



THE JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

A family devotional to follow celebrating His Birth

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Intro

This is where we find ourselves each year it seems following the wonder and joy of Christmas.

Our Christmas devotional book is now closed...but the ornaments hang for a few more days—remembering all we learned together this year as a family as we walked each day together.

The presents—all unwrapped...and as a mom of little ones...I feel the need to squeeze out more sweetness...more memories...more magic. And there is reason. I believe—because the Maker put that desire there.

Because...there is more.

This is when it's really just beginning.

The awaited for Savior was born—and for the wise men—their journey would now begin. It would take a year...a YEAR of day in and day out travels for them to finally reach the Savior.

For us—this is when the journey...when the real magic should begin too.

THIS is what I really want to teach my children.

We build up Christmas...and we should. The awaiting. The anticipation. The awe. The joy. The Savior is born! Now...it is time to go find Him.

And this is what we do. Together. Individually. Day by day. We look for Jesus. We come together and share how we find Him...how we see him in the daily—and we remind each other what He looks like day to day in each of our worlds as we see His light and presence shining through.

For little children—we leave the nativity up longer that has rested all season on our mantel. Only we take away the wise men. We move them on the other side of our home. And each night they journey closer. We read about the wise men as a family for the next week or so. And each night we each write on a piece of paper how in some way—we saw Jesus that day. And in doing so—we begin our year like the wise men did—looking for Jesus. We begin our year not with a list of things we want to do better. Because really—if we just look for Jesus—and that is ALL...then grace abounds—and we need to do nothing more.

And this is the truth I want to teach them.

To look for Him.

In the daily.

That's it.

Look for Him in every circumstance and trust Him to show up—to show you what to do—to trust Him to be there—and to continuously wait on Him.

And on hard, hard days. I need a reminder. And some days. They will too. And on days like that—we grab our treasure box full of little ways we saw Jesus in the beginning—and we remind ourselves how to see Him again...and again...and again. We remind ourselves of His faithfulness in our lives. And as we see Him ever so clearly throughout the year—we jot it down...and place it in this magi treasure box. And we learn together how seeing Him, knowing Him and experiencing Him is really the greatest treasure of all.

I wrote a Magi Devotional several years ago. I'm going to refine it a bit—but if you would like to follow along—or print it off each day to read together and walk your children through looking for Jesus as they learn about the Magi—and start the year off as they did...these devotionals are a work of heart from our family to yours.

So tonight—or tomorrow night—or whenever you read this...simply start by just moving your nativity Magi and getting ready to let them venture through your home...and this King through your heart.

The Journey of the Magi now begins...

Day 1 - "Looking for Jesus"

Matthew 2:1-2 "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 in the east and have come to worship him."

After the King was born—the day we celebrate on Christmas--isn't this when the journey really begins? Always looking for Jesus. Running towards Him. Longing to see Him.

This.

This is what we as believers really want to teach our children.

So our journey begins.

For many families—this is the time they start putting up their Christmas decorations. But for us, some will go up, but not our Magi or our manger scene. For the next couple of weeks, our Magi will journey through our home getting a little closer to the manger each day—a little closer to seeing Jesus. Each day will represent almost a month's time in the actual magi's journey as we remember the almost YEAR long journey it took for the magi to finally arrive to worship the king.

Each morning, the children will run down the stairs to find the magi to see how far they have come from their last resting place. And each morning (or night when morning passes us too quickly by) we will sit with them as we reflect on their journey and what led them to continue toward the King NO MATTER WHAT.

This journey will inspire us in the year ahead—to continue to draw closer to Jesus.

This journey will remind us that the year ahead will not always be easy—but to trust in the One who is calling us.

This journey will bring us to our knees to worship...and remind us to bring our own gifts to Jesus...to bring glory to Him.

In our after Christmas craziness—putting things "back together", I don't want to forget there is something to be learned with the magi's journey to Christ.

Because their journey began after the birth of Christ—ours, too, will begin after Christmas when we celebrate and remember Jesus's birth.

So for the next 2 weeks, we will have family devotionals centered around the wise men and their journey to Jesus. We will dig deeper into history surrounding their lives--who they were, where they came from and the star they followed. We will dream about what their journey might have been like together--and the twists and turns they took to help protect Jesus from King Herod.

Our goal throughout the day EACH day: Throughout the day—like the wisemen, we will look for Jesus. We will look for His majesty in creation. You might see Him in creation outside or in wonderfully created creatures you see outside. We will look for Him in kindness and acts of love in others. You might see His light and love in a family member or friend--or even a stranger. You might even see Him in your own life and heart--and you might want to share this with us as a family as well. Each night, we will learn something new about the wisemen and their journey beginning first in Matthew's account of the magi's story, and we will end by sharing ways we saw Jesus that day.

