

# Two More Wise Men

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This week we are going to talk about the wise men that came to see Jesus. We're going to tell you some things you might not know about the three wise men that came to see the baby Jesus. Not only that, there were also two more wise men that came to see Jesus when he was a grown man.

[music – “Nothing But a Child” performed by Dave Pogge]

## Part 1

The Bible doesn't actually say there were three wise men that came to see the baby Jesus. It says wise men came bringing three gifts, frankincense, gold, and myrrh, so it is merely assumed that there were three men, each bringing one gift. The number of wise men doesn't really matter, and it simplifies the staging of Christmas pageants to have each gift brought by a different actor.

Dramatic license also permits the arrival of the wise men on the night that Jesus was born. It took some time for the wise men to see the star, organize a caravan, travel to Jerusalem, gain an audience with Herod, and then go to Bethlehem. Matthew 2, verse 11, says that by the time they got there, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were living in a house, not a stable. The shepherds were long gone by then, but it makes for simpler theater to have the kings and shepherds adore Jesus at the same time using the same scenery.

The number of wise men, and when they arrived, isn't nearly as important as why they arrived. Ellen White comments on the arrival of the wise men as described in Matthew chapter 2 in her biography of Christ, [The Desire of Ages](#). Here now are some excerpts from chapter 6 of that biography titled,

## "We Have Seen His Star"

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."

The wise men from the East were philosophers. They belonged to a large and influential class that included men of noble birth, and comprised much of the wealth and learning of their nation. Among these were ... upright men who studied the indications of Providence in nature, and who were honored for their integrity and wisdom. Of this character were the wise men who came to Jesus.

The light of God is ever shining amid the darkness of heathenism. As these magi studied the starry heavens, and sought to fathom the mystery hidden in their bright paths, they beheld the glory of the Creator. Seeking clearer knowledge, they turned to the Hebrew Scriptures. In their own land were treasured prophetic writings that predicted the coming of a divine teacher. Balaam ... had foretold the prosperity of Israel and the appearing of the Messiah; and his prophecies had been handed down by tradition from century to century. But in the Old Testament the Saviour's advent was more clearly revealed. The magi learned with joy that His coming was near, and that the whole world was to be filled with a knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

The wise men had seen a mysterious light in the heavens upon that night when the glory of God flooded the hills of Bethlehem. As the light faded, a luminous star appeared, and lingered in the sky. It was not a fixed star nor a planet, and the phenomenon excited the keenest interest. That star was a distant company of shining angels, but of this the wise men were ignorant. Yet they were impressed that the star was of special import to them. They consulted priests and philosophers, and searched the scrolls of the ancient records. The prophecy of Balaam had declared, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." Num. 24:17. Could this strange star have been sent as a [herald] of the Promised One? The magi had welcomed the light of heaven-sent truth; now it was shed upon them in brighter rays. Through dreams they were instructed to go in search of the newborn Prince. <sup>1</sup>

[music – “Come Follow That Star” performed by the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir]

## Part 2

As by faith Abraham went forth at the call of God, "not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8); as by faith Israel followed the pillar of cloud to the Promised Land, so did these Gentiles go forth to find the promised Saviour. The Eastern country abounded in precious things, and the magi did not set out empty-handed. It was the custom to offer presents as an act of homage to princes or other personages of rank, and the richest gifts the land afforded were borne as an offering to Him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. It was necessary to journey by night in order to keep the star in view; but the travelers beguiled the hours by repeating traditional sayings and prophetic utterances concerning the One they sought. At every pause for rest they searched the prophecies; and the conviction deepened that they were divinely guided. While they had the star before them as an outward sign, they had also the inward evidence of the Holy Spirit, which was impressing their hearts, and inspiring them with hope. The journey, though long, was a happy one to them.

They have reached the land of Israel, and are descending the Mount of Olives, with Jerusalem in sight, when, lo, the star that has guided them all the weary way rests above the temple, and after a season fades from their view. With eager steps they press onward, confidently expecting the Messiah's birth to be the joyful burden of every tongue. But their inquiries are in vain. Entering the holy city, they [went] to the temple. To their amazement they find none who seem to have a knowledge of the newborn king. Their questions call forth no expressions of joy, but rather of surprise and fear, not unmingled with contempt.

The priests are rehearsing traditions. They extol their religion and their own piety, while they denounce the Greeks and Romans as heathen, and sinners above others. The wise men are not idolaters, and in the sight of God they stand far higher than do these, His professed worshipers; yet they are looked upon by the Jews as heathen. Even among the appointed guardians of the Holy Oracles their eager questionings touch no chord of sympathy.

