

# A Wise Man's Gold

*The Pagan Magicians of Persia*

December 21, 2014



**Is Christ getting lost in your Christmas?**

**You got'a keep your eye on Him, or He'll get away from you!**

Got'a be *attentive*, because **our culture is addicted to chaos.**

*Especially during Christmas.*



**We too easily allow the urgent to overshadow the important.**

*Especially during Christmas!*

**The problem isn't the list of demands, the load of expectations, or the lack of time; it's losing sight of the significant.**

**Chaos is a choice.**

*Especially during Christmess.*



**Remove *Christ* and all you got is the *mess!***

Let the world push and shove and honk in their festive frenzy!

Don't bite. Don't take the bait.

**You're celebrating the Prince of Peace.**



**You're pursuing the *King* of Christmas.**

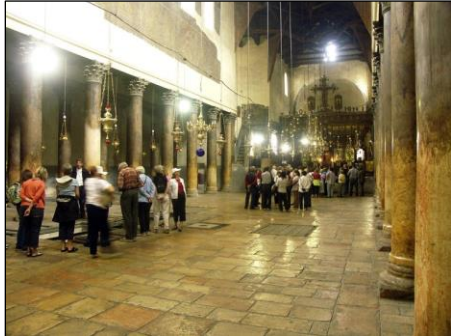
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." – Matthew 2:1-2 NIV

They had *their* shopping done.

What are these guys doing in the story?!

Only Matthew records the event; but, he uses the term “magos” [MAW’goss], a foreign title used by the Babylonians, Medes, and Persians for wise men: a mix between scientists and sorcerers.

But to be fair, the scientific line was pretty grey in their day.



Church of the Nativity, Jerusalem

Coming from the east pretty much narrows it down to Persia (i.e. Iran). During the Persian siege of Jerusalem (614<sup>AD</sup>), only one church was spared from destruction. Any guesses which one? The Church of the Nativity. Any guesses why? It contained a mosaic of the Magi.

**Why would they travel 1000 miles to worship a Jewish king? Why would they bring Frankincense and Myrrh? That’s anointing oil, and the equivalent of embalming fluid.**

**Why would they give away a treasure of gold?**

Well, **seems the greatest wise man to ever live had left ‘em instructions. Over 500 years earlier!**

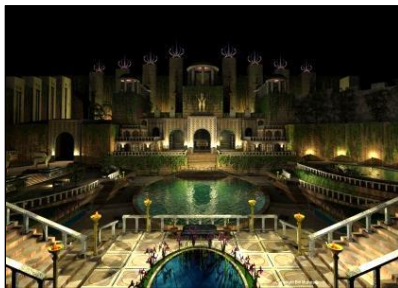
Matthew is a Jew, writing to Jews, to persuade ‘em that Jesus is the promised King. And the term he chooses, magos, or chakkiym in Hebrew, is found only 14 times, in *one* story, in the Bible.

And the story takes place in Persia, which was formerly Babylon.

If he *didn’t* mean it as a reference, it’s a *really poor choice*.

**It’s the story of the prophet Daniel who was taken into exile.**

When King Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men couldn’t explain his dream ...



... the king ... ordered the execution of all the **wise men [chakkiym (khaw’KHEEM)]** of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the **wise men [chakkiym]** to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] to put them to death. **[Why? They were chakkiym!]** – Daniel 2:12-13 NIV

But, Daniel explains the dream without even hearing it!

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel ... “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries ...” Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and **placed him in charge of all its wise men. [chakkiym]** – Daniel 2:46-48 NIV

God’s just getting warmed up!

Daniel's friends are given the choice of bowing a golden statue, or facing the fiery furnace.



**They refuse the gold and take the heat.** And, the Son of God escorts 'em through it, unsinged. To which ol' King Nezzy says ...

I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." – Daniel 3:29 NIV



Years later, Daniel is rewarded by another king, for interpreting God's graffiti.

This man Daniel, whom the king called **Belteshazzar**, [Belteshazzar is Daniel's royal name] ... was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. – Daniel 5:12a, 29-31 NIV

After the lion's den, yet another king issues a decree for everyone in his kingdom to "fear and reverence the God of Daniel." (Dan 6:26)

In the story of Christ's birth ...

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married ... – Luke 1:26b-27a NIV



Why are we told the angel's name? It appears only twice in the OT. Guess where.

While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding." [About what?] – Daniel 9:21-22 NIV

He was shown exactly when and where the Messiah would come; and he was given such detail concerning Him, that it made him sick. Having seen and understood it, he then had to seal it up in symbolism (12:4) (like the 70 weeks of years puzzle). (9:24)

It's part of what Paul calls **the path beyond tracing out.** (Rom 11:33) Isaiah says **the crooked shall be made straight.** (Is 40:4) Solomon asks **who'll straighten what God has made crooked.** (Eccl 7:13) And, the son in Proverbs is told to **trust God to make straight his paths.** (Prov 3:5-6) John the Baptist cries out before Jesus, "**Make straight the paths.**" (Mark 1:3)

I've said before, I think the gold Jesus received helped purchase a set of scripture scrolls (they were extremely expensive).

The father in Proverbs tells his son (Prov 1:8) to **choose knowledge over choice gold**. (8:10) The Psalmist says **the judgments of God are more precious than gold**, even pure or refined gold. (Ps 19:9-10) It's like God made a shopping list. "If you ever happen to get a bunch of gold ..." And then these guys drop by with a drop box full of gold.

The father in Proverbs tells his son that **his instructions will be as a chain about his neck**. (Prov 1:8-9) A chain, eh? Hmm. **Daniel's neck-chain would've been made of pure, refined, gold**. With everything Daniel knew, and instructed the coming generations of wise men to watch for, and when, can you imagine him not dropping his gold in, and saying, "Give Him my best when you see Him!"

Oh, and **remember the royal name he was given: Belteshazzar?** Know what it translates to? **"Lord/master of the straitened's treasure"**, or **"[One] who lays up treasures in secret."**

Every Jew knew the story, reputation, and influence of Daniel. And, to have his wise men show up over 500 years later, at the very time and place Jesus was born, bearing expensive gifts, was a testament to what Daniel had been shown and shared.

What a powerful reminder, and fresh appreciation, for all that Christmas represents, by way of God's amazing plans being worked out from the beginning of human history and now in our lives.

**The wise men were the first to call Jesus the King of the Jews; Pilate was the last – he put it on the sign above the cross.**

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade ... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. — 1 Peter 1:3-7 NIV

This is the wise man's gold.

So, when a mental case grabs your parking space, or the clerk is a real jerk, just remember that *this* is how God refines us. **The game is on in all those little maddening moments.**

**How do you speak and act when the heat turns up? That's the Refiner's fire.**

**Heated moments reveal our impurities.**

**Nobody can *make* you mad. They can only test the purity of your faith and trust in Christ.**

So, let the world push and shove and honk. Don't take the bait. Don't bow to the gold.

**We've been called to reveal the Prince of Peace in the furnace.**

*Especially during Christmas ... It's our golden opportunity!*