

Who Were The Wise Men?

We may never know whether the Magi were literal kings, but the idea of kings bringing treasure from Babylon is a compelling way to envision the beginning of Matthew's gospel. In the days of Isaiah, King Hezekiah received a friendly envoy of Babylonians in Jerusalem. In a moment of hubris, he showed them "the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine olive oil—his entire armory and everything found among his treasures" (Isa. 39:2). Isaiah warned Hezekiah that these Babylonians had made a mental note of his storehouses: "The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord" (Isa. 39:6). Sure enough, in 587 B.C. the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, did just that, capturing and plundering Jerusalem. In fact, Daniel recounts a raucous party in the Babylonian capital where the Babylonian king used the golden cups from the Lord's temple to take shots (Dan. 5:1-4).

So, if you prefer to call the Magi *kings* this Advent season, recognize how you are proclaiming the return of Jerusalem's treasures from exile. As these kings travel the road from Babylon in the East to Jerusalem, they bring back the gold, frankincense, and myrrh stolen so many years before from David's house. This is what Isaiah promised would happen. The same foreigners that looted Jerusalem would one day, "rebuild [her] walls, and their kings will serve [her]" (Isa. 60:10). Matthew shows us that what Nehemiah and Ezra experienced under Cyrus the Persian was a mere foretaste of the riches God would return to his Messiah in Jerusalem. At Christmas, the kings bring the treasures back to Jerusalem. It signals the beginning of the eternal restoration of David's wealth, the rebuilding of David's city, and the rejoicing of David's people. Call them Magi. Call them wise men. You can even call them kings if you'd like! When it comes to Matthew's Christmas narrative, the more the merrier. Each label shines a light on a different facet of the story. Whatever you choose to call them this holiday season, these men are the first in the canonical New Testament to bow and worship the Lord Jesus. This Christmas we would do well to follow their example.

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Above are the last 2 paragraphs from:

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2016/december/magi-wise-men-or-kings-its-complicated.html>