Look for Him as you go throughout your day. And remember these moments of seeing Him throughout the day. Each day you can choose one of the ways you saw Jesus with your family. Our family jots these "Jesus sightings" down on a strip of paper, and we put it in a treasure box--one that we found at an old store that we think resembles a treasure box the wise men might have carried on their long journey to Jesus. At the end of our 2 week journey, we look back through all the ways we saw Jesus, and then we continue to add to it throughout our year! On hard days when it feels like it's hard to see Jesus, we pull out this treasure box and we remember His faithfulness and how He has shown Himself to us in the past.



Each night—after you go to bed—while you are sleeping...we will move the wise men a little bit closer to the manger scene! In the morning, you can run to find them to see how much closer they are to the manger scene—some where in our home. Some days it may seem they are off course—some days much too far away...and others—back on track...probably much like their journey often seemed throughout that year long journey to bring gifts to Jesus and worship Him. (Some nights—as a special treat—different children may be asked to move the magi closer to the King—to our nativity set too.)

Can you think of ONE way that you saw Jesus is someone or something today?

Dear God,

Thank you for this special journey you are about to take us on as a family together. Will you open our eyes to see you each day? We open our hands to you and what you want to teach us. Help us to see and receive your love in the days ahead. Thank you for coming to this Earth so we might each know you and experience you in a real, personal way. We love you. Amen.

Day 2 - "Walk by Faith"

Matthew 2:1-2 "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 in the east and have come to worship him."

Based on Biblical and historical writings, we can confidently guess the journey of the magi was between 1-2 years. Each of our days in this 2 week devotional will represent a MONTH in the wise men's journey. Can you imagine traveling A YEAR to deliver gifts and see baby Jesus?! Can you imagine not knowing how long the journey would be but leaving your home country to follow a STAR of all things into the desert?! Can you imagine leaving to see a baby that you have been told is the Son of God?!

They left everything they knew and left believing in faith that God had called them to go despite what the world would say about them! They were trusted leaders—yet they left their honor and prestige and were probably called crazy in their going! Their journey is amazing—it is full of faith, wonder—and even adventure as they are tricked by King Herod but because they have learned to listen to and follow God they are redirected—and Jesus's life is saved. They are redirected in the end down a more difficult route—but for His sake it would be worth it.

Has God ever asked you to do something that required a big step of faith like the magi?

Although they might have felt alone and unsure at different points in the journey, God never left them—and they always had a bright star to lead them and remind them God was with them. Today is where our journey begins with the Magi.

Can you think of ONE way you have seen God today? Let's share that with one another, write it down and put it in our treasure box to mark the beginning of our journey...

Dear God,

Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to us. Like the Magi, we want to follow your guidance—and today we come to worship You for loving us and sending your Son for us. Open our eyes so we may see You on our journey this year ahead. Lead and guide us—and use our gifts for Your glory.

Amen.

Day 3 - “They Came from the East”

Today we will see in the lives of the Magi the importance of stepping out in faith...even when you feel like you are alone...even when what God is asking you to do doesn't make perfect sense...even when God's plan for your day isn't comfortable. The amazing thing the Lord does here is that He also provides others to walk this difficult journey with each wise man. Not one had to journey alone. They had separate callings, but often the Lord will give us friends and other people to step out in faith with during different seasons of our lives just like He did for the wise men.

Matthew's book in the Bible gives the fullest story of the Magi in the Bible—and from Matthew we are only told they are from the east.

Matthew 2:1-2 “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 tells us in his book the Magi came from the east. He just says Magi—and we assume there were 3 as we learn later that they brought three gifts to present to Jesus. Tradition, however, has also passed down and it has been historically documented that there were, indeed, three; it is also documented in historical writing that they were from the families of Shem, Ham and Japhet—some speculate that one was from Africa (northern Ethiopia)—and scholars have speculated that they came from Persia, Arabia, or even India). Their names are given as Casper, Balthasar and Melchoir in historical writings.

During this time, Magi were very important leaders in the government. For these leaders to **leave** their city and place in the government would have been quite a big deal! They risked losing their place in the government power—everything they had worked a lifetime to achieve—all for the sake of obeying God and going to worship His Son. To tell those who were under them, in their care and who followed them and trusted in their leadership that they were leaving to follow a STAR to see the Son of God—would have not only raised eyebrows but might have also risked their reputation being the wise men that so many saw them to be. Many probably thought they were crazy!

Magi were not only powerfully politically, but they also had priestly duties and were seen as holy. Many may have not agreed with their leaving their duties and families to follow God in this way—but we know the Magi went. They obeyed God, and they took a risk not worrying about what others thought of them in order to obey and do what God was asking them to do.

