

CHILDREN'S GREAT BIBLE TEXTS

VOLUME XVII



THE GOSPEL OF  
MATTHEW

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**THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

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**Contents:**

[Follow The Gleam.](#)

[The First Christmas Gift.](#)

[Nazareth.](#)

[Fighting The Dragon.](#)

[The Merciful.](#)

[The Peacemakers.](#)

[A Pinch Of Salt.](#)

[How To Be A Lamp.](#)

[The Second Mile.](#)

[Heavenly Treasure.](#)

[Two Masters.](#)

[Our Sisters The Birds.](#)

[The Strait Gate.](#)

[Let Him Who Loves Me Follow Me.](#)

[Matthew The Publican.](#)

[Serpents And Doves.](#)

[Secrets.](#)

[Dearer Than A Sparrow.](#)

[An Easy Yoke.](#)

[Treasure Trove.](#)

[The Pearl.](#)

[The Heart Of A Child.](#)

[Guardian Angels.](#)

[The Ungrateful Labourers.](#)

[The Ass That Could Not Be Spared.](#)  
[Our Neighbours.](#)  
[What Is Your Talent?](#)  
[Inasmuch.](#)  
[Exchanges.](#)  
[The Language Of The Kingdom.](#)  
[The Story Of A Roman Lady.](#)  
["Let Be."](#)

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## **FOLLOW THE GLEAM.**

Where is he that is born King of the Jews ? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him.— Matt, ii. 2.

There are some stories that we never grow tired of, are there not ? I expect most of you have books that you have read over and over again, and yet you are just as fond of them as the first time you opened them. Among the stories we never weary of are those two beautiful tales of Christ's infancy — the story of how the shepherds, watching their flocks under the cold stars, heard the angel's song ; the story of how these strange Wise Men came from the

mysterious East to worship the baby King. And so to-day, once more, we are going to hear the old, old story of the brave Wise Men who followed the guiding star.

We are told very little about these Wise Men, but we can guess a good deal. In the margin of the Revised Version of the Bible there is a little note which tells us that the Greek word translated " Wise Men " is " Magi." Now the Magi were originally Persian priests who devoted themselves to the study of the stars and also to many forms of magic. Later the name was given to wise men of other nations who pursued these studies. The Magi built high towers from which they watched the movements and appearances of the stars, and they connected these movements with events that happened on the earth and especially with births.

Now about this time there seems to have been a widespread expectation of a coming Deliverer who was to rule over all the earth. Some said He was to be born in Judaea. Also there were many Jews in the land where these Magi lived, and they had told them of the great Messiah who was to come and conquer all the world. You may be sure these devout old astrologers were on the look out for any unusual appearance in the heavens that might betoken His coming. Night after night they climbed their watchtowers and scanned the skies, and when one night they saw a bright new star shining in the direction of the land of Judaea they felt sure that the King was born.

They had a strange religion, these men — full of queer superstitions — and yet they were groping after God, and God led them by the light they had to the feet of Jesus.

You may be sure there was great rejoicing that night in that Eastern land as the Magi gathered together and consulted when they could be ready to set out to pay homage to the

King. The gifts must be chosen — the best they had — for was He not a King, and only the best might be offered to a King ? The water-bottles must be filled, the food prepared, the tents made ready, the camels loaded; for the journey was a long and weary one, and would occupy months.

At length the arrangements were made and the preparations began. Some men shook their heads and said the Magi were foolish to venture on such a journey. They would have to cross many a weary desert, they would have to climb many a rugged mountain pass, they would have to traverse many a rapid river. They would be in danger from the scorching sun by day and the cold winds by night, from wild beasts and robbers, from floods and droughts, from sickness and exhaustion. Who knew if they would ever return ? But the Wise Men replied that the star was beckoning them and that they must follow where it led. And so they set out.

They travelled by night, for it was cooler then, and at night they had the light of the stars to guide them. At first the strange new star seemed to go before them leading them on, but by and by it disappeared. The days grew into weeks, the weeks into months, and at length one morning they found themselves on the outskirts of Jerusalem. They had come to the capital, for surely the great King would be found in the capital of His country.

