

# THE WISDOM OF WORSHIP

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You've heard the saying, "A word to the wise..." Behind that phrase is the notion that a word is all it takes for a wise person to respond; they don't require a lecture, because they are wise and they get it. Just a word.

Today I have a word for the wise, and it is this: **WORSHIP**.

While the first Christmas morning was still many months away, God began to stir the hearts of wise men in the Far East. I don't know just how their studies led them, but God was speaking to them about His plans, and His plans were huge.

His plans centered in the people to whom He had revealed Himself and His purpose, the people He had called by His name—the Hebrew people, the Jews. They were not a large race, and they were scattered across the globe, yet they were a cohesive people, with strong and enduring ties. And they were integral to God's plans upon the earth.

They had a once-illustrious history, under Moses' leadership, and under King David and his son, King Solomon. But they had since been devastated and carried away captive, their notoriety all but lost.

Silence. No prophets spoke for God. His words were not heard. Hundreds of years passed. The Hebrew people struggled to regain their freedom and solidarity, but whatever they achieved did not last. Their land—if you could call it that—was overrun by foreigners and occupied by a foreign government. Their discontent and desperation was evident.

Their hearts, too, were being stirred, for God was at work among them. God was at work on their behalf.

A star—or perhaps it was an angel of light, for it did not behave like a star—appeared in the Far East, as a signal—a word to the wise. Those who had prepared their hearts and minds, recognized the star-signal and packed their things to follow its movement.

They left their people and their homeland behind to follow the star. They traveled a long and difficult road, fraught with dangers from nature and dangers from men. They crossed a continent with a silent conviction. God was up to something huge, and He had engaged their partnership.

They had no map and no GPS. They had only a star, which appeared from time to time. When it was visible, they followed hard after it. When it was not, they stuck to the road they were on until it appeared again.

They were intent upon their journey, because they knew what they would find at the end of that long road: the newborn king of the Jews.

God was regathering His people and calling them back to Himself, and raising up a king from the line of David, as prophesied for generations, to lead the way into the new era.

Angels would herald His coming and sing for joy at His birth. Shepherds would spread the News of His birth around the region. But it was these magi—these sages and kings of the Orient—who would welcome Him with gifts and take the Good News to faraway lands and unfamiliar cultures.

They had prepared their gifts and secured them for the long journey. They would not arrive empty-handed to greet the King. They would not offer Him what had cost them nothing, for that would be disrespectful, and they had only traveled so far because of their deep respect—for the God of the Jews and for His King.

When they finally reached the capital city of Jerusalem, they went straight to the palace of the governor. Surely He would know what they needed to hear; he could give them final directions.

“Where is He who is born King of the Jews?” they asked. But Herod, the Roman governor of the region, was caught off guard. Far from the heart of the Empire in Rome, Herod was sometimes referred to by his colleagues—with derision—as the “king of the Jews.” But he was not “born king,” so they surely had another in mind. That thought was cemented by their express purpose: “We have come to worship Him.”

He inquired of the Jewish elders what this reference could mean and what the ancient prophecies had predicted. By their answer, Herod directed the visitors to Bethlehem, a short distance south. His curiosity aroused by these events, and his anxiety—for this matter gave him an uneasy feeling, a foreboding—he sent the wise men on their way, urging them to return and tell him what they found, so that he, too might come and worship this new king.

What Herod actually had in mind was something far more sinister—to preserve his rule—and the wise men were warned by an angel not to cooperate with him or return to his palace.

Worship. They had left all behind and journeyed all that way and endured all the difficulties of the road for one thing: to worship Him. That was all. They had nothing to ask Him. Nothing they needed from Him. They just came to worship Him. To pay their respects.

For that is what worship is. It is the ultimate expression of respect for another person. It is the highest compliment one can give. The greatest gift one can offer.

Worship is submission at its best. It is love at its deepest. It is the offering of your life. It is your soul's surrender.

*Worship is the gift that wisdom brings.*

In the Scriptures, our first encounter with worship (in the Hebrew tongue, *shachah*) is in the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Genesis.