Their journey was not a short one either—but most likely OVER 900 miles by camel. (Our family lives in Atlanta, Georgia—so this would be like us traveling on camel and by foot all the way to San Antonio, Texas! Take a minute to go to this website: <http://www.distancebetweencities.net/> and finding a city 900 miles from where you live. Now you can better understand why it probably took the Magi 1-2 years to finally reach baby Jesus to worship Him!)

Not an easy journey to begin with...and if scholars are correct that they were EACH from different countries. You can imagine each of their journeys had to begin separately—and then

they came together. This was during a time of NO telephone, email or letter writing—so God spoke to each of the Magi separately, and each of the Magi had to step out in faith regardless if they thought they would be alone on the entire journey. But one day they came together as they got closer to Bethlehem following the star that would take them to the Light of the World—Jesus Christ.

Many times our journeys, the most difficult ones the Lord asks us to take will be like the wise men, and we feel like we begin it all alone. However, God is always with us—willing to lead and guide us as we look to Him and follow Him step by step.

Many times, the Lord will also provide others to journey with us—who kind of meet us half way yet they become just a big part of our journeys. Together we encourage one another and cheer one another on—pick one another up when one falls and rejoice as we get closer to the finish line that the Lord has called us to.

The Lord always guides, and He always provides. And with Herod ahead at their next stop in Jerusalem...they would need one another for what was ahead. Can you think of a time when you and a friend were on the same journey—where you both felt like God was calling you to do the SAME thing? Has there been a time when you felt like God was asking you to do something and you were afraid to step out and do it all by yourself? There will be times in your life when you feel like you are alone in your journey—but you can pray that God will provide a friend to walk beside you and you can encourage one another and point one another to Jesus along the way!

Thank you God how you always provide for us on our journeys. Thank you that you are always with us—and that in your great grace you also provide others to journey with us. Help us to step out in faith and follow you before we see others doing the same—and to trust that you will provide others to encourage us along the way when we need it most.

Remember to share a way you saw Jesus today—and add it to your family's treasure box!

Day 4 - “The Road Less Traveled”

A word to moms: How worth it this journey is! To hear a little one saying, “I saw Jesus in the dark clouds...there was a beautiful bright light behind them and it made me think of Jesus.” To share with them how amazing this is because Jesus is the Light in the darkness—and the Light of the world. The words of a child...“I just saw Jesus all over my heart today over and over again. And my heart kept making me do nice things.” This is seeing Jesus on our journey. What a treasure to write these down and put them in our treasure box to present to the King and encourage us along the way.

The Magi’s journey required traveling through A LOT of desert.

What do you think traveling through days and days and DAYS of desert would be like?

And I bet we have never thought about it—but did you know it also required traveling through crusades? Based on the tracks of their journey, avoiding attack and crusades would have been almost impossible. And the only way to safely make it through was to follow a bright...

STAR.

Because of the dangerous ground they would have to cover, traveling by night would be the safest. And it would be by night that the star that God provided for them as a guide would be the brightest.

Some times in our lives, it will feel like we have to walk through dark times. But we can trust God to lead us!

And if the only way for them to find the baby they sought to bless was by following a star... THEN...it meant they could only be directed when most of us like to sleep. They might have grumbled. They might have been tired. But this was also God’s way of protecting them.

It. Was. Not. Easy. It was probably one of the most ambitious journeys ever attempted during this time! He who called them would lead and guide them.

As they went through the desert and avoided enemies from the Roman Empire by night, I bet there were many times they wanted to turn around. I bet there were times they questioned if this was really what they heard God tell them to do. I bet they wondered if they were on the right track.

The God who called them would protect them. The word had spread of their traveling with riches—and they would need protection from thieves. Each town would meet them and hear their story—and the word would pass of this unbelievable story from reputable travelers who were known to be wealthy and carrying gifts.

The Lord who called them would also protect them from the territory they traveled through that was ruled by the Roman Empire. Have you ever thought that it was God’s protection asking them to follow a star?! Although at first the thought of following a STAR seemed wild—although at first realizing they would only know their way BY NIGHT when they could actually

see the star—they later would realize that God has a purpose FOR THEIR GOOD—EVEN though it might not have made a lot of sense at first. HE CAN BE TRUSTED and He leads and guides us for our good because He loves us!

There were days and weeks where the wise men were no doubt afraid. There were days that they questioned if this WAS REALLY God's best for them—was this REALLY what God wanted them to do—did they hear Him right?! Was He calling them to the dessert to be attacked, hungry and tired? Would His revelation really be at the end of their journey? Would it really be worth it?

There were many days and nights of uncertainty and darkness in the journey of the magi. We have the privilege of knowing the END of their story and we know that they safely made it to worship Jesus! We can imagine the glory they experienced as they saw Jesus as a little one—RIGHT BEFORE THEIR EYES. This was worth traveling for! And God sees our future and knows the days He calls us to follow Him in the darkness will ALSO be worth it as we keep going toward Him.

