

Matthew 2:1-12 “Wise Men Still Seek Him”

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
 - King **David's** home town (Goliath, Psalms, Bathsheba, etc.)



- Jesus was born here some time prior to Matthew Chapter 2
 - Several years have passed
 - Now in a house (v. 11)
 - Jesus was called a Child (*paidion*, vv. 9, 11) rather than a newborn Infant (*brephos*, Luke 2:12).¹
- Traditional site is now in a cave below a large Cathedral
 - Many Shepherds kept their livestock in caves for safety.
 - Weather; Wild animals; Rustlers; etc.

¹ 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.



Born in a traditional **stone manger**

- Typically not of wood, too valuable, livestock chew on wood.



In the days of King Herod the Great:



Matthew 2:1-12

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 have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

- **Wise men**

- From the east

- 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). ²

- 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. ³

²Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Nashville: T. Nelson.

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



A fire-altar with the relief of a Magus, a member of the Zoroastrian priestly tribe—the Magi ⁴
(From Kayseri, Turkey)

- **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 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

⁴Vos, H. F. (1999). Nelson's new illustrated Bible manners & customs : How the people of the Bible really lived (333). Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson Publishers.

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.** 5

- **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**

- 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.

- 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. 6

INSERT VIDEO HERE: "IS THIS THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM?"

- **Come to worship Him**

⁵Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). Harper's Bible dictionary (1st ed.) (1137). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁶Boice, J. M. (2001). The Gospel of Matthew (30). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

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

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In **Bethlehem of Judea**, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, **Bethlehem, in the land of Judah**,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

- **Herod gets upset**

- All Jerusalem follows suit
 - Stars doing weird things!
 - Astrologers from Persia showing up
 - Messiah is born?

- **Scripture tells specifically where Messiah is to be born**

- Chief Priests, and Scribes knew these Scriptures and where to find them
- They read the Scripture to Herod

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for **the young Child**, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

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

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, **the star** which they had seen in the East went before them, **till it came and stood over where the young Child was.**

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

- **Moving Star?**

- **ἀστήρ, ἔπος** *m*; **ἄστρον**^a, **οὐ** *n*: a star or a planet. ⁷
 - **A single luminous planet or star, not a group of them.**
 - Literally an "illuminary" that is able to move and stand still!

⁷ 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.

- 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!**

11 And when they had come into the **house**, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, **and fell down and worshiped Him**. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: **gold, frankincense, and myrrh**.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

- **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
- Joseph gone already?

- **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).⁸

- **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.⁹

- **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.”¹⁰

- **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

⁸Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Nashville: T. Nelson.

⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (31). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

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

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