



## WEEK 3 - A REVOLUTION BEGUN

### OVERVIEW

As we have seen throughout our study of the book of Matthew, the gospel writer frequently writes on multiple levels. In the case of the magi from the east, Matthew is not just looking *back* to the Hebrew Bible and the fulfillment of God's *ancient* promises. He is also offering stark commentary on the *current* realities faced by his readers in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century. Matthew's readers faced cultural pressure from the all-powerful Roman Empire as well as persecution from wealthy local elites. They undoubtedly wondered, "How will the Church survive in the face of such mighty opposition?" To respond to such pressure, Matthew's depiction of the magi visiting Jesus makes a mockery of Roman propaganda about the Caesars (e.g. Frankincense! Magi *from the east*! The star!) and hints at the boundless blessings to be had not at the top of the social ladder, but at the foot of the cross. As Jesus himself says later in the gospel, "those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last" (Matthew 20:6). This layer of meaning will offer us a stark reminder this Christmas of those who are truly blessed in the kingdom of God!

*The star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!*

**Matthew 2:9-10**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you think of the magi visiting Jesus, what do you picture in your mind?
2. Read Matthew 2:1-2 and 9-10.
  - a. What do you think the "star" was, and how did it *stop over the place where the child was*?
  - b. Considering the world behind the text, how was the star significant?
3. Read Matthew 2:11.
  - a. What were frankincense and myrrh used for?
  - b. Why do you think the magi gave these gifts to baby Jesus?
4. Describe how the scene of the magi visiting Bethlehem shows that there is a new king in town.
5. How does this part of the nativity story undermine or mock the Romans, as Barry described?
6. What elements of the magi visit point to the upside-down kingdom of God? (see also Matthew 20:25-28)
7. Barry asked us to consider, "As the magi bow to the infant Jesus, who or what am I bowing to?" What stands out to you from this part of Matthew, as a discipleship manual?