Trust Him in the dessert, and trust Him in the darkness. He is always with you and with Him you have nothing to fear. He will give you strength, protection and nourishment for your journey just like He did for the wise men—just keep looking for Him and seeking Him.

Has there ever been a time when you questioned if God was really with you? Have you ever want to give up on the thing you felt the Lord asking you to do because you couldn't see the end in sight? He is with you. He will not forsake you. He longs for you to trust Him—in the good days and in the hard days. Like the wise men, it will be worth it! In Matthew 25 Jesus tells the Parable of the bags of Gold where the master entrusts bags of gold to His servants. One works hard and does everything he can with what his master gives him—while another just hides what he is given until his master returns. When the master returns—he rejoices over the servant who multiplied what he was given and says to him, *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”* (Matthew 25:21) The Lord has given us gifts to use for His glory. He entrusts us to certain tasks to bring Him glory—and He wants us to shine before men to bring light to Him. It will not always be easy—and there will be some days like the wise men that it's hard! But He is with us—and it will be worth it when we hear Him say, *“Well done—my good and faithful servant!”* He sees the end of your story—and He wants you to be reminded today that it will be worth it!

What are some ways you saw Jesus or felt His love today? What is something you can do in the day ahead to use your gifts for His glory?

Dear God,

Thank you for being with the wise men on their journey—for calling them to see Your glory and to have the privilege of traveling across countries just to worship you. So many you could have called—yet you called them because you knew they would hear your voice and they would obey. Open our ears Lord to hear your voice. We want to follow you when you call us—and we want to see your glory and worship you. Thank you for loving us—and for being with us through storms in our lives and always carrying us through. Amen.

Day 5 - “Nothing Can Change God’s Plan”

The Magi—they had made QUITE a name for themselves. Word spread throughout the nations that there were three distinguished, wise men who would stop at nothing to visit a baby said to be the Messiah. Through desserts and battles—hungry and tired—they made their way. As the months passed many would tell stories of their seeing the magi themselves! And before long—Kind Herod himself heard of their quest to see a soon-to-be king. King Herod did not want anyone to be ruler or called king other than himself. He knew the only way to find this king—would be to call in the three men who were said to know how to find him.

Matthew 2:3-10 “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where Christ 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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.’” 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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”

I remember the FIRST time I read this story to my children. They began shouting, “Herod was tricking! Herod was tricking!” Yes—this is true. Herod did NOT really want to see and worship baby Jesus. We know this—but in the moment...the wise men did not. The wise men had traveled through hardship to finally feel as if they were being favored and welcomed in the presence of the king. Being summoned by King Herod and asked to help him would have been an honor—and they believed him as they had no reason not to. God didn’t unveil Herod’s dishonesty to them until later in order to protect them.

It would not be until a dream later they learn otherwise, but for now—remember they didn’t know any different. I’m sure when they discovered the truth, they felt deceived and even couldn’t believe that they were almost used to reveal the location of Jesus to the very ruler who wanted to kill him out of jealousy! The ONE man who wanted to do away with Jesus was able to talk with the three who knew where Jesus was. A CLOSE CALL! What are the chances?! What the enemy meant for evil—God would use for good. (Over and over again we see this in scripture—how what man means for evil God can turn around and use for His good! Remember Joseph and his brothers—and Joseph’s words: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” *Genesis 50:20* What a beautiful picture of Christ to come!).

Indeed, Herod was “tricking”!

He intended to use the wise men to find baby Jesus who he felt would be a threat to his place in the kingdom. The wise men told them exactly how they were getting there and exactly what direction they were going in. They even agreed to come back and get King Herod after they

located him! BUT THIS—this was NOT in God’s plan. And nothing can thwart (change) God’s plan!

Isaiah 14:27 says, *“For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?”*

The Lord Almighty had a purpose for the wise men—and ultimately for Jesus Christ—and not even the king of the land could change that! The wise men never took their eyes off the Lord, and they continued to follow the star He told them to. In the right time, when God knew the wise men would understand—He would reveal what He needed the wise men to know about Herod to protect them and for His ultimate plan.

The Lord has called us to be wise and to put our trust in Him alone. There will be times in our own lives when we are lied to or someone tries to trick us into doing something that isn’t in the Lord’s plan—and that is why it is so important for us to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and to put or trust in Him alone. We have to be careful not to listen or trust just anyone because of who they are or who they say they are—and ask the Lord for discernment and peace in the way He has chosen for us to go. The wise men would have much to risk by not obeying the king’s orders—but they had much more to risk if they didn’t obey the Lord.

The wise men are getting closer to the manger...

They have seen the star—and tomorrow will be grand as they worship this babe they have traveled through desert, storm, army to get to him...for weeks, months and quite possibly over a year. And when they drop to their knees in worship...their hearts will know the journey was worth it. I can’t wait to share this tomorrow with the littles!!! I think a few songs about the Magi will be in order!