The arrival of the magi was quickly noised throughout Jerusalem. Their strange errand created an excitement among the people, which penetrated to the palace of King Herod. [He] was aroused at the intimation of a possible rival. Countless murders had stained his pathway to the throne. Being of alien blood, he was hated by the people over whom he ruled. His only security was the favor of Rome. But this new Prince had a higher claim. He was born to the kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen White, [The Desire of Ages](http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da6.html), Chapter 6, “We Have Seen His Star”, <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da6.html>

Herod suspected the priests of plotting with the strangers to excite a popular tumult and unseat him from the throne. He concealed his mistrust, however, determined to thwart their schemes by superior cunning. Summoning the chief priests and the scribes, he questioned them as to the teaching of their sacred books in regard to the place of the Messiah's birth.

This inquiry from the usurper of the throne, and made at the request of strangers, stung the pride of the Jewish teachers. The indifference with which they turned to the rolls of prophecy enraged the jealous tyrant. He thought them trying to conceal their knowledge of the matter. With an authority they dared not disregard, he commanded them to make close search, and to declare the birthplace of their expected King. "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

"And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
Art in nowise least among the princes of Judah:  
For out of thee shall come forth a governor,  
Which shall be shepherd of My people Israel."  
R. V.

Herod now invited the magi to a private interview. A tempest of wrath and fear was raging in his heart, but he preserved a calm exterior, and received the strangers courteously. He inquired at what time the star had appeared, and professed to hail with joy ... the birth of Christ. He bade his visitors, "Search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also." So saying, he dismissed them to go on their way to Bethlehem.

The priests and elders of Jerusalem were not as ignorant concerning the birth of Christ as they pretended. The report of the angels' visit to the shepherds had been brought to Jerusalem, but the rabbis had treated it as unworthy of their notice. They themselves might have found Jesus, and might have been ready to lead the magi to His birthplace; but instead of this, [heathen] wise men came to call their attention to the birth of the Messiah. ...

Now pride and envy closed the door against the light. If the reports brought by the shepherds and the wise men were credited, they would place the priests and rabbis in a most unenviable position, disproving their claim to be the exponents of the truth of God. These learned teachers would not stoop to be instructed by those whom they termed heathen. It could not be, they said, that God had passed them by, to communicate with ignorant shepherds or uncircumcised Gentiles. They determined to show their contempt for the reports that were exciting King Herod and all Jerusalem. They would not even go to Bethlehem to see whether these things were so. And they led the people to regard the interest in Jesus as a fanatical excitement. Here began the rejection of Christ by the priests and rabbis. From this point their pride and stubbornness grew into a settled hatred of the Saviour. While God was opening the door to the Gentiles, the Jewish leaders were closing the door to themselves.

The wise men departed alone from Jerusalem. The shadows of night were falling as they left the gates, but to their great joy they again saw the star, and were directed to Bethlehem. ... At Bethlehem they found no royal guard stationed to protect the newborn King. None of the world's honored men were in attendance. ...

"When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshiped Him." Beneath the lowly guise of Jesus, they recognized the presence of

Divinity. They gave their hearts to Him as their Saviour, and then poured out their gifts,—"gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." What a faith was theirs!

It might have been said of the wise men from the East, as afterward of the Roman centurion, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Matt. 8:10.

The wise men had not penetrated Herod's design toward Jesus. When the object of their journey was accomplished, they prepared to return to Jerusalem, intending to acquaint him with their success. But in a dream they received a divine message to hold no further communication with him. Avoiding Jerusalem, they set out for their own country by another route.

In like manner Joseph received warning to flee into Egypt with Mary and the child. And the angel said, "Be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him." Joseph obeyed without delay, setting out on the journey by night for greater security.

... He who never slumbers nor sleeps was watching over His beloved Son. He ... provided in a heathen land a refuge for Mary and the child Jesus. And through the gifts of the magi from a heathen country, the Lord supplied the means for the journey into Egypt and the sojourn in a land of strangers.

The magi had been among the first to welcome the Redeemer. Their gift was the first that was laid at His feet. And through that gift, what privilege of ministry was theirs! ... If we have given our hearts to Jesus, we also shall bring our gifts to Him. Our gold and silver, our most precious earthly possessions, our highest mental and spiritual endowments, will be freely devoted to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us. <sup>2</sup>

[music – "Offering" performed by the Ridgecrest Seventh-day Adventist Choir]

### **Part 3**

The dictionary gives two seemingly unrelated definitions of the word "epiphany." It can mean either, "a church festival commemorating the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ," or, "an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure." Upon further reflection, the name of the church festival makes perfect sense. When the wise men realized that the Christ had been born, they had an epiphany, loaded up their camels and set out to worship Him.

