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A Magi Miracle Is Manipulated In Our Lives

Matthew 2:1-12

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Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

⁵ So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

⁶ *‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”*

⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

We pray, O Lord, lead us by the light of Your Word to find the Christ whom You alone can reveal – in this text and in our lives and for our salvation. Amen.

A Magi Miracle Is Manipulated In Our Lives

1. Not by scheming and lying
2. Not by wisdom or worthiness
3. But according to His own gracious will, God reveals the Christ when and where and to whom He will.

The scene features Burt Reynolds stuck out in the middle of a lake yelling, “I want to live!” In the 1978 movie, “the End,” Burt Reynolds is seen swimming out to the middle

of a lake in order to drown himself. At the last moment, he has an epiphany. He bursts out of the water and shouts: "I want to live! I don't want to die! Lord if you'll just let me live, I promise I'll be a better person!" So he starts swimming and he starts praying. "Lord, I promise to do better. Lord, make me a better father, make me a better person, but, above all, make me a better swimmer!" He decides he doesn't want to die, and begins to try to make a deal with the Lord.

But is that how God's miracles work? Can we cut a deal with God? Can we barter with Him for what we want? Or are we just trying to manipulate God? We want things to work out our way and we'll do whatever it takes to make that happen.

God doesn't work through momentary miracles. His miracles cannot be manipulated by us or by this world. And that is because God is not interested in giving us momentary miracles; His work is to reveal an eternal epiphany and to do so according to His own time and choosing regardless of who we are and what we would do. And this is just what our text from Matthew 2 shows us. God Alone Manipulates a Magi Miracle – 1) It doesn't come by our scheming and lying; 2) It doesn't come because of our wisdom or worthiness; 3) It is left to God alone to reveal His Christ when, where, and to whom He will.

1. Not by scheming and lying

"Lord, I'll give you 50% of my income! That's more than anyone gives." But as he is praying Burt Reynolds begins to get closer and closer to shore. And the closer he gets, the more and more he starts to back off on his promises. "I think I'm going to make it, Lord! You saved me! I'm gonna start donating that 10% right away; I know I said 50, but I'll start with 10 and I'll work my way up from there."

King Herod wasn't interested in giving anything up. He is used to getting what he wants, when he wants, where he wants. History pictures him as the typical self-inflated power-hungry dictator of his time – he was Herod the Great. To quote D.A. Carson:

Herod the Great was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and

jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamme and at least two of his sons.
(Carson, *Matthew*, 86; quoted from Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 122)

Herod wasn't interested in giving up a cent of his kingdom to make way for this other so-called king. Being aware of his tyrannical attitude, the whole city of Jerusalem becomes afraid of what King Herod will do in response to this threat. But it is really Herod who is afraid.

He secretly calls His religious consultants to find out more precisely about this prophecy. He will take no chances. And when he discovers the prophecy of Micah, that the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem, he tells the magi:

“Go to Bethlehem and find this Child and bring back word to me, that I too may come to worship him.”

But Herod has no such intention. We find out later in Matthew 2 that Herod's plan is to kill the Christ. He thinks he can manipulate this magi miracle by scheming and lying.

Herod is afraid. Behind all his scheming and lying is fear, insecurity, suspicions. He fears losing control. He is threatened by the idea that there could be another king, some other God who will rule.

Isn't that why we lie? The truth of this is too painful to face. The loss that it will bring. So we try to manipulate the situation. We want this Magi Miracle to work out in our favor. So we scheme to make it ours; we lie. We will offer God 50% of all we have if it means we can get what we want – but all the while we know there is not even 10% in us that we are willing to give up. We will say whatever is needed to get what we want.

“I promise I'll never ask for anything ever again ...

“What good does it do to say I'm sorry, now...”

“Its ok as long as she doesn't find out...”

“Its ok as long as no one gets hurt...”

Or as Burt Reynolds says when almost reached the shore, “I'll never cheat at business – just as soon as I get rid of those 9 acres in the desert.”

But for all the lies, all the scheming, it will never lead us to the miracle that God intends to give. We need God to intervene. We need Herod's throne to be brought down. We need our throne to be brought down. Only then will we see this miracle for what God intends it to be.

2. Not by wisdom or worthiness

But if lying and scheming can't control the course of events, then maybe God would be influenced by another more pious reason. As Burt Reynolds swims along, asking the Lord to save him, he begins making more promises: "I'll obey the 10 commandments, I won't kill anyone, I won't commit adultery, I ... I ... I'll learn the 10 commandments, and then I'll obey them. Lord, just let me live!" Is this how God's miracles work? Is it our wisdom, our worthiness that a magi miracle is manipulated in our lives.

"Behold! Wisemen from the east." These are the wisemen. We see them pictured in art and literature as wise and pious kings. We see the manger scene, the royal figures just steps behind the shepherds. They get there right on time. They are the "wisemen" – and have found their way to the Christ because of their wisdom and worthiness.