As they entered one of the gates they inquired of a sentry where was He who was born King of the Jews, for they had seen His star in the east and were come to worship Him. The man stopped a yawn to gaze at them. He had been up all night and was just going off duty. " King of the Jews, King of the Jews ! " Was it King Herod they wanted ? Well, of course, he was to be found up at the palace. But he certainly was not born a king. He had been made a king by

force of Roman arms, but he was not born into the royal estate. Besides, he was an old man now — almost seventy years of age. No, that could not be the king they were seeking.

They went on into the city, and soon they met a Jewish merchant hurrying to the market-place. They repeated their (question — " Where is he that is born King of the Jews ? " The man looked amazed. The King of the Jews born ! The great Messiah come to earth ! Who had been telling them fables ? Certainly the Messiah would come some day. Was He not the hope of all the Jews and would He not go forth conquering and to conquer ? But when He came there would be some strange manifestation of God. Everyone would know about His advent. No, no, they might take his (the merchant's) word for it that the great Deliverer had not arrived. He was in the marketplace every day except the Sabbath, and he heard all the news of the countryside. If anything unusual happened he would be the first to know it. To be sure there had been that strange story of the shepherds many weeks ago. It had raised no little stir in the town for a day or two. But of course when people thought the matter over they saw the absurdity of it. Who ever heard of a great king being born in a stable ? The thing was ridiculous ! He was sorry they had come so far on a fool's errand, but if they had any wares to exchange he would be pleased to examine them. After that, the sooner they returned to their own country the better.

And so it was with everyone they inquired of. Nobody seemed to know anything about the new King. Many looked alarmed. Had an unknown pretender sprung up, and were they to have disturbances and bloodshed in their midst ? The Wise Men might well have been discouraged, but they felt so sure that the star had betokened the birth of the great Messiah, and they were so determined that they

would discover the King, that they continued to ask their question — " Where is he that is born King of the Jews ? "

At last the news came to the ears of Herod; and Herod was sorely troubled. Had the Messiah really come or had someone invented this story to cause a disturbance among the Jews and so wrest his throne from him ? He must look into the matter at once. He must discover where this child was to be found and slay him before the Jews took up his cause.

So he sent for the wise Jewish priests and scribes and demanded of them where their Christ was to be born. And when he had got the necessary information he sent for the Wise Men secretly and told them to go to the village of Bethlehem, six miles to the south of Jerusalem, and when they had found the young child to come back and report to him that he also might go and worship him.

So the Wise Men set out once more. It was evening, and as they went on their way they discussed among themselves "how they would know in which house to look for the baby. And as they talked one of them looked up into the starry heavens. And lo, the star which had appeared to them in the East and had vanished as they travelled, appeared again and went before them. It led them to Bethlehem and seemed to stand over a certain humble house in the village. And there at last they found the King of kings whom they had sought so long and so faithfully ; there at last they fell down and worshipped Him and offered up their gifts.

Boys and girls, there are two things we can learn from these Wise Men of old.

1. They found the star because they looked for it. God has given us many stars to guide us to Jesus. There is the star

of beauty — the beauty of the world around us, which speaks to us of God's love for us. There is the shining light of God's Word in which we can all read and learn of Him. There is the star of conscience which calls to us every day. There is the star of our mother's love which is but a feeble reflection of the love of God. Above all, there is the star of Jesus' tender pleading self-sacrificing love which draws us to His side. Have you looked for any of these stars, dear children ?

2. And second, when these Wise Men had found the star they followed it. It isn't much use finding the star unless we follow. It is only when we follow that it leads to the feet of Jesus. Many of you have found the star, your own particular star, for there are many stars and we are not all led by the same one. If you have found your star, then follow it. Don't turn your back on it. It is only a star, but it will lead you to the Sun of Righteousness.

## **THE FIRST CHRISTMAS GIFT.**

They offered unto him gifts. — Matt. ii. 11.

The happy Christmas-time has come round once more, and for the past few weeks there have been little under-currents of excitement in our homes. There have been wonderful mysterious secrets, strange whisperings behind doors, and swift hidings of little bits of work when mother came suddenly and unexpectedly into the room. And there has been much guessing, too, as to what Santa Claus will put into our stockings on Christmas morning.

