The Bible is full of illustrations contrasting the wise with the foolish. But here is one major one: the Magi’s wisdom of strong faith with little to go on and King Herod’s foolishness of wrong faith with much to go on. Both were faith responses to the news of the Messiah. HOM.idea. What made the Magi wise and Herod a fool? First, let’s look at how...

I. The Wise Men Earnestly Pursued Clues that Were Obscure
   A. These men lived far-away with an obscure knowledge of God...
      1. These strangers to God’s Word, with expertise in forbidden arts, left their pagan realms to seek a baby Heaven had announced.
      2. We all live far away from God’s glory! But how God dealt with the Magi shows how He deals with all who seek Him.
   B. Their faith was in mere clues. (God often speaks in obscure ways, often using dreams to stir faith [The Miracle Dreams by Susie M. Best]

That night when in Judean skies
The mystic star dispensed her light,
A blind man moved amid his sleep,
And dreamed that he had sight //
That night when shepherds heard the song
Of hosts angelic choiring near,
A deaf man stirred in slumber’s spell
And dreamed that he could hear. //
That night when in the cattle stall
Slept child and mother cheek by jowl,
A cripple turned his twisted limbs
And dreamed that he was whole. //
That night when o’er the new-born babe
The tender Mary rose to lean,
A loathsome leper smiled in sleep,
The little King was held secure,
And dreamed that he was clean. //
That night when to the mother’s breast
The sanctified who came to save,
A man moved in the sleep of death
And dreamed there was no grave.]

1. Balaam, a Gentile seer, prophesied in Num 24:17a (NKJV), “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel...” (This ancient vague prophecy of a “Star” and a coming King might have been learned by these Magi. It wouldn’t be much to go on, but it launched their bold quest.)

2. They were so convinced, they even brought birthday gifts for this baby’s King’s arrival [Nativity scenes] focus on what they brought Jesus, yet these Magi received a greater gift: the privilege of kneeling before God Incarnate, which probably changed the course of their lives, as T. S. Eliot tried capturing in his poem “The Journey of the Magi” (some excerpts):

“A cold coming we had of it, / Just the worst time of the year / For a journey, and such a long journey: / The ways deep and the weather sharp, /.../Then the camel men cursing and grumbling / And running away, and wanting their liquor and women, / And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters, /.../And the villages dirty and charging high prices: / A hard time we had of it. /.../With the voices singing in our ears, saying / That this was all folly. //

All this was a long time ago, I remember, / And I would do it again, but set down / This set down / This: were we led all that way for Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly, / We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death, / But had thought they were different; this Birth was / Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death. / We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, /.../And at dawn we came down to a temperate valley, /.../And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon / Finding the place.... //

C. But even wise men make mistakes: they turned from “the star” to where they reasoned a king was most likely to be born: Jerusalem.

1. That little detour cost a town of infants and toddlers their lives.

2. We make mistakes, too, when we turn from God’s leading to our common sense—“voices singing in our ears, saying that this is all folly.”

D. But when they did find Jesus, they bowed down and worshiped him.

1. These ancient philosophical scholars made a wise faith response by placing their trust in an obscure bit of divine revelation.

2. Much clearer evidence leads us to worship this King, yet many still ask, “Who knows who this Jewish carpenter really was?”

**TRANS:** This Bible says He is God’s Son, born of the virgin Mary. We have more and better information than the Magi, yet their bold example forever confirms the truth that our response to Christ identifies us as either wise or foolish. These wise men pursued obscure clues, but...

II. A Foolish King Stubbornly Resisted the Obvious Truth

A. Herod had greater access to truth (with a group of well-trained Jewish scholars who had aligned themselves with him politically.)

B. Herod trusted their Bible knowledge about “where the Christ was to be born” [They knew OT prophecy about the Messiah! They knew the exact town where He was to be born, yet they weren’t looking for Him as the Magi were!]

C. News of the Messiah worried Herod, when it should have made him join the Magi in finding and welcoming the new-born King.

D. Herod believed the OT prophecies, but without a fear of God. His response to slaughter Bethlehem’s children to get rid of the threat of Christ’s reign. (Most people who try destroying the Jesus of the Bible have a motive like Herod’s: if God has truly shown up in Christ, it spoils everything. It means having to surrender to Christ and giving up their own way of thinking and living....)

**CONCLUSION:**

–All responses to Christ are either wise or foolish. Some might call us foolish dreamers for believing that God became human, fulfilling obscure OT prophecies. But God-given dreams are never “too good to be true.” In fact, His divine love makes salvation from sin and death by Christ’s Cross and Resurrection “too good not to be true!” (The quest of the Magi became a divine dream that materialized.)

–They kept listening to and wisely heeded their dreams. In v.12, they dreamed a warning and “returned...by another route,” yes, another route than the foolish one taken by Herod. The example of their faith-response to Christ is ours to follow, so that we can, by our example of faith, lead other dream-hungry people to the miracle of Advent.