

Matthew 2 – A Polarizing Question

Have you come to worship Him, or kill him?

- Really only 2 choices regarding this human being who called himself the Son of the living God, the Messiah, the King of the Jews.
 - ONLY 2 choices that you may make!
 - Hot or cold toward Jesus
- Revelation 3:15–16** (NLT)
15 “I know all the things you do,
that you are neither hot nor cold.
I wish that you were one or the other!
16 But since you are like lukewarm water,
neither hot nor cold,
I will spit you out of my mouth!

What's a HOT person look like?

- They love to read God's Word
- They love to pray
- They love to worship, particularly with others
- They love to fellowship, talk, laugh, eat and care for other believers

What's a COLD person like?

- They like to be thought of by others as religious and holy
- They think of church as a chore and a waste of time
- They would be the last to ever give of their income to a church.
- They have eyes full of adultery, lips full of religious talk, a form of godliness but denying its power.

Where do you stand?

- “Well, I'm neither, I stand somewhere in the middle
- Christ will spit you out!

Matthew 7:21–23

21 “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. **Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.**

22 On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.'

23 But I will reply, **'I never knew you.'**

Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

Setting the scene:

- In the country of **Israel**
- In the state of **Judah**
- City of **Bethlehem**: a small village situated in the hill country of Judah just 6 miles southeast of Jerusalem center
- Three main characters:
 - Jesus
 - Herod
 - Magoi
- The initial themes of **Matt 2**, then, are:
 1. people coming to Christ **with worship in their hearts** (the Magi, vv. 2, 11) and
 2. people coming to Christ **with murder on their minds** (Herod and his group, vv. 13, 16).¹



- Jesus was born here some time prior to Matthew Chapter 2
 - Several years have passed since Chapter 1 conclusion.
 - Now in a house **(v. 2.11)**

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12*, Revised and Expanded Edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 55.

- Jesus was called a Child (**paidion**, vv. 9, 11) rather than a newborn Infant (**brephos**, Luke 2:12). ²

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, **wise men from the east** came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

- **Wise men**

- From the east
- 2-3 year journey?
- Jesus no longer a baby, family living in a house now.
 - The Greek word for wise men in this account (**magoi**) is rendered as
 - **"astrologers"** where it occurs in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Dan. 1:20; 2:2) and as
 - **"sorcerers"** in its other occurrences in the New Testament (Acts 13:6, 8). ³
- The Greek historian **Herodotus**, writing in the **fifth century B.C.**, identified the Magi as **a caste of Medes who had a priestly function in the Persian Empire.**
 - In the Book of Daniel the **"astrologers"** (**magoi**) are grouped with magicians, sorcerers, and Chaldeans as advisers to the court of Babylon with responsibility for interpreting dreams. ⁴



A fire-altar with the relief of a Magus, a member of the Zoroastrian priestly tribe—the Magi ⁵

- **J. C. Ryle speaks of the cost of the magi to seek Jesus** – "The conduct of the wise men described in this chapter is a splendid example of spiritual diligence. What trouble it must have cost them to travel from

² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures (Mt 2:1-2)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville: T. Nelson.

⁴Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville: T. Nelson.

⁵Vos, H. F. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible manners & customs : How the people of the Bible really lived (333)*. Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson Publishers.

their homes to the house where Jesus was born! How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The fatigues of an Eastern traveler are far greater than we in England can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great. The dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But none of these things moved them. They had set their hearts on seeing Him "that was born King of the Jews;" and they never rested till they saw Him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, "Where there is a will there is a way." It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men's example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our souls? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

- **Popular traditions have portrayed them as:**

- **Three in number**, although Matthew does not say so, because of the three gifts (2:11)

- **Kings** in light of Isa. 60:3:

Isaiah 60:3

The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And **kings** to the brightness of your rising.

- Post-biblical traditions have also supplied the names:

- **Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.** ⁶

- **Came to Jerusalem, not Bethlehem**

- They may have been Gentiles (Isaiah 60:3):

- They hadn't heard of the prophecy concerning Messiah's birthplace.

- **Followed a sign in the stars?**

- **A special "Son of Man" sign?**

Matthew 24:29-31

29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

30 **Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven,**

and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

⁶Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). Harper's Bible dictionary (1st ed.) (1137). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

- The earliest theorists viewed it as a comet. Such was the view of the great church father Origen of Alexandria. Later, Johannes Kepler, the father of modern astronomy, explained it as the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in the year 7 B.C. This view has been elaborated in various ways and is probably the favorite explanation of astronomers today.

7

- **But I ask you today:**

- **Have you come to worship Him, or kill him?**
- **How quickly those who are cold or lukewarm turn on Jesus!**

Matthew 27:22–23

22 Pilate responded, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

They shouted back, **“Crucify him!”**

23 “Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?”

