



## CrossRoads Notes:

Read Matthew 2:1-11

*Title: Christmas Hope*

*Theme: The Hope of the Wise Men*

*Series: The Cast of Christmas*

**Introduction:** *Hope as it is used in the Word of God has a much different meaning than the word hope used in this world. Children hope they will get a certain type of Christmas gift. Some people hope they will graduate from high school and go on to college or hope they can find that certain job or career that will make them the amount of money they want to earn or that fame they hope to gain. Others hope that they can do whatever will bring satisfaction for themselves and to others. Others hope that they can beat their cancer this year, be with loved ones just one more year, one more Christmas.*

**Proposition:** *I would propose to you that hope promised in the Word of God is a unique hope that is far beyond a wish, it is an absolute certainty. It is the kind of hope found in the life of the Magi.*

**Interrogative Sentence:** *Just what is this hope and how do we express a life that says, "My hope is in Christ?"*

**Transitional Sentence:** *There is much that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp this Christmas season as we take time to look at the Biblical accounts of the lives of those who were physically involved in the life of Christ that first Christmas. (Matthew 2:1)*

Who were these "Magi?" These men were "Magi" (*magos*) who could very likely have been Persian priests. By the time of Christ's birth these Persian priests became almost exactly what the Levites were in Israel. They became teachers and instructors of the Persian kings and at this time period they were good men, who sought truth and great wisdom. These wise men were skilled in philosophy, medicine, and natural science. They were able to combine secular and religious aspects of knowledge and understanding. (William Barclay; *The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages; Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*; Tyndale reference library)

The wise men's interest in the Messiah may have arisen from contact with Jewish travelers in the east and from knowledge of the Old Testament. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) What we do know is that the Prophet Daniel had been taken to Babylon as a prisoner of war and as the results of his faithfulness to the Lord, God raised him and his friends to high political positions. (Daniel 4:48-49) We do know that Daniel was also raised to a place of political influence under the King of Persia after the Persians conquered Babylon. (Daniel 6:1-3)

The point is this, a Godly man like Daniel and his friends was used by God in a place of captivity for 70 plus years to influence kings and other political positions and God still uses the life of Daniel and his friends to give guidance to the lives of Bible readers today. It is very possible that Godly influences had carried on down throughout the Eastern world and their lives along with the Old Testament teachings had a guiding affect on the Magi. It is the Bible that says, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11) This is why in the Great Commission we are told to “[teach] them to obey everything [Jesus has] commanded [us]...” (Matthew 28:20) and the charge to the soldier of Christ is to “Preach the Word...” (2 Timothy 4:2) The Word of God and its effects on how we live will affect all who see our lives.

Let the Holy Spirit place this truth in your spiritual hearts this Christmas season. The Magi may be regarded as the representation of the Gentile world. Their homage from the East sets the heartbeat for all who want to be worshipers of Christ. You can be a kingdom seeker who desires to worship the King of kings and the life you live for the Lord will have an affect on someone for generations to come. (The Life and Times of Jesus)

**Transitional Sentence:** *Another truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that the Word of God can lead you to fear or believe in the Christ of Christmas. When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem they asked - (Matthew 2:2)*

There were is no doubt they were very much aware of the Jewish nation and most likely at some time got their hands on some Hebrew writings. If they had they would have read Numbers 24:17, “...A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel...” (Numbers 24:17)

A Roman historian (Suetonius) writing of this time period wrote, “An ancient and settled persuasion prevailed throughout the East that the Fates had decreed someone to proceed from Judea who should attain a universal empire.” A second Roman historian (Tacitus) wrote, “Many were persuaded that it was contained in the ancient books of their priest that at that very time the East should prevail, and that someone should proceed from Judah and posses the dominion.” Two of the most respected Jewish historians in the world (Josephus and Phelio) wrote about the time period of Christ being born and they make mention in their writings of the expectation of the people looking for a king to arise who would set them free. (Barnes Notes)

Any child of God who has illumination of having Christ born within their spiritual hearts had come to that time in their lives that the Word of God disturbed them. All Christians who walk in the hope of Christmas have been in that same battle as King Herod and those in Jerusalem. There is a battle for the throne of the heart. Those who fight to keep on that throne will find themselves like Herod, doing everything possible to keep Jesus from His rightful place. Those who have the hope of Christmas joyfully surrender the throne room of their hearts over to the Lordship of Christ by inviting Jesus to be born within them by the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ.

The diligent seeking of the wise men led them to more guiding of God's Word and what is even more interesting is that it was God's enemy who helped seek out the place where the Magi could find the Christ child. Even in the midst of the Lord's enemies God can get directions to those who truly seek him.