Some church promote such a theology. If you are pious enough, if you have enough faith, you can expect God to perform miracles in your life. A better job. A better family. Better health.

They speak of faith-healings. By laying on hands, by fervent prayer, and with enough faith, you can cure anything ailment. It has to do with what you are doing, how much you are believing, how obedient are you being. And if you aren't being healed, if things are going poorly for you, well, then the answer is simple – you don't have enough faith.

And it spills over into our understanding of justification. If you want to be saved, then you need to ... You need to find Christ ... You need to pray the sinners prayer ... If you want God to forgive you, you need to sincerely and honestly and fervently and feverishly and frantically ask Him.

But what are we doing? Aren't we just making ourselves the source of God's miracles? Aren't we just trying to manipulate God by our wisdom and worthiness?

The "wisemen" were not really as wise as we would picture them. The Greek word Magi gives us the English "magician." These men would have been known in Jesus' day as a type of pagan astrologers. The only other mention we have of magi are from the book of Daniel, where we find them among the religious servants of the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar. They are listed alongside wizards and sorcerers. Magi were experts in astrology, a superstitious study of the stars. God calls these sorts of religious practices an abomination in his sight.

They don't arrive just steps behind the shepherds. The text suggest it took close to two years to make their way to Jerusalem. And when they finally get there, they don't really know what they are looking for. They end up in Jerusalem where they find the wrong king. There is only one thing that keeps them on track – a star. "Behold! Magi from the east!"

God will not be influenced by our promise to obey the 10 commandments. Even if, unlike Burt Reynolds, you know all, do you keep them? God will not be swayed to bless us based on how fervent we might pray or how hard we might believe. He knows better. He knows we will never make good on these promises. Something in us will always be lacking.

We are by nature Gentiles – foreigners to the covenant of God. We are filled with We are a far off, wandering, lost if God would not reveal the way. Paul calls it a mystery (Ephesians 3). Something that God alone can reveal to us. That we should find the Christ or be partakers of His fellowship is something we might never expect.

3. But according to His own gracious will, God reveals the Christ when and where and to whom He will.

So it is not by scheming and lying; and it is not by our wisdom or worthiness; and that is because God reveals the Christ when and where and to whom He will.

What are the odds? What are the odds with all that was working against them? Gentile, unbeliever, a far off country, a two year journey, the wrong city, the wrong king, plots against them, the true king hidden in a lowly house in a lowly city, in a lowly family – what are the odds that these Magi should find him?

But the star again appears. They set out from Jerusalem with new found joy, for they were lost without that star. Without God's gracious will, we are all lost. But a star appears and we see beneath it, the one who is born, the King of the Jews. A light has shined, and the glory of the Lord has appeared. In Bethlehem of Judea. Though this city be small and their family be poor; it shall be the most exalted.

And so God chooses according to His gracious will. His Son has come in the most unexpected of ways – a king who in truth, in prophecy, in lowliness, for lowliness. A star appears and it would have us take notice. Take notice of what is happening in Bethlehem. For there God is proving that Jesus is for you.

He is being born not in the palace of Jerusalem, but in poverty. He comes not to lie and scheme his way to the top; not to hoard his riches and kill those who would threaten Him. Rather He offers His life to those who threaten Him. He gives up heaven itself to be accursed for you. He is the true King. The one which comes from God to save this fallen world. w

This is the light which shines, which leads you to safety, to life. What are the odds? We come from a far off; We are by nature Gentiles, sinners, a far off – lying and scheming and manipulated by our own sinful flesh; upon you, God’s light shines. Despite all that we have going against us, God finds you, God leads you, and here, where you gather today, He reveals a miracle when, where, and to whom He will. He reveals the Christ to you.

This is the light which shines upon you and which goes with you. You don’t need to see it to know it is there. For we walk by faith and not by sight. We often must wait, take detours, be delayed, be plotted against and come a long ways before God reveals it – a star. When all things seem to mount against you, it is there, shining on Bethlehem. When evil is plotting against you, scheming to get you; it is there. When you have nothing to go on, but a promise from God’s word – it is there. It is the promise. That is who guides us. The promise that the Christ shall be ruler in Israel, and that He will shepherd you safely home. For this we rejoice. Not just a little, but with exceedingly, great joy!

You know what Burt Reynolds says when he finally makes it to shore? “You saved me, Lord! But you also got me into this mess in the first place!” How quickly the world’s promises turn on God. But we know better. We know it was not God who got us into this mess, it was we. We have nothing to negotiate with. It is a miracle we simply can’t manipulate – not by scheming or lying; not by being wise or pious. Instead, it is left to God’s gracious will. It is because of God’s revealing of Jesus that we are saved from our own mess. He has forgiven all your sins for Jesus sake and will continue to shining the light of His Word to guide our way safely to shore. This is a Magi Miracle. This is an Eternal Epiphany. Amen.