Abraham, like the magi of our story, had been stirred by God to leave his family and his homeland and to follow God to another, an unfamiliar, place. In the course of his journey, God spoke to Abraham several times, making promises of great things to come—miraculous things.

Though childless at nearly a hundred years of age, God gave Abraham and his wife a child, a son. Through this miracle child God promised to fulfill His plan to make Abraham's seed a blessing to the rest of humankind.

Yet, when the boy was only thirteen years old, God tested Abraham's faithfulness, by asking him for an act of worship: He asked Abraham to sacrifice his son's life—that son of promise.

Keenly aware of the cost, Abraham trusted that there was more to this than met the eye. He believed that his son would not perish—and God's promise would not be broken—even if God had to raise him from the dead.

So, he prepared wood for the sacrificial fire, loaded up his donkey, and they began the journey to the place of sacrifice. On the third day, he parted from his servants and the animals to walk the final distance. Isaac carried the wood and Abraham himself carried the knife and the coals in a firepot. He said to his servants, *"The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back"* (Genesis 22:5).

It is a word that means "bow down in humble reverence." It is not a forced bowing, but a willing personal expression of honor and respect.

The wise men had come all that way, months of arduous travel, to do this—to bow down in humble reverence—before a toddler. Because He was not merely a toddler, He was the King of the Jews. It was not His age to which they bowed, nor His achievements, but to His destiny. They bowed themselves before the destiny of this young boy, Jesus—King of the Jews.

It was this same word that the psalmist used when he taught us to sing:

*Come, let us worship and bow down.  
Let us kneel before the Lord our maker,  
for he is our God.  
We are the people he watches over,  
the flock under his care.*  
(Psalm 95:6-7)

This is why so many people, generation after generation, have knelt down to pray to God. It is a sign of respect. It is an act of worship.

The physical act alone is not worship; it may be only humiliation. But when the heart is engaged in humble adoration, kneeling becomes worship.

Here is a lesson I hope you will take away from the story of the wise men: While there may be many expressions of praise—praise is the voice of worship—there is but one fundamental act of worship—with or without praise. It is to bow oneself down, not by force but out of reverence. To bow down in deep respect. To bow down in humble surrender. To bow down in overflowing love.

They say that “Wise men still seek Him.”

But what is it that makes men wise like that? What sets them apart?

Is it their heritage? Is it their education? Is it success in business?

What makes people dream, plan, prepare, pursue, endure, preserve, and present as those wise men did?

What will it take for you to become a worshipper of God? More than a casual church attender. More than a church member.

What will it take to get you to walk away from your home, to cross the county or the continent, out of reverence for the King?

What is it that prevents you, in this very moment, from bowing to your knees in worship to Christ the King?

Will you worship Him right now?—not with your words, not with a sound, but with a physical act. If you are physically able, bow down on your knees right now before Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

As you humbly bow, become aware of His presence. Become aware of His greatness. Become mindful of His great kindness to you. Let your heart adore Him now. Stay there a few moments longer.

Now, gently sing,

*O come, let us adore Him*

*O come, let us adore Him*

*O come, let us adore Him*

*Christ the Lord.*

As you return to your seat, let me ask you again... What does it take to become a worshipper of God? What makes people dream, plan, prepare, pursue, endure, preserve, and present as those wise men did? What sets people apart in this way?

You have just experienced it. It is simply your will. You must *choose* to worship.

Do not wait for a feeling. *Create* the feeling by bowing down in humble respect and pouring out your love to Him. Join a great and everlasting tradition: worship the King!

Here's how the psalmist said it:

<sup>1</sup> *Shout joyful praises to God, all the earth!*

<sup>2</sup> *Sing about the glory of his name!*

*Tell the world how glorious he is.*

<sup>3</sup> *Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!*

*Your enemies cringe before your mighty power.*

<sup>4</sup> *Everything on earth will worship you;*

*they will sing your praises,*

*shouting your name in glorious songs."*

(Psalm 66:1-4)

Are you willing to commit or recommit yourself to becoming a worshipper of Christ? Will you make the choice today? And purpose to make it again tomorrow?

If so, then seal it with a prayer...