

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 38, **No.50, December 18**, 2012 / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."** (2 Peter 3:18)

THE MAGI: A Powerful Example of Undiluted Worship!

From research done by LifeWay, found at <http://www.lifeway.com/article/170606/> — it would appear that many Americans, especially Christians, are ‘two-souled’ (have divided hearts) when it comes to who and what gets their time, their money, their attention, and their hearts EVERY DECEMBER! **Who or what am I enthusiastic about in December?**

This is a long standing battle— to be confronted with the conflict that comes deep in the soul when the beloved traditions of culture are pulling upon us with a mighty force; and when at the same time we are confronted with God’s divine revelation, which is counter-culture!

The Wise Men (the Magi) of Matthew 2, give us a wonderful example of men, in this battle, turning their backs on culture and giving undiluted worship to JESUS CHRIST!

I. THE CULTURE OF THE BABYLONIAN AND ROMAN WORLD

To understand the Wise Men or Magi who visited the young child, Jesus— it will help to start with a quote from ***4000 Years of Christmas***, by Dr. Earl Count, which is a **pro-Christmas** book dedicated— **"To you** who have loved Christmas and have made it beautiful."

Dr. Count states, **"Christmas is one of mankind’s greatest experiences.** For more than four thousand years, spreading over the earth, it has drawn loyalties and longings of millions of people..." Dr. Count further informs that ancient history tells us, "of an old, old Babylonian festival that moves westward, dividing its ways as it comes: through Greece into Rome as ***a festival that remodels itself at every step to fit the people among whom it settles...***"

Various Encyclopedias, ***THE TWO BABYLONS***, by Alexander Hislop and other readily available sources chronicle these events and reveal that although different names

were used— the Babylonians were among the first who are known to have engaged in huge, merry-making, feasting, gift-exchanging December festivals.

Yes, the annual December holiday season has been taking place for about 4,000 years— starting about 2000 years before Christ. **In the third century AD, something took place that would radically impact the whole world, even to this day!**

The Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to become a Christian and established Christianity as the state religion. **He required all of his armies to be baptized. Saturnalia**, (which was rooted in the ancient Babylonian Mystery Religions), **had the hearts of the newly baptized masses.** What could be done? How could the state church, Roman Catholicism, overcome the pagan practices?

Pope Gregory had a solution. He believed that the best policy was to let the masses keep their practices, but to change the names of their temples and their traditions; and then to do these same practices to the glory of God. **December 25th** was the long established high day in both the Babylonian religion and Rome's Saturnalia.

Thus the Catholic Church simply re-imaged the ANCIENT HOLIDAY of the masses into the birth day of Christ. And, of course, they re-imaged many of the practices. But the focus of the Christianized celebration would be the Mass of Christ, later shortened in name to Christ's mass, to Christmass, to the present day form of Christmas.

Today the focus of the grand winter holiday is varied. Today many Christians seek to hold on to both the holiday and Christ. **Thus, there is a great tug-of-war as to who or what really gets our heart!**

LifeWay research reported, "Americans give Jesus a head nod at Christmas but spend most of the season pleasing their eyes, ears and taste buds with decorations, music and meals."

II. THE MAGI IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

In the Old Testament era, the Magi often functioned as advisors to kings. They would divine wisdom and interpret dreams. (Read the first 5 chapters of Daniel) Daniel was elevated to be the governor over all of Babylon's wise men or Magi. **As Priests in their own religion**, the Babylonian Magi would have practiced and taught many of the religious and holiday traditions that people around the world hold sacred today. **However**, the Magi of Matthew 2 were not content with their Babylonian culture and religion; and **so they set out in search of a King who was worthy of worship! Amazing— in Matthew 2 we have GENTILES worshipping at Christ's feet!** Let us remember that in God's global plan of redemption, the Old Testament proclaimed that a Redeemer was coming, who would be **a light to the Gentiles!** (Isa. 42:6; 60:1-3; Lk 2:29-32!)

These Magi are a testimony to the grace of God which reached into the darkest center of pagan religion **to bring these gentile priests to worship Jesus!** We do not have

exact details. **But we do know that hundreds of years earlier, through Daniel, God planted truth in Babylon.** It is evident that God preserved that truth for hundreds of years so that it reached into the minds and hearts of the Magi of Matthew 2.

[**NOTE:** Not all agree that the Magi of Matthew 2 came out of Babylon. Be that as it may, you will find that the Bible principles and applications of this article line up with God's Word. Focus on those. Do your own study.]

