

O Come Let Us Adore Him

Matthew 2:1-12

In 1743, John Francis Wade wrote the beautiful Christmas hymn entitled “*O Come, All Ye Faithful*.” He declared many wondrous truths in that carol, but then he always returned to the chorus, where he wrote, “O come, let us adore Him.” There are many meaningful slogans used at Christmas time to remind us of the true meaning of Christmas, but for me personally, and perhaps for you, too, none is so meaningful as “O come, let us adore Him.” That is truly what Christmas is all about. Christmas, of course, is the time when we celebrate the birth of Christ, the entrance of God into our world to become one of us.

And if we really believe that, then truly the only response we can make to that is to bow before the Lord Jesus in simple adoration. And let me suggest that we haven’t observed the birth of Christ in a God-honoring way until we have adored Him. And if we are sincerely interested in observing the birth of Christ the right way, we should go back to the New Testament accounts of how those present at the birth celebrated it. How did Mary and Joseph respond? How did the shepherds react to the news the angels proclaimed to them that starry night? What prompted the wise men to travel many miles to see a baby? We could not adequately look at all of them in one sermon, so instead we choose one of those groups of humans to study, and to determine the best way to observe Christmas.

The second chapter of Matthew records how the wise men came great distances from the East to worship the new-born king. The Scriptures do not tell us much about these men. Tradition, however, has filled in the gaps. Tradition tells us, for instance, that there were twelve wise men, a number which eventually was whittled down to three. We are told that the three were kings, a belief derived from the fact that the gifts they presented to Christ were very costly items. It is believed that the wise men came from the area of Babylonia or Persia, where astronomy was then a popular area of study.

As the story developed across the years, names were even given to these wise men: Caspar, Balthasar and Melchior. If you choose to pay the fee you can see what are supposed to be their bones in the shrine behind the high altar in Cologne Cathedral in West Germany. All *that* we know from tradition. What we know from *Scripture*, however, is a fact that is clear enough. These men came from the East in order to *adore* the new-born king.

And if that was true of the first Christmas, then how can we even pretend that we have observed Christmas in a God-honoring way if we do not adore Christ? If we want to know how to adore Christ, then we need to dig deeper and discover for ourselves the marks of adoration. Once again, we look to the example of the wise men for clues as to how we can adore the Christ today, and in so doing, observe the birth of Christ in a genuine way. This could be the most meaningful, exciting Christmas you've ever had!

1 The first mark of adoration is Worship

If we're going to adore the Christ this Christmas season, then we must learn to worship Him. We're not going to get very far in observing the birth of Christ until we have worshipped Him.

That was the purpose of the wise men in their coming. That was why they had come all this way in the first place. That is what verse 2 tells us: *For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.* That was it. They didn't come for any other reason. They didn't come to be seen, nor did they come to ask a favor of the King. They came to worship the Messiah.

How were they going to worship Him? **First** of all, they set off on a long journey to find Christ. We don't know exactly how far it was that they traveled. But they wouldn't wait for Him to grow up and come discover **them**. There are many people who do not know Jesus Christ, or do not know Him better, because they will not take the trouble to seek Him. If you are going to adore Christ, you must take the trouble to worship Him.

But beware, because not everyone will worship the Christ child. The wise men may have been perplexed as to why all of Judea was not thronging the countryside to go worship the new-born King, and you may be, too. These wise men came from a far country, but the Jews—Christ's own people—would not stir a step to go to the next town to bid Him welcome to the world.

Second, the wise men had to find out where the child was. Since they were looking for a king, it was natural that they should go to the capital of that country. So they went to Jerusalem. When they arrived there they began asking the people on the street, *Where is he that is born King of the Jews?* They obviously expected to find the city joyously celebrating the birth of its king. But they walk up and down the streets and in the marketplaces only to find that no one knows anything about Him at all. They must have felt like a person in a foreign country who professes faith in Christ, and then comes to America, only to actually see how very little our people

care for Christ. How disappointing that must have been for these wise men! Nobody in Jerusalem knew anything about their new King. That was strange enough. But nobody wanted to know anything about Him. That was stranger still.

“*Where is He?*” they asked. That is the first question that must be asked by the worshipping heart. “*You shall search for me, and you shall find me,*” God says, “*when you shall search for me with all your heart.*” You see, to truly worship Christ, you must **seek Him**. Do you know where Christ is, in a spiritual sense? In the breathlessness of getting ready for Christmas, have you lost sight of Him?

But then when the wise men received directions as to where the Messiah was to be born, and when they saw the star once again, they came eventually to Bethlehem. When they arrived there at the house, the Scriptures tell us in verse 11 that “*they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him.*” They had found the Christ Child and their journey was over. They had come to worship Him, and that is what they did. They were not like so many of us today, who are so overcome by the preparations and decorations and partying and good cheer that we forget to worship.

There is a curious tradition among the Russian peasantry. It is said that an old woman, called the *Baboushka*, was at work in her house when the wise men from the East passed on their way to find the Christ child. “Come with us,” they said. “We have seen His star in the east and go to worship Him.” “I will come, but not now,” she answered. “I have my house to set in order; when this is done I will follow and find Him.”

But when her work was done the wise men had passed on their way across the desert, and the star shone no more in the darkened heavens. She never saw the Christ child, but the tradition says that the *Baboushka* is living still, and still she is searching for Him.

For His sake, the tradition says, she takes care of all Christ’s children. It is she who in Russian and Italian houses is believed to fill the stockings and dress the tree on Christmas morning. The children are awakened by the cry of “Behold the *Baboushka!*” and the children spring up hoping to see her before she vanishes out of the window. The *Baboushka* believes that in each poor little one she warms and feeds, she may find the Christ child, whom she neglected ages ago.

