fail to see they've seen only too clearly before Jesus even turned two. Jesus came to the Jews but many of them rejected him and so consistent with God's promise to Abraham he opened his arms to the surrounding nations and now billions of people including you and me have come to him and have found in him the true wisdom of God.

Why not take a moment now and just meditate on all the wisdom of the world bowing before Jesus. Perhaps a verse like Col 2:3 might help, it says that in Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Are you seeking knowledge and wisdom in the place where

it's truly found? In a world where it often feels like we never stop studying just to keep up with things; does any of this education actually make any sense of the bigger questions of life? Who do you know that with degree after degree who's more confused than ever, who's life is in a mess, and who desperately needs the wisdom that is only found in the Jesus. And when you're finished thinking deeply about this passage and its implications in your life then why not spend a few minutes in prayer? Commit this day to Jesus and pray for wisdom from him as you go about whatever he's prepared in advance for you to do.

Thanks for reading. I'm really excited to pick this up again with you tomorrow.