APPLICATION: **Christian! God has planted you in your own particular 'Babylon!' Live holy, pure, loving, forgiving, full of grace, truth loving lives! Plant the Gospel! Water the Gospel! In His time, God will give the increase! Every New Testament Epistle is full on instruction on how to be 'salt and light' in the midst of a pagan world!**

III. THE WISE MEN/MAGI IN THE TIME OF CHRIST'S BIRTH

How much Old Testament truth came into the hands of the Magi of Matthew 2? We do not know. However, the very fact that hundreds of years after Daniel we have Magi specifically asking, "*Where is he who is born king of the Jews?*"— **think about it, the only truth source on the planet that would have led to the Magi's question** would have come from the Old Testament and/or from some preserved teaching from Daniel.

As recorded in Matthew 2:1-12, as the Magi arrive— Herod and all Jerusalem were afraid! Why? Certainly, no one would have feared a few dusty guys riding camels! HOWEVER, in reality the Magi were high ranking officials from a rival empire, traveling in the Roman Empire.

Moreover, instead of camels, most likely they would have been riding on Persian steeds/Arabian Horses and accompanied with a protective armed entourage! Most importantly, they were asking for, "*He that is born king of the Jews!*" "King of the Jews" was Herod's title, given to him by Caesar Augustus! **For these reasons, the Magi were the source of fear and wonder!**

BUT imagine the great surprise to the Magi! They had left their country, their religious customs and gods and were in search of the KING worthy of worship. **However, NO ONE in Jerusalem cared about such a one!** When the Jewish religious leaders were asked, they pulled out their Old Testament scrolls and pointed to the precise prophecies— however, it was all academic to them. **They had NO INTEREST in a king worthy of worship!**

Hundreds of prophecies told of **Christ's FIRST COMING.** The religious leaders knew these prophecies. **But the religious leaders were busy practicing man-made religion.** NONE WERE LOOKING FOR MESSIAH, the King worthy of worship!

APPLICATION: There are hundreds of prophecies of **Christ's SECOND COMING!** Today, most in the churches could care less. There are a few "Prophecy Hobbyists" who make lots of money from selling the latest prophecy books, promoting their latest

theories. **But where are the rank and file believers who are taken up with the HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN? Will you and I be part of such a remnant?**

Know this: GRACE has a specific teaching agenda! - Titus 2:11-14: *"11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 **Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;** 13 **Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;** 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* **Question: Am I content to merely practice religion; or am I being taught by grace?**

Matthew 2 also informs us that the Magi saw HIS star in the east. Once they were in Jerusalem, that same star led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. **How could they have known that one particular star was HIS star?** Nothing in astronomy or in astrology could have told them. Their information could have only come from divine revelation from the true and living God! (Possibly Numbers 24:17 and Isaiah 60:1-3 quickened by the Spirit of God, aided them)

THE REALITY IS THIS: WHAT GOD REVEALED TO THEM, THEY ACTED UPON IN FAITH and OBEDIENCE. Their Babylonian religion had left them empty... even as the masses continued to delight in the same! They received Biblical revelation and began to desire to worship the true King who is above all kings. **They acted upon the truth God had given and God gave them more revelation, namely, HIS star!**

APPLICATION: Without faith it is impossible to please God! **Faith is ACTING upon the Word of God in obedience! Caution:** Don't let the Word of God 'fall' to the ground! When we are careless with the Word of God, we not only miss the blessing that comes from faith-obedience; **but we get SHORT-CIRCUITED from future revelation! Why should God REVEAL truth to us if we have not treasured and obeyed the revelation He has already given?**

IV. The WISE MEN/MAGI IN THE PRESENCE OF KING JESUS

By the time the Magi arrived Jesus was from 1-2 years old and living in a house. (Matthew 2:9-11) **In these verses we witness true worship.** Here are men who have turned their backs on cultural religion. They have been given gracious revelation from God. Against all odds, they place supreme faith in God's truth. God had led them out of BABYLON and to the feet of Jesus. And at the feet of Jesus, they worship JESUS only!

APPLICATION: THIS IS STILL THE CALL OF GOD! A Religious, Economic, Political Babylon spirit of greed, lust and hate engulfs the whole world and is under the coming judgment of God. **However, God still graciously calls His redeemed saints out of Babylon!** (It's all in the BOOK! Read Revelation, chapters 17 & 18!)

AS TO THE WORSHIPPING Magi, let us take note that their worship was entirely JESUS FOCUSED! It was not about the Magi. In tragic contrast, a few years back I received a flyer promoting a worship seminar for Evangelicals. **Attendees**

were promised help on how to bring “the next generation into worship *by exploring the sounds, styles and aesthetics of the post modern world.*”

All over America, folk flock to churches that give them the ‘sounds, styles and aesthetics’ of the pagan world, which they love. The message from many pastors and churches is clear: You can keep the world, continue to love the world, and have Jesus also!