Every year many people celebrate Christmas; but how often is it followed by an epiphany? Does the celebration of the birth of Jesus give them an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure? Does the birth of Jesus have the same impact on most people today as it did on those wise men so many years ago?

This time of year we sing and read about the wise men who went to visit Jesus as a baby; but the Bible also tells us that there were two other wise men that went to see him years later. One of those wise men was named Nicodemus.

The story of Nicodemus going to see Jesus is found in the third chapter of the book of John. It was during this interview that Jesus said what is probably the most widely quoted verse in the Bible—John 3:16. People go to football games and hold up signs that say, simply, "John 3:16." They want everyone to know, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, Chapter 6, "We Have Seen His Star", <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da6.html>

That verse, taken out of context as it so often is, seems to indicate that Jesus loves everyone so much that He will save anyone who just says he accepts Jesus as his savior. It is a very comforting notion that many people find attractive. But, is that really what Jesus told Nicodemus? When Nicodemus went to see Jesus, did Jesus really tell him that all he had to do was to claim to be a follower and he would be saved? Let's read the Bible and find out.

**Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."**

**In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

**"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"**

**Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."**

**"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.**

**"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**

**"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3:1-21)**

Jesus told him, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. ... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ... You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' " Jesus could not have said it much more clearly, repeating it three times, and yet Nicodemus replied, "How can this be?" So Jesus said, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

What Jesus actually said isn't consistent with the popular notion that you can accept Christ and continue to live in sin. If you are born again you will live a life you are not ashamed of. You won't hide in the darkness but fearlessly step out into the light. You will be proud of your life, and give the credit to Jesus.

Yes, you can (and should) come to God just the way you are. He will accept you just the way you are. But that doesn't mean that after you have come to God you can remain the way you are. Some people claim that because God accepts you the way you are, you don't need to change anything in your life, other than joining a church. They say that you can ignore God's law because Christians are not under the law, but under grace. That doctrine might sound like good news, but it isn't the Gospel. It is a deadly deception.

Jesus accepted Nicodemus just as he was when he came that night. Jesus knew everything there was to know about Nicodemus before he walked through that door. He knew every sin Nicodemus had ever committed, and knew what Nicodemus wanted. This is clear from the beginning of the conversation. Nicodemus started by flattering Jesus, acknowledging Him as a great teacher. But before Nicodemus could even ask the question, Jesus gave him the answer because He knew what Nicodemus really wanted. Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Three times Jesus told him, he must be born again. Jesus never once said that everyone can see the kingdom of God without being born again.

The question is, "What does it mean to be born again?" Nicodemus must have known what it meant in his heart, and it must have made him uncomfortable, because he tried to change the direction of the conversation by saying, "How can a man be born when he is old? ... Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Nicodemus was trying to avoid Jesus' clear meaning by arguing about the impossibility of the metaphor. What Nicodemus didn't have the courage to say was, "I'm too old and weak to change!"

Jesus would not have told Nicodemus three times that he had to be born again, if it is impossible to be born again and live a better life. God can give you the power to turn your life around. Baptism gives you a new start and a new power to grow in grace. Baptism isn't a license to continue to live in sin with the blessing of God, as some people would like to believe.

Nicodemus was a wise man who came to see Jesus because he wanted to know how to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus gave him a straight answer, "You must be born again." But Nicodemus wasn't the only wise man to ask that question.

The other wise man who came to see Jesus is known only as, "The Rich Young Ruler." His story is told in Luke 18, verses 18 through 30.

**A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

**"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"**

**"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.**

**When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."**

**When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”**

**Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”**

**Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”**

**Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”**

**“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”**

Like Nicodemus, this civic leader was apparently a pretty good person. He wasn't an adulterer, murderer, thief, liar, or disrespectful son. But even so, Jesus told him he had to do better. He was apparently deficient when it came to generosity, so Jesus told him he had to become a more generous man. He didn't actually use the phrase, “born again,” but implication was the same. This man needed to think less of himself and more of others. He had wealth and power, but he used it only for himself. Jesus wanted him to become a follower, and bring others to Christ. He didn't want to do that. He wanted God and everyone else to see what a good person he was, and obtain a heavenly reward because of his own virtue.