Through seeking counsel from men who knew the Old Testament, King Herod found insight on where to find the child who was to be born as God's Messiah, the Christ. He was as much aware of the Biblical promise as most Jews were at the time of Jesus' early childhood. (Matthew 2:4-9)

Symbolically, Herod represents that which stands against the will of God and that which opposes the works of God. Herod was a tool of Satan being an adversary to the workings of God in this time of history. Satan often works through man's wicked heart to accomplish his evil plans.

In the New Testament we read that the devil can take man captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:26) The Hebrew word for "Satan" (*satan*) means to act as an adversary, one who hinders or opposes God and His people. (Who's Who in the Bible; The Complete Word Study of the Old Testament)

What the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp this Christmas season is that in the midst of your adversaries, if you are seeking to live a life of worship to Christ, the Lord can give you direction and that direction can be trusted as long as it is in line with the truths of the whole of Scripture. You will find enemies in the midst of raising your children, in your work place, in political affairs of this nation and in the church structure. In the midst of adversaries there is always guidance in the written Word of God.

Obedience to the counsel of God's Word, when need be, leads to supernatural leading which brings joy. (Matthew 2:9-10) This was a supernatural star and it was God's leading that took them to the place where Jesus lived with His parents. (Thru the Bible; The Expositors Bible Commentary; Matthew Henry Commentary; The Bible Exposition Commentary)

The Lord has this promise for those who express their hope in Him, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." (Psalm 32:8)

**Transitional Sentence:** *The last truth to grasp this Christmas season in regard to the hope of the Magi is that true hope leads to practical sacrificial worship.* "On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh." (Matthew 2:11) God through these Magi is showing the attitude of the heart He longs to see in those who approach Christ.

All who have hope in Christ will fall before Him in their hearts, they adore Him and submit to His authority. The worship offered by the Magi gives us the three stages of

becoming a joyful Christian. One is vision, a heart seeking after God's Messiah. Two is submission to what the Word of the Lord tells Christians to do. Three is consecration, giving all that God has given to Christians for the work of God in their lives. Christians who have true hope give property and service unto the Lord.

Christian Historian and Bible teacher William Barclay gives some ideas that are worth our consideration. Gold is the gift for a king – Seneca tells us that in Parthia it was a custom that no one entered into the king's presence without a gift. Gold at that time period was considered to be a metal of kings. Jesus is the King of kings who serves and reigns through sacrificial love and full authority over everything in heaven and earth. Christians must meet His terms for service.

The story of Admiral Nelson is worth considering as we strive to understand how to approach Jesus with a gift worth giving. Admiral Nelson was known for his kindness, compassion and courtesy. After one of his naval victories, the defeated admiral, knowing of Admiral Nelson's reputation made his way across the deck of the ship and reached out his hand to shake Admiral Nelson's hand. Admiral Nelson kept his hand in his pocket and said, "Your sword first, then your hand." Before they approach Christ, Christians need to lay down their weapons of the flesh, their love for the world and their ears for the lies of the devil before they may join hands with Christ. This is the greatest gift Christians can offer Christ.

Frankincense is the gift for a priest – It was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for man through the sacrifice being offered. The Latin word for priest (*pontifex*) means bridge builder. This is what Christ did for us. His sacrificial death on the cross built a bridge so repentant mankind can have a way for getting back to God, have fellowship with God, know God's will, and be empowered for service to the King of kings.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die – Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus came to reveal God to man and He came to die. Holman Hunt has a famous picture of Jesus. It shows Jesus at the door of the carpenter shop in Nazareth. He is still only a boy and had come to the door to stretch out his arms so to give them a break from working over a bench. In this picture He stands at the doorway with arms outstretched and on the wall behind him, the setting sun throws his shadow in the form of a cross. In the back ground there stands Mary, and as she sees the shadow there is concern on her face of the coming tragedy that awaits the sinless Christ, all because of the wickedness of man's heart.

Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for the one who was to give His life foretold that Jesus was the King of kings, the perfect High Priest and in the end the Supreme Savior of men.

**In Closing:** *Christians have the sure hope expressed by the Wise Men that enables them to seek the Lord.* God guiding the Magi to where Christ lived is a sure hope that

God can bring all who seek Jesus to a place in their lives where they can enjoy worshipping the Lord. This is only enjoyed if a person is willing to go the distance, seek the counsel of God's Word and pay the homage that is due to Christ.

This Christmas are you expressing Christmas hope? Can you be seen as a Gentile worshiper who has gone the distance to worship Jesus Christ as king of your heart and life? Do you search the Scriptures to find the truths of life, are you ready to respond to what the Lord reveals to you about Christ? Do you offer to the King of kings your greatest gift, your heart? Is your life an aroma pleasing to God? Have you died to the flesh, the lures of the world and can you discern the lies of the devil as the Wise Men did?

This year find your place in the Christmas story and proclaim the truths of Christmas for all to hear!

Let us pray!