GOD’S WORD reveals that such a message is false! (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17)
Judgment Day is coming! (1 Peter 4:17-19)

In 1974, Alan Redpath preached: “These days it appears that we must dress up the gospel to make it attractive... I wonder if we stop to think that in our efforts to make the gospel message “attractive” we are **drawing the curtain across the face of Jesus in His humiliation!**”

“The only one who can make Him attractive is the Holy Spirit... Only the Holy Spirit can make the LORD JESUS so real and vital that people will fall in love with Him and worship Him, **and it is the delight of God the Holy Spirit to point to the humiliation of God the Son!...**”

“It is the Spirit of God who makes His cross so attractive, and the beauty of the holiness of His life so wonderful that somehow, as to a magnet, in recognition of personal need, the soul is drawn to an experience of the saving power of Jesus— not by our techniques, but by Holy Spirit conviction.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT STILL QUICKENS THE GOD-BREATHED WORD OF GOD for the saving of the lost and the building up of the saints! (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

CONSIDER: To draw the pagan Magi out of Babylon, **at no point did God** arrange a ‘seeker service’ designed to appeal to their cultural tastes! God did not turn to an ancient ‘Poll taker’ to scout out ‘the sounds, styles and aesthetics’ of Babylonians!

GOD SIMPLY GAVE THEM HIS WORD! His Word is powerful! It matters not if the people you are witnessing to presently believe His Word or not— **it’s God’s Word and the Holy Spirit quickens the dead!**

APPLICATION: It can be a modern pagan in a motel room, reaping the consequences of godlessness and unrighteousness and he/she opens a drawer **and there lies a Gideon Bible!** He opens it and begins to read and is converted! The Holy Spirit of God still quickens the Word of God— **the wind of the Holy Spirit blows,** (John 3:3-8), **giving LIFE to the dead and REVIVAL to saints!**

Let us live and PREACH the Word!

V. THE WISE MEN GOING HOME ANOTHER WAY

Warned of God, the Magi of Matthew 2 took a different route home, avoiding Herod. We can well use that geographical reality to picture spiritual truth. **Each of us goes**

forth into the rest of our lives taking a **ROUTE CROWDED WITH FOOLS** or taking **paths of God's wisdom!**

Please understand that it is no light thing to speak of someone as a "FOOL"— BUT HEROD WAS A FOOL! He hated and rejected Jesus because he was afraid of losing his kingdom to a RIVAL KING! **But give Herod this much credit:** Herod understood that when there are RIVAL KINGS— to one we BOW and yield; to the other we give only a HEAD NOD!

APPLICATION: We cannot have Jesus and some other king or god. I remember after preaching in Delhi, India, a young man ran to the microphone and spoke with an angry voice. I later learned what he was saying:

"I have many gods and I also worship Jesus. My grandfather read the Bible to me. I BELIEVE IN JESUS. But this man has made me angry. He has said that all other gods are false and must be renounced and that JESUS ONLY is the way to heaven. He has said that JESUS ONLY is worthy of worship!"

He was correct. By the grace of God I did preach just exactly as he accused! He, his grandfather, and multitudes are deceived.

Yes, Herod was a FOOL. The Bible reveals that **in these end times**, there is the Bride of Christ; but there is also a great Harlot, (Revelation 17-22).

APPLICATION: There are two revivals on earth— to which will I give myself?

1. "Never has it been clearer to me that two revivals are in progress on the earth. **One is the revival of the Spirit of God by which** dead men and women are freed from their sins by the blood of the Lamb and raised to a life **which is the life of the sons of God, a life which bears God's nature, manifests God's mercy.**

2. The other revival is the revival of religious flesh, a revival which is so appealing and gathers such multitudes and wields such power in this world because it offers all the comfort of religion while allowing you to keep your ego and all rights to yourself." (Quote from Robert Burnell: Escape from Christendom)

VI. THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WERE FOOLS:

They knew the truth, but ignored it. They understood BIBLICAL TRUTH, but they were loyal to their own religious agenda— so much so, that they would later call for the crucifixion of JESUS!

JERUSALEM WAS FULL OF FOOLS: They did not search out the truth for themselves. They lived according to what religious leaders said. When their religious leaders said, "JUMP!"— they jumped! And when they said, "**CRUCIFY HIM!**"— they joined in crying out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

IN CONTRAST, THE MAGI WERE WISE: When God's revelation came to them— they renounced all to seek, to find, and to WORSHIP the King who was worthy to be worshipped!