Are you like the *Baboushka*? Have you neglected the worship of Christ in your Christmas preparations?

2 The second mark of adoration is Followership

This follows closely on the heels of the first. The wise men had to follow the star in their efforts to find the baby. When the angels appeared to the shepherds they told them, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”* All the shepherds had to do to find Jesus was to go to Bethlehem and look in all the stables until they found a baby lying in a manger. But the wise men did not have that advantage. The only help they had was to follow a star in the heavens.

I believe the star was easily visible to everyone. There were thousands of people about them who perhaps saw the star just as the wise men did. But these thousands saw no meaning in the star, and continued to live their lives as always, totally ignorant of the fact that the greatest event in the history of mankind was taking place. The difference was that these wise men were intent on adoring the Christ child, and so they followed the star, even to the extent of traveling such a great distance.

Not everyone shared this followership, not even in the Messiah’s own country. In verses 3 and following, when Herod heard that these wise men were asking about the birth of a King, he was troubled. He was an unstable individual, and because he was troubled, all Jerusalem was troubled with him. Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes together, and demanded of them where the Christ was to be born. They said, *“In Bethlehem of Judea.”* Even the religious leaders were quite sure *where* the Messiah was to be born, but they did not care to follow the star to go and see *if* He is born. They did not follow, and they did not adore.

In verse nine, when the wise men resumed their journey, the star reappeared and went before them. Following it, the wise men were led to the exact spot where the child was. Followership was the mark of their adoration. They would have missed the place entirely had they relied solely on human reasoning and pride, as we do so often in our day.

They didn’t even know the name of the baby, or the names of His parents. Bethlehem was not normally a large place, but its population had swelled with the taking of the census. According to human logic, it would be impossible to find the right baby in all that city. But they followed the God-sent star, and God led them right to the Messiah.

Sooner or later, the Father has a star for each of us, though it may appear in many shapes and forms. But whatever the Father places before you, He puts it there for you to follow, and when you follow it, you are led always to Christ. Every Book in the Bible points to Christ. Nature is like a giant outstretched finger pointing to Christ. The human body is even used by Paul to show us the relationship between us as believers and Christ.

We can choose to follow these things, or we can ignore them. God may choose to speak to you through your conscience, or He may choose to lead you through a song or a sermon or a friend. A set of circumstances may lead you in one direction, while a kind word may lead you in another.

One thing is certain: you will never learn to adore Christ until you have learned to follow Him. And the more you learn of Christ, the more you want to know. The wise men knew of the event of the birth, and now they wanted to know the place of the birth. You never get to the point in your life where you can stop learning and following Christ.

3 The third mark of adoration is Joy

There is a third mark of adoration that seems to be sadly lacking in the lives of many who profess to be observing Christmas in a God-honoring way.

That mark is *joy*. Without joy in your Christmas observance, the rest of the trappings just do not make sense. If you had no joy, there would be no reason to send greeting cards, or to sing Christmas carols, or to hear Christmas sermons, or to set up a tree, live or artificial, inside your house. You take out joy, and you've destroyed Christmas.

But what exactly are we talking about when we say that our adoration is to be marked by joy? And what difference does it make anyway? Why can't I just give a few gifts and pat a few people on the back, wishing them a "Merry Christmas"?

If you read the Christmas story carefully, you find that the birth of Christ was an event surrounded by and permeated with joy. Look at verse ten: "*When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*" In Luke's account of what the shepherds heard that most memorable night, the angel told them, "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*" (Luke 2:10). You see, joy was a natural accompaniment to the birth of Christ 2,000 years ago, and whenever we celebrate His birth today, we have a reason to be joyful! Without that joyful adoration of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christmas is a farce, at least as far as our observance of it is concerned.

We have something to be joyful about because the birth of Christ paved the way for us—for all of us—to have eternal life. It marked the invasion by God into human history. It signified that God was more than passively interested in what was going on down here on the earth. The birth of Christ was a joyful event because that was when God changed the course of human history—and it was a hell-bent course, I might add—by becoming one of us. And becoming one of us meant that He would go through the exact same things we experience.

Are you misunderstood? Jesus was misunderstood, much more than any of us. We haven't been nailed to a cross yet! Are you facing death? Jesus faced death, and conquered it! What about temptations? Jesus suffered temptation throughout the course of His life here on the earth. And listen! What about sin? Are you having problems with sin? Of course you are, whether you are willing to admit it or not, but God through Jesus came into the world to give us victory over sin!

What a Savior! What a Messiah! Words and time both would fail me to try to list all the reasons we have to be joyful at Christmas time, and indeed, throughout the year.

Not everyone, though, is going to be joyful about the coming of Christ. That was true in the days of the wise men and it is true in our day, as well. You just go back and compare the joy of the wise men to the unrest of the Jewish people in Jerusalem. Look at the apparent apathy of the priests and scribes. Scrutinize Herod's evil heart in pretending to have a desire to worship the Christ. So don't be surprised when other people are not as excited and joyful as you are.

But although Jesus has been ignored by some and rejected by others, He is the joy of those who, like the wise men, keep looking for Him until they find Him. Take a look at the manner in which you have celebrated the birth of Christ in years past. Examine the way you've celebrated His birth this year so far. Have you come to adore Christ?

Is *worship* a natural part of your adoration of Jesus at Christmas time? Do you, at Christmas time, recommit your life to unreserved *followership*? And is there room in your heart for *joy*, amid all the other things you do this time of year?