

Who Went First?

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.”

Luke 2:8 (NIV)

I remember well listening to a member of a Christian cult who smugly announced that evangelical Christians have it all wrong when they think that the Magi were there when Jesus was born—as represented in all the manger scenes.

He argued that from the time the star appeared, it would take some time for the Magi to figure out what it meant, pack their bags, and travel to Bethlehem.

He also argued that the fact Herod slaughtered boys in Nazareth two years old and under suggested they told Herod that it was two years since the star appeared.

He further said that saying there were three Magi was wrong. The Bible only said there were three gifts and did not comment on the number of Magi. After he finished, he stood there with a satisfied grin on his face.

I suggested to him that all Christians agree that the shepherds got there first. Then I assured him that when the Bible made it clear that the shepherds came first, it was God’s way of telling us that the common people of low rank are the ones who are especially precious to the Lord.

Over and over in reading the Gospels we see what Mark 12:37 meant “And the common people heard him gladly.”

Jesus showed His love for all people in the Gospels, and went to their parties (celebrating a wedding) and accepted invitations from the rich—such as the centurion in Luke 7:1-10 (who built the Jews a synagogue). Jesus was equally at home helping poor widows as seen in Luke 7:11-17.

Our Lord’s ministry was, and is, to whomever shall listen and take heed to the Gospel message. So whether the wealthy Magi got there first—or two years later—is not the point of the message. What is essential is clearly that Jesus is the Saviour of all people regardless of social class.

So the Magi were not at the birth scene of our Lord but rather visited Him in a house—as Matthew 2:11 puts it: “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” (NIV)

What all of us need to do—whether we are rich or poor—is to recognize that the Lord Jesus is available for people of all classes. We see this represented in the many manger scenes—which show lowly shepherds adoring the Christ Child. Manger scenes also show the wealthy as represented by the Magi—also worshipping Emmanuel.

So this Christmas—whether rich or poor—the scenes at the manger tells you that you are very welcome to come to Jesus, bow the knee to the Resurrection and the Life, and confess Him as your Lord and your God. Will you come to the One Who said, in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (NIV)

The shepherds came, the Magi came, why not you?

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