Dear God,

We thank you that NOTHING can change your plans! We ask that you would be over all the details of our lives and that you would give us wisdom in the way to go. We ask for discernment when someone tells us something we are not sure about—and that ultimately we would hear from you and be obedient to you. Thank you for being BIGGER than any problem or person that would attempt to change your plans! How exciting to know you have a plan for our lives that no one can touch as we trust in you! Amen.

How did you see Jesus on your journey today?

Day 6 - "Coming to the King"

Matthew 2:9-11a "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. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him..."

The wise men continued on their journey and still not knowing the threat King Herod was to Jesus or the risk they could unintentionally bring upon the baby they ventured on with the intent to RETURN to King Herod and tell him exactly where baby Jesus was as they had been instructed to! They were on the border of endangering not only the Messiah and themselves but also the salvation of the world! God could have stopped their journey there. He could have redirected them or even completely wiped them out of the story to protect His son, but He didn't! God had a bigger plan! God is bigger than King Herod—and the wise men had NOTHING to fear--not even from the most powerful rulers on Earth. God wanted the wise men to finish the story He was writing just for them. He loved the wise men and He wanted them to worship and experience the joy of His Son--at all risks and all costs. God would protect them, guide them and even warn them. It would be so important for them to hear God's voice and to be able to recognize His directing them.

God continued to lead the wise men all the way to Jesus by the star—and Matthew shows us just how long the journey really was as by the time they got there they were no longer in the stable but in "the house" Mary and Joseph lived in. He was now a toddler—and the wise men had been traveling during every milestone moment of Jesus's first year just to see Him and worship Him.

They saw the child (no longer a baby!) with his mother Mary—and what did they do? Can you imagine how AMAZING this was?! **"They bowed down and worshiped him."**

For 1-2 years they had traveled—enduring desert, storms, battles, wild animals, fatigue. They had been brought to King Herod and for weeks they had questioned together what they should do—as they hadn't had a peace about King Herod when they were in his presence. They had kept the treasures safe—resisted any temptation to sell them in return for food or stay...

And now...

They saw Him.

And upon seeing Him with Mary—they knew. They knew EXACTLY who He was! Can you imagine?!

And they hit their knees—and worshiped Him.

I can't imagine anything more grand...anything more beautiful...anything more worth a journey like theirs. And Mary...she got to worship Him every day. Oh...what a blessed calling! And this...too we are offered!

One day—we too will see this King—and when we do—there will be no doubt of who this King is. And we, too, will not even have to think about what to do next as we drop to our knees and worship!

I can't wait for us to learn tomorrow the importance of each gift—but today let us just reflect on the wise men seeing Jesus for the first time...what that must have been like...and how it led them to worship. How do you worship Jesus? Every day—what does it look like? What are different ways we worship?

Tomorrow we will see the wise men present the gifts...and learn the significance of each one. But for now—let us enter in with the wise men into the heart of worship.

Dear God,

Thank you so much for sending Your son Jesus. How majestic You are and how majestic is Your Son! We journey like the wise men with the longing to one day see Jesus face to face—what a day that will be! Thank you for being with the wise men and for guiding them to Jesus. Thank you for being with us each day and for guiding us closer to Jesus. We want to worship you now and through out the day in the way we act, the way we love and the way we live. We worship you and love you. Amen.

O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

For You alone are worthy
For You alone are worthy
For You alone are worthy
Christ the Lord

We'll give You all the glory
We'll give You all the glory
We'll give You all the glory
Christ the Lord

How have you seen and experienced Jesus today? Write it down...put it in your family's treasure box—to remember His hand in your life and celebrate His presence as He leads and guide you. What a gift we have in Jesus!

Day 7 - “The Gifts”

Matthew 2:11b “Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

Now—as you know the Magi had just finished worshipping Jesus...they were on their knees—and it was time to present the gifts they carried and protected for almost a thousand miles... over desert and valley and even through times of peace and war. Finally they were here—and can you imagine how excited they were?! Don’t you remember the feeling in your hearts??? When you have found the PERFECT gift...the gift you feel God Himself laid on your heart to surprise someone you couldn’t wait to see with—they thought they would RUN right up and give Jesus the gifts when they saw Him...but their hearts were overwhelmed His presence and they worshipped Him first!

Now while we know very little of where these wise men are truly from—tradition has passed down where many in the early church said they were from. And OH MY—were they long awaited for!!! Even books in the Bible said they would come!!!

Psalm 72:10-11 “The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts, the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay their homage, all nations shall serve Him.”

Isaiah 60:6...”Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense and proclaiming the praises of the Lord.”