It is hard for rich people to be saved because they have so much to lose. Peter was a poor fisherman. He gave up everything he had to follow Jesus, but he didn't have much to give up. When you have nothing, you have nothing to lose. Matthew, on the other hand, was a wealthy tax collector. It might have been harder for him to leave everything and follow Jesus. But Jesus promised him he would “receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.” Matthew accepted the offer. As far as we can tell, he had no regrets.

We don't know what blessing the apostles received while they were alive. We can only imagine the blessings they will receive in the age to come. Despite that uncertainty, do you think any of the apostles would rather have your life than theirs? Even without knowing you, I'll bet that none of the apostles, except Judas, would gladly exchange places with you. Yes, they gave up a lot, and suffered greatly, but apparently had no regrets about making the decision to follow Jesus completely.

Two wise men came to see Jesus. They both wanted something better than they had. Jesus told them both the same thing: they would have to turn from their sins, be born again, and follow Him to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Nicodemus took his stand for Jesus. We remember him today for defending Jesus to the chief priests, as recorded in John 7:50-52. John chapter 19 tells us that Nicodemus bought the burial spices and helped prepare Jesus' body for burial. He boldly stood for Jesus when being a disciple of Jesus seemed to be a lost cause.

The other wise man apparently was not as wise. Although the Bible doesn't specifically say so, it appears that he was unwilling to use his wealth to help others. He certainly didn't receive the honor that Nicodemus did. The Bible doesn't even tell us his name.

Soon after his birth, wise men came from the East to offer gifts as tokens of loyalty and obedience. After all these years, nothing has changed. That's what wise men still do. They use whatever wealth and power they have been given to serve God. God rewards them for their service.

But suppose you aren't as rich as Matthew, Nicodemus, or the Rich Young Ruler. Suppose you are middle class. Do you think God won't bless you for your lack of wealth? Consider the parable that Jesus told in Matthew chapter 25, verses 14-30, about entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

**“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.**

**“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’**

**“His master replied, ‘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!’**

**“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’**

**“His master replied, ‘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!’**

**“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’**

**“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.**

**““Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’**

Whatever you have will be increased, if you are a good and faithful servant. If you are rich and powerful, and have five talents, and put those talents to good use, you will be greatly blessed. If you only have two talents, and put those talents to good use, you still will be given more, and have an abundance.

The only way to avoid being blessed is to fail to put whatever you have to good use. Jesus even goes so far as to say that not only will you not be blessed for your negligence, you will be punished.

The servant who had just one talent didn't use the talent for evil—he didn't use it at all. That was why he was punished. The master gave him something, and he didn't use it.



No matter how much you have, God wants to give you more. All you have to do is to use what God has given you to be a better Christian. Don't be content to follow Him just a little and receive just a few blessings. Study the Bible and pray that God will show you how to be a better Christian.

The Holy Spirit will guide you. Your path will not necessarily be the same as someone else's—in fact it almost certainly won't. But it will be in harmony with the Bible. If you feel tempted to disobey the clear direction in God's word, you can be sure you aren't being led by the Spirit.

God gave the wise men from the East great treasures. They gave their treasures to Joseph. Joseph used these treasures to escape to Egypt and live there as long as Herod was alive. God has given you lasting gifts that you can use for Him.

It may seem like Christmas is over. The presents have all been unwrapped, and all the Christmas cantatas have been sung; but Christmas isn't over. The promise of Christmas is just beginning.

[music – “When the Angels’ Song is Silent” read by Dave Pogge, accompanied by Susan Pogge]

*When the Angels’ Song Is Silent*  
*Mary Kay Beal*

*When the Angels’ Song Is Silent and the star is not so bright,  
When the stable door stands open in the cold mid-morning light,  
When the Angels’ Song Is Silent and the shepherds have gone home,  
Then the promise of Christmas begins.*

*When the Angels’ Song Is Silent, and the prophecy’s fulfilled,  
When the swaddling clothes are folded, and the baby’s cry is stilled,  
When the Angels’ Song Is Silent, and the drama is all done,  
Then the promise of Christmas begins.*

*For the promise is more than a child in the hay,  
More than shepherds and kings and a glad Christmas Day.  
Yes, the promise is more than a bright star above,  
It’s a cross! And a tomb! And a Father’s great love!*

*When the Angels’ Song Is Silent and the kings have come and gone,  
All the world is changed forever, for the echo lingers on.  
When the Angels’ Song Is Silent, God is nearer than before,  
And the promise of Christmas, the wonder of Christmas,  
The glory of Christmas begins.*