



THE EARNEST CONTENDER

VOLUME 38, ISSUE 3 HOLIDAY 2024

Rejoice!

*When they saw the star,
they rejoiced with
exceeding great joy.*

Matthew 2:10

By Dr. Rick Bickelhaupt, *GBC Founding Pastor*

The Christmas season is upon us. For most, it is a time for family, shopping, and merriment. At church, we sing “Joy to the World” and songs that tell us that we should *rejoice*. Scripture repeatedly makes use of this term throughout the Bible. In fact, the Word of God mentions the word *rejoice* 183 times, *rejoiced* 45 times, and *rejoicing* 28 times. But what does it mean to *rejoice*?

A closer look into this term brings to light some basic truths. Notice that the word begins with the prefix *re-*. According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*, this prefix means: *return, repetition, iteration*; it relates the idea of “bringing back,” or something done “again.” Studying the root of the word reveals *what* we are to be bringing back: *joy!* When we rejoice, we bring back the joy that once was. In Matthew 2:10, the wise men, “*when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding*

great joy.” Why did the wise men have their joy come back to them? Consider three reasons.

First, they rejoiced because their long and difficult journey was over. These magi were from a distant land. According to the context, their journey may have taken about 2 years. Bible scholars believe that these wise men from the East could have traveled from as far away as India or Pakistan. Additionally, this journey likely occurred during the night as stars are not usually visible during the daytime. If this were the case, travel would have been difficult, hazardous, and slow. The wise men rejoiced because their hard journey had ended successfully, leading them to the One whom they were seeking—The Christ-child.

Second, they rejoiced because their journey through the darkness was over. The Prophet Isaiah prophesied concerning Christ, and said, “*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined,*” (Isaiah 9:2). There, the wise men were able to personally behold the Light of the world, (John 8:12). John 1:14 says: “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*” It is no wonder the wise men rejoiced; they beheld God’s glory when they saw the star illuminating over the Christ-child. Their journey through darkness had ended.

SEE “Rejoice,” p. 2

FROM "Rejoice," p. 1

Third, they rejoiced because they personally met the object (the Person) of their worship. Matthew 2:11 says: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." This verse reveals that the wise men came to a house, not a manger. It also describes Christ as a "young child," not an infant. Additionally, when the wise men entered the house, they bowed and worshipped Christ, not Mary. They presented Christ their treasures as an act of worship.

Matthew's account of the wise men should serve as a reminder that hardships and darkness often accompany us on our life's journey. Regardless, we ought not to forget the joy that awaits us at our journey's end. This Christmas, let us rejoice! The Savior has come. □



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CHRISTMAS AT HOME

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DECEMBER 22, 2024

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THE EARNEST CONTENDER

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Don't be a GRINCH



AVOIDING THE PITFALLS THAT LEAD TO A SHRINKING HEART

by Jeremy Bickelhaupt, Editor

The holiday season, a time meant to uplift spirits, can often devolve into a chaotic frenzy. The relentless cycle of party planning, decorating, baking, and shopping can transform even the most cheerful individual into a modern-day Grinch. While we chuckle at Dr. Seuss's light-hearted, nonsensical tale of that mean-spirited, green, fuzzy-fingered Whoville menace who owned a heart two sizes too small, the Grinch wasn't the first to plot against the Christmas spirit. The Bible, in Matthew 2, introduces us to an earlier, more sinister Grinch: King Herod. His desire to eliminate the infant Jesus reveals a heart consumed by fear and envy, a spirit that sought to steal the joy and hope of Christmas.

Let's delve into Matthew's account of Christ's birth and uncover ways to avoid the pitfalls that lead to a shrinking heart. Those pitfalls include:

BAD ATTITUDES

Herod's attitude toward the arrival of Christ was one of jealousy. Matthew 2:3 tells us that Herod was "troubled" when the wise men inquired about the Savior. His fear of someone usurping his kingly authority caused Herod to have a negative outlook. In contrast, we need to look to the wise men's example—they maintained a positive spirit. Consider that they had to travel from afar. Dr. John R. Rice says that Bible scholars believe they traveled from the area of ancient Babylon—a difficult journey of about 600 miles! Yet, they did so with joy and a giving attitude! How is your attitude during the holiday season? Do you focus on yourself and worry about how the festivities affect you? Let's be like the wise men and focus on the joy of giving!

LYING & DECEITFUL WORDS

In verses 7-8, Herod lied to the magi, telling them he wished to know where this Child was so he too could go and worship Him. His true intention of killing the Babe is revealed in verse 13, as an angel warns Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt. Conversely, we can learn from the wise men by being honest. In verse 2, the magi revealed their true intentions—they informed Herod that they came to seek and worship the new King. Knowing full well that stating this intention of theirs would likely strike a jealous chord with Herod, they did so anyway. During the Christmas season, let's be honest about the reason for the season. Let's be truthful with our children and neighbors in declaring our worship of the Savior!

ANGRY REACTIONS

Herod had instructed the gift-bearing travelers to return to him with news of where the Infant was, but after finding and presenting gifts to the Christ-child, God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. In verse 16, the king's wrath boiled over, and he reacted by ordering the deaths of all the infants under 2 years old throughout the region. To contrast Herod's angry reactions, we can again turn to the wise men's example. In verses 9-10, we see that they followed the star and rejoiced when they found Jesus. Herod desired to distract the magi from their purpose, but in these verses, we find them faithful and happily obedient, following the illuminating star. It's easy to become distracted by the frenzy of the holidays, but let's be mindful to keep our eyes focused on Christ, our Illuminated Purpose for celebrating Christmas!



CHRISTMAS
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2025

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For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;
Ephesians 2:8

The grace that allows us to *hear* and learn of Christ's redemptive plan for sinful mankind.

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
Romans 10:17

And the grace that commands the believer to *share* the Good News of Christ with a lost world.

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.
Mark 16:15

WE DESIRE all to **COME** to Christ, **HEAR** His message, and **SHARE** it with the world.



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