CRAZY that even the Old Testament said they would come...many, many, many years before Mary or Joseph or Jesus Himself was ever born!!! AND although we don’t know exactly where they were from tradition in the early church has said one was from Ethiopia...another possibly from Iran or Egypt...some have said the east (China). Since the 7th century—they have been identified as Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar—and there is even a historical document written in 735 that tells us a little bit about each of them. NOW, keep in mind this isn’t written in the scriptures—but this could possibly be who they are...and we do know their gifts and what they meant...so let’s meet them for who the historical documents say they possibly were!

First—meet Melchior...it is said he was a very old man with white hair and a long beard...



The Journey of the Magi

(So...this is the younger Melchoir). It is said that Melchoir brought GOLD.

GOLD? Can you IMAGINE?! Oh my!!! Gold was meant for KINGS!!! Kings were the ones who stored and collected gold--and they were the ones that received gold as gifts in their honor. Can you imagine—I mean...really—can you IMAGINE what Mary was thinking? **“MY SON???** You are giving Him gold. Gold is for kings...gold is for KINGS...it is TRUE—my son...the **KING of KINGS!**” He brought the gold and there he laid it at this baby’s feet. A gift for a KING...

Then...came Caspar. Caspar was said to be young and beardless and to have a ruddy complexion...



It is said the Caspar brought frankincense.

FRANKINCENSE???

Well...lemme tell you about this one! Frankincense comes from a tree called Boswellia. You create frankincense by slashing the tree—making it bleed resin and the resin eventually hardens which they call tears. Many priests would burn the tears—or FRANKINCENSE as an offering and it was also used for anointing by priests. SO... frankincense was something priests owned and others offered to priests as a sacrificial offering for anointing. He brought this gift that belonged to priests...and laid it at Jesus’s little tiny feet. Again...**can’t you hear Mary’s wondering, “For my son???** A priest? He will be a **KING and a PRIEST!?”** Oh how this mom I’m sure was treasuring this all in her heart!

Then came Balthasar, black-skinned and bearded...(My children insisted we paint Balthasar!)



The Journey of the Magi

This Magi is said to be from Africa, and he came last. He brought the gift of myrrh and laid it at his feet.

MYRRH??? **“Oh wait,”** *Mary thought. “There must have been a mistake. Myrrh? For my little one? Maybe that was all this kind Magi had to give. Did he mean to give me this?” *You know the feeling...you have gotten a gift before you just weren't sure was really meant for YOU. But you are polite and you accept it. Mary thought more, “Why would this sweet soul bring us myrrh? This is what we use to heal wounds...to put on our loved ones when they die...to put in their bodies after death to keep them perserved a bit longer...he's just a baby...”* *And I have a feeling Mary again—treasured these things in her heart.**

As a family—take time to go back through the gifts and let them marvel in how they RELATED to Jesus...how they really were intended just for Him. Gifts for the King of Kings...the most High Priest (after all...when he was crucified—the curtain would be torn and no longer would the high priest have to be the one who spoke on behalf of the people to God...ANYONE could because THE High Priest had come!) And...the myrrh...hard to take in...BUT take heart—because HE has overcome the world and through Him we have a relationship with Him...and life eternal.

Dear God,
Thank you for sending Jesus—to be our KING, to be our High Priest and to be the Lamb of God—to die for us so we might have eternal life. What a gift!!! We, too, want to come and bring our gifts to You Lord. Help us use our gifts for Your glory and to bring others to know You. Amen.

How did you see Jesus today??? *Ask Him to speak to you, work through you and love through you as the day goes on. Ask Him to fill Your cup today—with His Holy Spirit...and to shine His presence through your life.*

Day 8 - “God is Bigger”

Matthew 2:12 “And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

After the Magi had spent time with young Jesus and his family—the time came for them to return to their homes. The Lord had led them to Jesus by the star. You can imagine they hoped to return the same way they got there. Isn't that the easiest thing to always do? I don't know about you—but when I go to a new, unfamiliar place—I always try to drive back home in the same way I came!

I can imagine when they found out they would have to take a completely new—possibly even more difficult route home—they were wide-eyed. The Bible doesn't tell us anything other than they went another route. They didn't go back the familiar way. They knew they needed to again obey God for their own safety and for the safety of Jesus.

Some times a harder route is simply God's grace and goodness over us—just as a different route was God's grace and goodness over the wise men. We have to trust Him even in the hard times. We have to believe in His promises and truths that we are His children, He is for us...and if He is for us, then who can be against us? Let's pray together and for those we love that as we journey through the new year and hard things come—that we will remember this part of the Magi's journey and it's purpose. We can trust and be assured that one day we will see His grand plan and the purpose of the hard parts too that just don't make sense. In the year ahead, don't expect to take the same route that you took this year--because the Lord just might ask you to try new things (new routes!) and trust Him through it!

