

## *Showing Up*

Matthew 2: 1-12 (January 8, 2023)

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In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” <sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

<sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### *Historical Context*

These wise men or “magi” in Greek originated from Persia. They were followers of Zoroastrianism, a belief system that was a precursor to Islam. Whereas translations refer to them as “wise men,” it is doubtful only men were in this group. Caravans from Persia often included women practitioners of this religion as well. Yet, Matthew clues the reader into the patriarchal context that often privileges male voice, male characters, and male presence.

### *Theme: Showing Up*

Last week’s focus lifted Egypt as a place of refuge for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Now we go back to glean lessons on the Day of Epiphany. The etymology or definition of “epiphany” means “to show up, show on, show out.” The star appears in the east beckoning this group of Persian elites to make an appearance in Bethlehem. An astrological phenomenon “shows up” so that the magi may “show up.” They are to traverse the land and pay homage to one who is greater than they are. Unlike Herod who acts out of worry, the magi journey with worship on their mind.

The intermingling of conflict with a call to revere is palpable. There is terror and tension. There is also wonder and worship. Herod is so filled with anxiety and paranoia that he fabricates his intent to pay homage. Nevertheless, this wise group travels through the deceit in order to share of their treasure. Herod’s anger stands in stark contrast to the awe and curiosity of the magi. He is overcome with fear. Upon seeing the child, the magi are overwhelmed with joy. Herod is not the recipient of honor. The horror he inflicts later upon innocent children reflects this displeasure. Yet, the bowing of the magi to the newborn Jesus reveals their understanding on the promised one. The magi “show up.” Herod “shows out.”