



# *Sought*

God provides salvation to those seeking Him.

## MATTHEW 2:1-12

Some people are looking for help with a problem. Others may have exhausted all other options. Those who are intrigued by the story of Jesus may consider finding out more about Him. Over the centuries, many have sought Jesus because they admire His teachings or His moral example. However, Jesus provides more than moral teaching; He provides salvation to all who trust in Him.

**What causes people to search for Jesus? To what lengths might a person go to find Him?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## MATTHEW 1:1–2:12

Matthew began his Gospel with Jesus' ancestry (1:1-17). He introduced Jesus as a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Jesus' ancestry also included David, one of Israel's greatest kings (2 Sam. 7:1-29). Matthew demonstrated that Jesus came from a prestigious bloodline that included many kings (Matt. 1:7-11). He also mentioned some women whose lives impacted Israel's history. Rahab (1:5) was a prostitute from Jericho at the time Israel conquered the city under Joshua's leadership (Josh. 2:1). Ruth (1:5) was a righteous woman but a Moabite by birth (Ruth 1:4). Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6) was not specifically named but became David's wife after David committed adultery with her and had her husband Uriah killed (2 Sam. 11–12). Jesus was royalty yet identified with all kinds of people and came to redeem them all— regardless of their reputations or backgrounds.

Matthew then described Jesus' birth and the wise men's visit (1:18–2:11). Mary and Joseph were engaged, but she was found to be pregnant before the couple married (1:18). The Lord assured Joseph that Mary had conceived by the Holy Spirit's power and instructed him to name the child *Jesus*. The angel's words fulfilled the prophet Isaiah's words from over 700 years earlier (Isa. 7:14). Joseph followed the angel's instructions and took Mary as his wife (Matt. 1:24-25).

A group of wise men arrived in Jerusalem seeking to worship the newborn King of the Jews (2:1-2). King Herod inquired of the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah would be born, and they informed him that he would be born in Bethlehem, as Micah the prophet had prophesied (2:3-6; Mic. 5:2). Herod pretended to be interested in worshiping the newborn King and instructed the wise men to bring him news of the Messiah when they found him (Matt. 2:7-8). A star led the wise men to Bethlehem, where they found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus (2:9-11). God warned the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod, so they returned to their country by another route (2:12).

As you read Matthew 2:1-12, notice the different reactions to Jesus' arrival. What do the reactions reveal about Jesus' identity?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### THE ARRIVAL (MATT. 2:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

#### VERSES 1-3

After Jesus' birth, **wise men** followed a **star** that led them to Jerusalem. They were compelled to worship the Christ child—**he who has been born king of the Jews**. Once they arrived in Jerusalem, they inquired about His birth. News of the wise men's arrival spread to **Herod**, who was troubled by the news and, in turn, **all Jerusalem with him**.

The wise men came **from the east**. The identity of these men is a mystery. The term *magi* sometimes is used to describe them. The term could represent a Persian caste or astrologers and magicians from Babylon. Additionally, various scholars suggest that these men came because of the teachings of David, Daniel, or another prophet. The Bible does not provide an answer. However, one thing is indisputable: God compelled the wise men to find the King of the Jews. And the Lord used a star to guide them to the King.

When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, they caused a disturbance. The notion of Herod's being **deeply disturbed** just scratches the surface of the commotion caused. The word means “exceedingly stirred up” or “tremendously agitated.”

Herod was not the legitimate king of the Jews. He was half-Jewish and half-Idumean. He had forced his way to the throne with the help of the Romans. To keep his position, Herod was extremely

loyal to Rome. He also abused his authority and was found to be an exceptionally cruel king. He would do whatever it took to stay in power, including killing children and his own family members. Caesar Augustus is stated to have said that he would rather be Herod's pig than his son. This insinuation would have been a great insult to the Jewish community.

In contrast to Herod, Jesus was **born** King of the Jews. Matthew made it clear that Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne. He was from the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David. Furthermore, He was the Messiah the prophets had foretold.

The wise men came from a great distance seeking to worship the King. Yet those who were near, in Jerusalem, were not ready for Him and did not seek to worship Him. As a consequence, they were stirred up by His presence. Perhaps they were comfortable with their situation in life and the thought of a new reign meant they would have to change. More likely, they knew the extreme lengths Herod would go to remain king, and they wanted no part of that.

### **Why might people today view Jesus as a threat?**

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## **THE DIRECTION (MATT. 2:4-8)**

**<sup>4</sup> So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” <sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”**

### **VERSE 4**

Since Herod had no intention of letting go of his throne, his agitation turned into inquisition. Though he was caught off guard, it appears

he moved quickly as he **assembled all the chief priests and scribes** to gather information about the Messiah.

Herod did not have a good relationship with the chief priests and scribes; both groups were suspicious of him. Herod's concern was not in repairing relationships with either group but in understanding the news he had received from the wise men. Their appearance prompted Herod's gathering of all the religious authorities to comprehend the information of the Messiah's coming. He wanted this information so he could properly respond to the threat that Jesus brought to him personally.

Matthew perhaps used a bit of satire when he stated that Herod was looking for **the Messiah** instead of the King of the Jews. The meaning of the title Messiah is "anointed one." Even though many in Judah would have recognized "King" and "Messiah" as synonymous, Matthew seems to have made a distinction. The wise men were looking for the King of the Jews (v. 2); Herod was looking for the Messiah (v. 4). Herod thought of himself as Herod the Great, but Matthew presented Jesus as "the anointed one." Jesus was the Son of God—the Messiah Judah had longed for. (See Ezek. 46:1-8.)