Now if Jesus Christ had not come down to earth there would have been no Christmas presents. We give each other presents at Christmas-time because it is Jesus'

birthday. Long ago the Wise Men brought Him gifts and laid them beside His cradle. But Jesus is no longer the Babe in Bethlehem. So instead of giving Him presents, we give them to each other. And we know that when we are making other people happy, we are making Him happy too.

I want to talk to you for a little about the Wise Men and their gifts. Who were these Wise Men ? We really do not know. Out of the mysterious East they came, and into it they disappeared again. Some people say they were three kings who came to pay homage to the King of the Jews, and there is a wonderful legend of how in their old age they were converted to Christianity by the apostle Thomas. The legend tells us that they went as missionaries to savage tribes, that they were put to death by them, and that, long afterwards, a Frankish king took their bones home with him and buried them in his Cathedral at Cologne. But all we really know is that they were Wise Men and that they came out of the East to see Jesus. And that was the very best thing they could have done.

But what of the presents the Wise Men brought ? Some people have found a special meaning in these three gifts. They say that the gold was an offering to a King, the frankincense an offering to God, while the myrrh was a gift for Christ's burial and foretold His death —

Gold a monarch to declare, Frankincense that God is there,  
Myrrh to tell the heavier tale Of His death and funeral.

Perhaps people have got that idea from the purposes for which frankincense and myrrh were used.

Frankincense is a kind of gum or resin which is procured from an Indian tree by slitting the bark. It was mixed with other things to make incense, and this incense was poured

upon the offerings which were offered up to God in the Temple and was burned along with them. So the sweet odour of the frankincense rose to God with the prayers of the priests.

Myrrh is also a gum procured from a tree. It is a spice and was used as a perfume and also in burying the dead. You remember how Nicodemus brought myrrh with him when he came to bury the body of Jesus.

Now I have said that Jesus is no longer a Babe in Bethlehem and so we give each other presents instead of giving them to Him. But there are some gifts we can still bring to Jesus, gifts that He longs to have.

1. We can bring Him gold. Gold stands for the most precious things. And what is the most precious thing we have ? I think it is just our lives. So we can give our lives to Christ's service. We can help to fight the evil that is in the world and in our own hearts. We can help to make the earth better, and sweeter, and brighter. We can use the talents God has given us to make other people happier and wiser. And when we are doing this we are giving Jesus a gift more precious than gold.

2. We can bring Christ frankincense. I think frankincense stands for prayers. And this is an offering Jesus dearly loves. When He was on earth He loved to have the little children gather round His knees, He loved to listen to what they said. And He still loves to have them gather round His knees, and He still loves to listen when they speak to Him.

3. We can bring Him myrrh. Myrrh is used to purify and preserve, and so I think it stands for the things that are purest and most lasting. And what is the thing that is purest and most lasting ? I think it is just the love and

devotion of our hearts. For love has conquered sin and death, and lives for ever and ever.

There is a beautiful legend which tells how a little girl in Bethlehem took Jesus a Christmas present. She had heard the story of the Wise Men who had come from far to see the Baby King. And she, too, longed to go and see Him. But she could not visit a king without taking an offering with her and she had nothing to offer, for she was very, very poor. So she went out with her little bare feet and crept up close to the inn where the Baby was sleeping. And as she stood there in the cold snow she wept because she had nothing to give Him. Then, as she wept, out of the snow grew a beautiful white flower whose petals were flushed with pink. It was the first Christmas rose. And the little girl heard a soft voice speaking to her. It was the voice of an angel, and it asked her why she was so sad. She told him how she longed to see the Baby King and how she had nothing to offer Him. Then the angel showed her the beautiful flower that had blossomed at her feet. He bade her pluck it and carry it to the King, and he told her that the beautiful white flower was her pure desire and the pink flush her heart's love for the Baby.

And that is the gift that Jesus values more than any other — the gift of our love. We may have nothing else to give Him, but if we bring Him that He is content. It is a poor, shabby little gift at the best, but He does not think it poor or mean. He prizes it above all others, and He glorifies it and makes it beautiful and pure.

The Wise Men came from far to see Jesus, but we have no distance to go to give Him our offering, for He is here in our midst to-day. Just think how glad He will be to tell the angels who sang at His birth — " I have received the very