

How do you worship a child? It is a strange idea. Imagine a 1-2 year old toddler. Think of how he needs protection when he goes outside. He needs help to eat; to get dressed; to walk.

But it says they bowed down and worshipped him. You know the Wiseman who traveled from the east? When they saw the 1-2 year old child with Mary his mother, they fell down and worshipped him – a toddler - who maybe spoke one or two word sentences. How do you worship a child?

Yet worship is a key part of that account. The Magi arrive in Jerusalem to ask “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” Then after King Herod figured out that this might be a real threat to his power, he gathers all the religious experts to find out where such a child might be born. He comes up with a plan for the wisemen to go find the child. Then they would report his whereabouts to Herod. He would have the child killed. But he disguises his real intentions by saying “Go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” Yah right Herod. You worshipped yourself more than anyone. You enforced your self-worship through the sword.

But these wise men held the key. They needed to find the child first. What would they do when they arrived? They fell down and worshipped him. Worship – the same word they used to announce their intentions to Jerusalem – the same word Herod used to disguise his true intentions. The word that described their actions upon seeing the child. It’s a derivative of Proskunew in Greek which was used to designate the custom of laying flat before a person and kissing their feet, the hem of their garment or the ground. The Persians did this in the presence of their supposedly deified king. The Greeks proskunewoed before a divinity or something holy.

Is that what these wisemen were doing? Did they just carry on the Eastern custom of laying flat before royalty? Maybe. But if that’s all they were doing, they unknowingly did something way more significant. They showed us how to worship the Christ child.

They did this first by **“Recognizing the authority of Christ over the world and your life.”**

“Where is he who was born King of the Jews?” They recognized His kingly authority. They endorsed it; approved it; certified it because of the star they had seen rose. If we are going to worship the Christ child at Christmas we need to recognize His authority over the world and our lives.

But we we will not get any encouragement in this direction from our culture today. What does the culture teach us? Who does it trumpet as the ultimate authority over your life? You. Our culture is all about personal autonomy. Self-rule rules. It's all about your preferences, your tastes, your orientation, your self-identification, your comfort and your way.

The self-ruling society is ultimately a society-defeating philosophy. For whose self gets to rule when two self-rules clash? This is a huge battle and obstacle to our worship of Christ. If we will not recognize His authority over us, then we will struggle with worshipping him. How can we worship Christ as King when Self rules? No one is greater than us if everything including the claims and commands of Christ has to submit to our self-rule before we accept it. These magi were way ahead of the Herod and the chief priests and scribes. They acknowledged Christ as king.

How do we worship the Christ child? **By rejoicing exceedingly with great joy.** "After listening to the king they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. The Gospel writer Matthew puts quadruple emphasis on rejoicing here. He could have just written "they rejoiced," which would indicate they were pretty joyful. But he writes "they rejoiced exceedingly." This was over the top rejoicing. This is the kind of rejoicing you do when you hear the baby's cry in the delivery room or she says yes to your proposal or he gets down on his knee.

But he not only writes they rejoiced exceedingly. He writes they rejoiced exceedingly with joy. Well Matthew, we already know they were rejoicing. You can't rejoice without joy. But Matthew is compelled to add joy to the rejoicing to heighten rejoicing exceedingly even more. Yet joy is not enough. It's great joy. They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Okay there must be something funny going on. Did Herod slip something into their drinks to help them in their joy factor?

No. It seems it came from their hearts. It seems Matthew struggled to describe just how joyful they were. But why were they so joyful? They had just about reached their journey's end – they were about to see the fulfillment for which they had hoped – they were about to see the promised one. They rejoiced – true worship involves rejoicing – it is not just about recognizing authority. Its about rejoicing in Christ. It is doing it because you see in Christ something so desirable and so satisfying that as you draw near him, you cannot help but overflow with joy.

This begs the question – “Is our worship of Christ joyful?” Why can we get so excited about Star Wars or a Hockey Game or a Christmas Party – but when it comes to worship we act bored; or go through the motions; we check our phones to see what our friends are doing or what plans are being made for Sunday lunch. But we don’t do that during Star Wars – or the Hockey Game or the party. Why? Because we think they’re far more compelling? We think that a movie created by human beings with all its special effects is more compelling than the coming of God to earth as a baby? We think that a hockey game which will be forgotten within a week is reason for more outward expression of joy than the mysterious, miraculous incarnation of God in human flesh? We think that Christmas gifts which though very valuable and very much appreciated at the time but sometimes are forgotten within a week is reason for more joy than God sending His Son into the world to deal with our greatest problem – sin and our alienation from God?

If these are true, there’s something wrong with our priorities. There’s something wrong with our heart love. There’s something misplaced about our affections. We have settled for the temporary and the passing at the cost of missing the sweet taste of knowing Christ which is eternal life.

How do you worship the Christ child? You recognize His authority over the world and your life. You rejoice exceedingly with great joy over the sweet eternal soul saving gift of His coming.

Then when they saw the child, **they fell down before Him and worshipped**. This was the Eastern custom of bowing low before a sovereign. Falling to ground was a physical way of demonstrating recognition of someone higher than you in authority or status or power.

But this doesn’t play well in our modern self-ruling society especially when so many humans in power have abused their positions of authority. Lying flat before another human is never done in our society. But we have to recognize the Christ child is no mere human. He was much more than an ordinary 18 month old sitting in his mother’s lap. He was God incarnate in that moment. Though the wisemen may not have known all the theology, their act was correct. They recognized He was higher and more powerful and greater than they were. He was after all God in flesh and they were mere men.

So how do we fall down and worship the Christ child today? Now we have no counterpart to falling on our face in our culture. We never do that unless we’re forced to – by an illness; by an accident; in a sporting competition or when sleep forces us to lay flat. But willingly laying flat? We may not physically do it but we at least need to do it spiritually.

We at least need to bow down and recognize Jesus is God and we are not. Or else we're not worshipping. We're treating him as some sort of peer whose advice we will take or leave depending on our preferences. But God doesn't give advice. He commands. He calls for obedience. His commands are for our good and the world's good. So we need to fall down and worship Him.

The final way the wisemen show us how to worship the Christ child is by **giving Him sacrificial gifts**. "Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." Gold is the treasured metal that served as the most expensive currency of the day. Frankincense was used in worship and was the only incense permitted on the altar in the tabernacle. Myrrh is sap used in incense and perfume. When approaching royalty or persons of high status, gifts you brought to show respect.

We don't know what the wisemen were thinking in offering these gifts. But for what purpose would we give sacrificial gifts to Jesus today? It's not like He needs them to get His work done. Acts 17:25 states "God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything. So the gifts of the magi are not to assist God or meet one of his needs. After all, it would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care packages. Nor are they bribes Deuteronomy 10:17 – God does not take bribes.

So how are these gifts part of worship? John Piper gives this perspective. They intensify desire for Christ himself – in a similar way to fasting. When we give gifts to Christ, it's like we're saying "The joy I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from you. I have not come for your things but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things." By giving to Christ what He does not need and what we might enjoy, we say more earnestly and authentically, "You are my treasure, not these things." That's how an offering or a gift of time or other resources to the Lord is an act of worship. We could be using all of those for ourselves. But instead we offer them up to Christ for His use. We show that He is our ultimate treasure.

The wisemen show us how we can worship the Christ child today and through the year. Recognize the authority of Christ over the world and your life. Worship Him by rejoicing exceedingly with great joy. Fall down before him in recognition of His deity and your humanity. And offer sacrificial gifts to intensify your desire for Him. May God take this familiar text to awaken in us a desire for Christ Himself.