The wise men came looking for the King of the Jews to worship Him. Herod recognized Him as a threat to his kingdom. Therefore, Herod sought to find Him so that he could kill Him. (See Matt. 2:16.)

## VERSES 5-6

The religious leaders pointed to Micah's prophecy, identifying **Bethlehem** as the promised birthplace. Mysteriously, the wise men knew to follow the star to find Jesus but did not know the city in which He would be born. Yet the religious leaders of Jerusalem were aware of the birthplace of the Messiah. In fact, Matthew does not seem to suggest that the chief priests nor the scribes struggled with Herod's request. They had a ready answer.

The religious leaders used Micah 5:2 as their reference point. Bethlehem, a small and insignificant town, did not compare to Jerusalem's more impressive stature but would deliver the great King/Messiah. Old Testament prophets often described bad leaders as worthless shepherds (Jer. 10:21; 23:2). In contrast, the Messiah would **shepherd** His **people Israel** and care for them as a good shepherd cares for his sheep (2 Sam. 5:2; see John 10:14).

Bethlehem was only five miles from Jerusalem, making it a short trek compared to what the wise men already had traveled.

**VERSES 7-8**

The word *secretly* reveals Herod’s improper motives. He desired to gain information he could use to do away with the child. He *asked them the exact time the star appeared* because that detail would provide a clue about the child’s current age. At this point, the wise men appear to be comfortable with Herod, especially considering that Herod said that he, too, wanted to *worship* the King.

The wise men went to worship the King of the Jews, the religious leaders ignored the news, and Herod wanted to put an end to Jesus. He told the wise men: *report back to me so that I too can go and worship him*. People today, like Herod, may have insincere motives for worshipping the Savior. Perhaps they attend Christmas services out of a sense of duty, or perhaps they want others to see them in church. God sees through false motives. Jesus deserves our worship because of who He is—God’s only Son, our Savior and Lord.

**What does Jesus’ fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy reveal about Him?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son***

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See John 8:58.)

**THE DISCOVERY (MATT. 2:9-12)**

<sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and

presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.<sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

**VERSES 9-12**

God provides a way for those who seek Him. As the wise men headed toward Bethlehem, the star reappeared and **led them** to the house where they found Jesus. Unlike before, Matthew explicitly states that the star **stopped above the place where the child was**. God performed a supernatural event with the star so that the wise men were led to the exact place. Matthew notes that when they saw the star again, they **were overwhelmed with joy**.

Once at **the house**, the wise men **worshipped** Jesus. Their worship of Him points to Jesus’ deity. The Law of Moses prohibited the worship of anyone or anything but God. They did not worship Mary. Rather, they fell on their knees before Jesus, presenting Him with **gold, frankincense, and myrrh**. From a practical standpoint, these gifts were expensive and would have helped Joseph and Mary escape to Egypt when Herod sent his armies to kill Jesus.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Some Bible interpreters see *gold, frankincense, and myrrh* as denoting certain characteristics of Christ’s life—the gold symbolizing His deity, frankincense symbolizing His purity, and myrrh pointing to His death, since people used myrrh for embalming. Others have suggested these gifts simply represented the best the wise men had to offer the newborn king.

**How would you describe the joy expressed as the wise men encountered Jesus? To what might you compare their experience?**

The wise men returned to their home country by a different route because they were **warned in a dream** about Herod. Dreams play an

important role in Matthew 1–2. The Lord’s angel told Joseph in a dream of Jesus’ conception (1:20). God warned Joseph by a dream to flee Egypt to avoid Herod’s death decree for Bethlehem’s male children (2:13). When Herod died, God again came to Joseph in a dream, advising him he could return safely to Israel (2:19–20). Finally, a dream warned Joseph not to settle in Judea, so he settled in Galilee to the north (2:22).

We do not know the exact route the wise men took to avoid Herod. We can assume it was nowhere near the way they came. Whatever route they took, they made sure Herod could not track them and be told where they had found the child. Herod would have to find Him on his own.

Jesus can be found by those who desire to worship Him. How ironic and how tragic that while the wise men came so far to worship the Christ child, Jerusalem’s other so-called wise men would not travel even five miles to investigate the wise men’s claims. As far as we know, no one bothered to get on a donkey and ride to Bethlehem to see if maybe, just maybe, the Messiah’s birth had occurred.



**BIBLE SKILL:** *Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.*

On one side of a vertical line, record words and phrases that describe the response of Herod and the Jewish leaders to the news of Jesus’ birth. On the other side, list words and phrases that denote the wise men’s response to Jesus’ birth. What factors impacted how each responded?

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Some are seeking God and His salvation, while others are not.
- Some misunderstand the truth of the gospel, while others want to silence it.
- Jesus can be found by those wanting to worship Him.

**Discuss how your Bible study group can encourage others to seek Jesus. How can the group help others discover the truth about Jesus?**

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**Consider a person you know who has a misunderstanding about Jesus or ignores Him completely. What can you share from this story to help or encourage him or her?**

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**Review the ways you celebrate Christmas. What could you adjust to make your celebrations more worshipful of Jesus?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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