The grace of Divine Revelation is **ULTIMATELY** and always to show us that **JESUS IS THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE WHO alone is worthy of worship!**

APPLICATION: WE WILL ALL GO FORTH and deal with every issue of life as **FOOLS** or as **WISE!** The **wise** love God's revealed truth found in God's Word. The **wise** treasure the truth of the Word of God. The **wise** respond to that truth with **faith/obedience**. The **wise** also understand that it is deadly to treat truth lightly! (See- 2 Thess. 2:10-12!!)

WISE MEN, WOMEN AND YOUTH STILL 'LEAVE BABYLON' AND WORSHIP JESUS!

O Come Let Us Worship JESUS CHRIST THE LORD!

AS AN OVERFLOW OF DELIGHTING in JESUS CHRIST our LORD— Let it also be seen in setting aside EXTRA LOVE OFFERINGS for the work and ministry of MISSIONARIES AROUND THE WORLD!

Jesus left heaven and came to earth on the GREATEST, most costly missionary journey of all time— to save sinners! In Christ we have the high calling of God in Christ Jesus to LIVE and TAKE the gospel to the world, from Gallatin/Sumner County to the ends of the earth. **LET US COME TOGETHER to worship, PRAY, and GIVE for the furtherance of the Gospel!**

May we, one and all, go forward greatly helped by the MODEL of the MAGI in celebration of JESUS CHRIST, THE LORD- the King Worthy of Worship! James Bell

SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES!

1. Ladies Bible Study— **'LORD, HEAL OUR HURTS!'**-- starting January 8!
2. **WEDNESDAYS: PRAYER SERVICE at 7:00PM! YOUTH: Wednesdays, 6-8pm** @ Adam and Bethany's home.
3. **Thursdays @ 6:30pm: OUTREACH VISITATION**
4. **EVERY SATURDAY @ 8:00am: Men's Fellowship and Bible Study**

Sunday Schedule for December 23:

1. **9:30am-** Sunday School /
2. **10:45am-** Morning Worship / Children's Church /
3. **LORD'S SUPPER at conclusion of the worship hour.**
4. **NO 'covered dish' noon MEAL AT CHURCH!**

Sunday Schedule for December 30

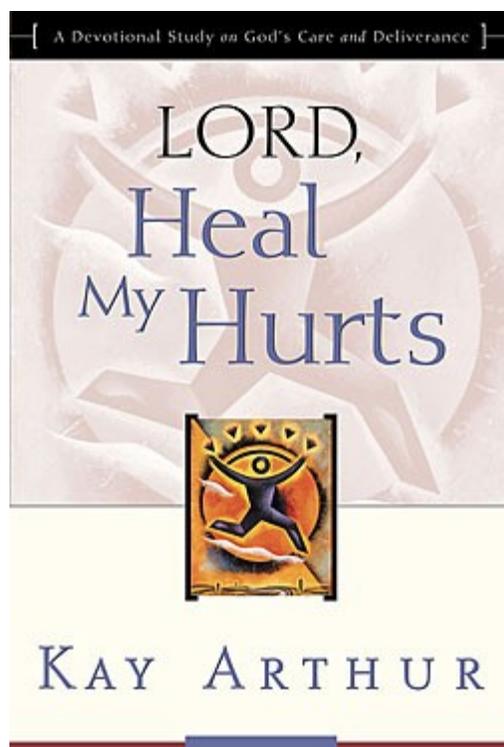
1. **9:30am-** Sunday School
2. **10:45am-** Morning Worship / Children's Church

3. Noon Fellowship 'Covered Dish' Meal
4. 1:00pm- Early Afternoon Service

Sunday Schedule for January 6, 2013

1. 9:30am- Sunday School
2. 10:45am- Morning Worship / Children's Church
3. Noon Fellowship 'Covered Dish' Meal
4. 1:00pm- Early Afternoon Service

((PLANS: Last Newsletter of 2012 to be on December 18; First Newsletter of 2013, on January 8))



Lord, Heal My Hurts

A Devotional Study on God's Care and Deliverance

No Matter How Deep the Wounds, God Can Heal Your Hurts. Everyone hurts. The pain runs deep, the scars never seem to fade, and the memories torment us. As a result, our growth is stunted, our walk crippled, our relationships infected. Will relief never come? Yes -- when you put yourself in the hands of Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals! No matter what you've done or what's been done to you, He wants to be your refuge. He loves you. And He offers healing for your deepest wounds. Discover how God can turn your sorrow into joy in ***Lord, Heal My Hurts.***

Let Kay Arthur guide you through the Scriptures so you can be set free from past hurts by the power of God. This powerful, insightful study will minister to you in deeply restorative ways. And these are truths you will want to share with others.

LADIES BIBLE STUDY STARTS BACK ON JANUARY 8, 10:30AM... Call and leave message at Southside with your contact information if you would like to be a part of this study; and/or if you want more information!

615-452-5951