The wise men worshiped Jesus—and they knew God's voice. The more we worship Jesus—the more we will know His voice and be able to follow Him in the new ways He wants to lead us. The wise men also show us that God will often lead us BEYOND our own understanding—differently from the ways and patterns He has led us in the past. There will often be risks involved—but as we listen to Him, we will know which way to go—and ultimately it is the way that bring Him the most glory, protect us from harm and help us stay in His perfect, good and pleasing will for our lives. Let us be open to walking in new directions—down roads that are unfamiliar to us when He calls us—and worshipping Him along the way.

How did you see Jesus today on your journey?

Dear God, Thank you for what you are teaching us through the lives of the men you called to bring glory to your Son—the wise men. Thank you for showing us through them how you some times do take us on unexpected turns and in unknown territory—but it is for our good and for your glory. You can be trusted! Thank you for loving us and for taking care of us. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Day 9 - “When the Light is Hard to See...”

I wish we could say our Magi story gets easy and exciting today. But truly—today’s lesson is a hard one! They are warned to go a different route to bypass King Herod—this is for their protection...some times hard things are for our protection. THEN—Herod finds out he has been outwitted by the wisemen—which really makes King Herod mad! I mean, seriously makes him angry!!

Matthew 2:13-18 “When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

So...our Magi are told in a dream by God to go another route. *God’s plan*. A different route...a harder route...a longer route—the first one only took a year...are you serious God? Okay, okay. *God’s plan*.

Herod realized the Magi aren’t coming back to tell him where Jesus is! Who disobeys the king? Who disobeys the government? He was filled with rage! This Jesus that the country is talking about and kings had come to see—Herod would do anything to stop the world from following this said-to-be King!

Herod’s plan?

To kill EVERY boy baby under 2 years old and younger in Bethlehem AND its vicinity. To have moms weeping...babies and precious ones dying because of a wicked, jealous Herod. To have over 600 families, as historians have estimated, lose their sons and many, many others effected by the loss of family members.

It was a sad, sad time!

Although they knew Herod was the hatred behind the slaying--every time they heard the name Jesus they would think of the ones they lost. They would look for some one to blame for their pain. And although Herod was the one who did this--many would hear the name of Jesus and be sad too because it was because of Herod’s wanting to kill Jesus that their little ones were sought after.

OUCH. Not a way I want to come into the world...*Surely this couldn’t be God’s great idea of how He would get everyone to fall in love with Jesus and follow Him...RIGHT?*

There will be times in our lives when it feels like everything is just falling apart. There will be days when it feels like the darkness over shadows all the light. This is probably how many felt during this time of Herod's cruelty. But God did have a great big plan. And in the hard days, we have to trust in God's faithfulness and trust that He has a plan even for the hard days.

Each day, we are writing down ways we see Jesus each day. On hard days, when the light of Jesus is really hard to see--we can come back to our treasure box and remember the ways we have seen Him in the beginning of the year. Throughout the year, when we see Him clearly--if we write it down and put it in our treasure box--these moments can remind us on dark days how to see Him. Even in dark days, He is with us. I always say when I'm too tired to pray--that's the time to ask a brother or sister in Christ to pray for me and let the prayers of His people carry me.

Truly--He has always been faithful to carry me. And I know He will be faithful to do the same for you.

Have you had a hard moment in your day today? How did you see Jesus or feel His strength in it?

Dear God,

I thank you that you are always with us--through the mountains and through the valleys. I pray that you would help us to see your light each and every day--and on the especially hard days, we ask that you would send a brother or sister in Christ to encourage us and be your hands and feet to us. We also ask that you would make us sensitive to your Holy Spirit and that you would lead us to serve, love and encourage others on hard days too. We love you and thank you that your yoke is easy and your burden is light. Thank you for carrying our hard days for us. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Day 10 - "Where Our Story Begins..."

One of my favorite hymns is, "*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Sweetest Name I know.*" Remembering back to what we learned yesterday the meaning of:

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

I can't imagine the pain in these families--all a result of the magi upsetting King Herod. I have tried to put myself in the shoes of those moms who lost their little ones after the magi left by going another route and avoiding Herod. We never tell this part of the story at Christmas time do we?

YET--this is part of how Jesus came into the world. Truly, it was as if He never even stood a chance!

He started his life not only in a stable but also with the entire community wrecked and mourning. No doubt the most humble way to enter this world.

Do you think those moms ever wondered, "Why my baby boy?" And later...every time she saw Jesus in the streets or heard about him--she would remember the last time she heard his name in the streets and lost her own son. "Yes, he'd be about his age," she think to herself. "Why my baby boy?" I mean, have you ever wondered why the world was so quick to cry "crucify"...or why it wasn't so popular to follow this Jesus?

Of course, He was radical.

Of course, He said He was God--and that made some people scratch their heads.

But there was also a rather large group who had been directly effected by his name since his birth...and this sets us up for the journey of the cross in the months ahead.

