

25 Days of Advent

Seeing Jesus Through the Eyes of the Christmas Story Characters

ADVENT DAY 18: Dec. 18 – Men Wise Beyond Their Years and Culture

Devotional

The story of the Star of Bethlehem appears only in the Book of Matthew. The Gospel tells us that a bright star appeared in the eastern sky when Jesus was born, famously seen by a group of Wise Men.

Although the Wise Men are a prominent part of the Christmas story – in nativity scenes, pageants, carols and Christmas cards – we know surprisingly little about them. Scripture doesn't tell us who they were, only that they came from "the East" and were "Magi" or Wise Men. We don't know their occupations, why they were so committed to finding the King or even how many of them there were. But that's OK, we can argue the religious details till we're blue in the face; it won't matter. Matthew probably left out the details because they were unimportant to gleaning the spiritual truths that are there.

"Wise" is a good term for these men because they were willing to learn the source of all true wisdom. What is clear to us is that the Magi were earnest in their desire to find the King of the Jews. They may have used their reliance on astrology, but God met them where they were and used his power over the heavenly bodies to lead them to His son. I don't know about you, but I am eternally grateful that God will reach out to a seeking sinner, with impure motives and uncertain beliefs, and point that soul to His son. It's how He drew me in.

According to Matthew, a bright star led the Magi from the East until it stopped "over the place where the child was," and "upon entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother." No doubt a surprise to the Wise Men – the star from Heaven didn't point to Herod, but to Jesus.

In his book, *The Characters of Christmas*, Daniel Darling describes the scene this way:

These were men of the world, wise and cultured and sophisticated in every way. They came expecting a young king on a throne, surrounded by servants and the trappings of royalty. What they found, instead, was a poor family in an otherwise quiet neighborhood. To the average onlooker, unfamiliar with the ancient prophecies and unaware of the guiding star, this was all so pedestrian. But to those who were open to God's leading, who were only seeking Jesus, they saw what the prophets predicted, what the angels serenaded, and what Mary understood: there toddling in a dirty tunic was the Son of God. In that moment, the real power was not in the wealthy coffers of these rich rulers. It was not in the gilded halls of Herod's palace. It was in the infant God-man standing before them. And so they bowed in reverent, real worship. They had followed the star and now they worshiped the One who hung the stars.

Darling posits that Matthew included the story of the Magi to show us how true worshippers worship the King. He breaks it down into four responses that we should emulate in our own worship:

1. **Seek** – they sought the truth by following the star and reading the ancient prophecies.
2. **Obey** – they obeyed the voice of the angel who told them not to return to Herod.
3. **Bow** – they bowed at the sight of Jesus.
4. **Give** – they gave precious gifts as an act of devotion and worship.

We would all be wise to follow their lead and ignite our worship with awe, vigor and passion this Christmas.

Look Up – Connect with God

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse: “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.” (Matthew 2:2)

Pray: Lord, how often is our worship just a check-the-box and move-on type of experience? Forgive us for that. Instead, ignite a passion in us to see more than a cuddling baby this Christmas but the God He is. Have us fall to our knees in reverent worship and offer you our heart, mind, body and soul. May we always seek and obey as the Wise Men did.

Look In – Family Memories

Discuss: Can you trace your own journey to Jesus? How did God work in the twists and turns of your life to bring you to him? This would be a great opportunity to share your faith testimony with your children.

Activity:

- Advent Tree: if you can't find a Wise Men ornament, try a treasure box (for myrrh), a gold coin or small bottle (for oil), or a camel and put it on the tree. [Download Ornaments](#) or [Ornament Ideas](#)
- Advent Garland: put the key verse on a paper/card, assign #18, and attach it to the garland twine. [Key Verses](#)
- Advent Cards: select a card and see what the activity might be (i.e., make a snowman and have a snowball fight). [Family Activities](#)

Look Out – Connect with Others

Find a local organization offering holiday meals and volunteer as a family to serve. Or ring the bell for the Salvation Army in your community, and sing or play Christmas carols during your shift. Hand out candy canes with a note explaining the spiritual meaning behind the candy to folks who walk by.