But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, **and all Jerusalem with him;**

- All Jerusalem was troubled because the Messiah of Israel was just born?
 - Seems ridiculous!

4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, Herod inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

5 They told him, **“In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:**

6 “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

- **Herod gets upset**
 - All Jerusalem follows suit
 - Stars doing weird things for years!
 - Astrologers from Persia showing up!
 - Messiah has been born?
- **Scripture tells specifically where Messiah is to be born**
 - Chief Priests, and Scribes knew these Scriptures and where to find them.

- **How long did it take for them to dig up a copy of the scroll of Micah?**
- They read the Scriptures to Herod – good chance Herod could not read ancient Hebrew.

Micah 5:2-5

2 But you, **O Bethlehem Ephrathah,**

who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,

from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall dwell secure,

for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

5a And he shall be their peace.

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

- Perhaps as far back as 2-3 years ago!

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

- Herod is unwilling to travel the 6 miles to find the Child himself in Bethlehem?
 - Sends the Wise men through deceit

9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

- **Moving Star?**

- **ἀστήρ, ἔπος m; ἄστρον^a, ου n:** a star or a planet. ⁸

- **A single luminous planet or star, not a group of them.**

- Literally an "illuminary" that is able to move and stand still!

- A Star unlike any other star?

- The Star waited for them while they stopped in Jerusalem?

- Planets can appear to do this

- Comets can appear to do this

- **It led the Magoi to the VERY HOUSE that Jesus was being raised in!**

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 7.

11 And going into the house,
they saw the child with Mary his mother,
and they fell down and worshiped him.
Then, opening their treasures,
they offered him gifts,
gold and
frankincense and
myrrh.

- **House now, not the cave anymore?**

- Jesus may be as old as 2 by now
- Thus the decree to kill all male children 2 and under by Herod.

Matthew 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death **all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under**, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

- **They saw:**

- Mary
- Jesus
 - Is Joseph at work?

- **They Fell down**

Mark 3:11 And the unclean spirits, **whenever they saw Him, fell down** before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God."

Revelation 5:8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders **fell down before the Lamb**, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

- **They Worshipped**

- The joy, rejoicing, worship, and gifts that mark the response of these wise men to the birth of Jesus is quite a contrast to the troubled state and murderous intent of Herod and his advisers in Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1–12). ⁹

⁹Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Nashville: T. Nelson.

- They opened their treasures

- The frankincense offered by the Magi signified the divinity of the Holy Child, the gold representing His royalty, the myrrh either His healing powers or the prospect of His suffering. ¹⁰

- Gold

- Metal of Kings – (v2) “King of the Jews”
- **William Barclay** notes that according to Seneca, the distinguished Roman orator and writer, it was the custom in Persia that no one could approach a king without a gift and that “gold, the king of metals,” was the proper gift for “a king of men.” ¹¹

- Frankincense

- The gift of worship and prayer
- **Incense**: the symbol of priestly, saintly prayers

Psalm 141:2

Let my prayer be set before You as incense,
The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Revelation 8:3-4

3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

- Myrrh

- The gift of death

- Always used in embalming bodies
- **100 lbs. supplied by Nicodemus for Jesus' burial!**
- Also used as a mild anesthetic when mixed with alcohol.

Mark 15:22-23

22 And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.

¹⁰ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹¹ Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (31). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

23 Then **they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.**

- **They departed for home**
 - a different way than Jerusalem
 - They knew Herod was a murderer.

Are you wise enough today to find Jesus?

- **What will you do when you find Him?**
- **He is looking for your response today**

12 And being **warned in a dream** not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

- Many dreams can supply great warnings
- Pay attention, maybe the Lord is speaking to you through a dream of providence or warning.
- These “wise” guys believed the warning and responded immediately.

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

- This is now Joseph’s third dream (**1:20; 2:12; 2:13**)
- **The Lord knew Herod’s wicked thoughts before Herod knew them**
 - **The Lord understands the wickedness of mankind and saves His children from their devices.**

14 And he rose and took the child and his mother **by night** and departed to Egypt

15 and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet,

“Out of Egypt I called my son.”

- Note **how often** the Lord speaks to these people in this precarious time
- Note how the people respond when God speaks to them.

- They're not testing God's will with multiple tests of confirmation.
- They hear, they respond, God saves them!

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region **who were two years old or under,** according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

- The wise men knew how long they had been following the moving "star".
 - Simple math gave Herod the shakes
- He wanted ALL male children murdered from age 2 to birth.
 - In Bethlehem but also in all Judea!

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted because they are no more."

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

- Joseph's 4th dream!
- Angels can find you no matter where you are!

20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, **for those who sought the child's life are dead."**

- Those who sought to kill Jesus never really knew what life is.
- Those who never sought Him for whom He really is were dead already.
 - Dead in their sins.

21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

- **Joseph's 5th dream** – How I love Joseph's connection to the Lord and his heart to obey ALL God told him to do.