For Jesus--I have to imagine that life even from the beginning just didn't seem fair. And for these families effected by Herod's hatred of Jesus--life wasn't fair either. I don't have all the answers. In fact, I feel like I have very few! I imagine when nonbelievers read how Jesus entered the world they think, "*Who is this God who lets hard things happen? I mean...if He is God--why doesn't He just come down and stop it?*" I wish I could answer all the questions--and while I know little...I do know He desires us to trust Him...He desires to allow Him to heal our wounds...and I don't understand it...but there is something that happens when we relinquish ourselves completely to Him...and trust in His name.

There will be times in our lives when we also wonder why hard things happen. But some how, I believe the Lord is glorified through each and every one of them as we trust and follow Him.

I also believe that some of these moms eventually trusted and believed in Jesus. And I also believe that at some point--they could have even sung a hymn about His sweet name as He healed their deepest wounds...

Sweetest Name I Know

There's within my heart a melody
Jesus whispers sweet and low
Fear not, I am with thee, peace, be still
In all of life's ebb and flow

Though sometimes he leads through waters deep
Trials fall across the way
Though sometimes the path seems rough and steep
See his footprints all the way
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Sweetest name I know
Fills my every longing
Keeps me singing as I go
Feasting on the riches of his grace
Resting 'neath the sheltering wing
Always looking on his smiling face
That is why I shout and sing
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Sweetest name I know
Fills my every longing
Keeps me singing as I go
All my life was wrecked by sin and strife
Discord filled my heart with pain
Jesus swept across these broken strings
And stirred these chords again

Truly, I think we often miss a lot of the hardship Jesus, Himself, came into the world with. I think it's important to realize it, meditate on it and understand it. I've heard pastors and teachers of the gospel say "Jesus came into the world and experienced pain so we could identify with him..." or "so He could identify with us".

I'm not so sure any of us could ever REALLY identify with Jesus, his pain and how hard things really were from the beginning for Him! Sure He can identify with us—because He's been there...but to identify with Him? I don't know that anyone in history entered the world in the way He did--hard from the beginning. And WHY? Because there was nothing God, Himself, would not do for a personal relationship with YOU. THAT is WHY He came my friends. Because He loves YOU that much.

So now...our real journey begins. Storing up treasures in our treasure box of how we see Jesus. Writing them down as we go and remember ways we have seen Him...the one worth traveling across the dessert and back for...and He is worth going one step further with...

Dear God-Thank you for sending Jesus to the world. Thank you Jesus for the journey you walked, how you entered and for how much you love each one of us. How humbling it is to read how you entered. Yet all for us. Thank you Jesus for your great, big love that I can hardly grasp or understand! Help us to love others as you do and to live for you. Amen.

Day 11 - "From mourning to dancing"

Matthew 2:19-23 "But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene."

And so--this is how Jesus's life began.

Not with parades and more kings coming to see Him. But rather in years of hiding. Jesus was a child still living in Egypt hiding from Herod with Mary and Joseph. Joseph and the family did not leave Egypt until the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. By this time, Herod was dead but Herod's son Archelaus was ruling so Joseph went to live in Nazareth.

We know very little about the childhood days of Jesus--but we do know from the gospel of Luke that after His family returned to Nazareth he grew in wisdom and with the favor of God. He would go to the temple to sit with the teachers, listen to them and ask questions. Those who listened to Him were amazed at His understanding and how He was able to answer questions. One time, he was missing for three days--and Mary and Joseph found Jesus at the temple answering questions. He explained that He must be in His Father's house--and the Bible said again--that Mary treasured these things in her heart.

Here we see the world begin to see Jesus for who He is again. But not clearly or to the fullest just YET. What we do see here, however, is God's faithfulness. Things might be hard for a time--but if we keep our eyes on God and like Jesus stay focused on our Father's business like He did--the favor of the Lord will rest and follow us also. He will be faithful to turn the mourning to dancing and the darkness to light.

And for us--this is where the journey gets exciting. In the days and weeks and months...and years ahead--continue to seek Jesus like the magi. Continue to dig into the scriptures and learn more about His life. This is just the beginning! Read the gospels--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John together--and learn about Jesus's life. Ask for the Holy Spirit to reveal His truths to you in scripture and to write these words on your heart. Keep your eyes on Jesus and follow Him on days that feel like the desert and sing songs of praise giving Him glory on the days you are able to sing. He is always faithful. So write down His faithfulness and remember together how you see Him in your daily walk. What a gift we have in Jesus!

How have you seen him today?

Thank you Jesus for this sweet journey of remembering the magi and how you entered the world. Give us strength and direction in our year ahead. Draw us close to you. Help us to see you and trust you and give you glory. Thank you for loving us! You are so good! And we worship and praise you. In your name we pray. Amen.