

Sought

MATTHEW 2:1-12

¹ After Jesus was born in **A Bethlehem of Judea** in the days of **B King Herod**, **C wise men** from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been **D born king** of the Jews? For we saw **E his star** at its rising and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the **F Messiah** would be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: ⁶ 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 **G shepherd** my people Israel.” ⁷ Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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, **H frankincense**, and **I myrrh**. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- A** Two towns in Israel were called Bethlehem—one in Judea (the one Matthew specified), and one in Galilee. Micah prophesied this would be the birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:2).
- B** The Romans made Herod the Great king of Palestine. He’s known to have murdered all but two of the Sanhedrin as well as two of his own sons and other members of his family to secure his place as king.
- C** The term “magi” referred to a group of scholars who were skilled in astrology; they were also seen as dream interpreters and played political and religious roles.
- D** Jesus being born King not only highlighted His position and claim as King by lineage and genealogy, but it also reminded everyone that Herod was a usurper of the throne.
- E** God the Creator used the star to guide them to Jesus; the star “went before them” and “stood over” the place where the child was (Matt. 2:9; see Josh. 10:12-13).
- F** “Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed)” (AMP).
- G** “A leader who will guide” (GNT). John 10:11 says Jesus is “the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”
- H** Aromatic resin from Boswellia trees, it’s used for medicinal and religious purposes, like incense (Ex. 30:34).
- I** An aromatic resin with a yellowish color, myrrh treats worms, indigestion, congestion, heart and circulatory issues, sepsis, and functions as an antiseptic for open wounds (Gen. 37:25; Esth. 2:12; and John 19:39).

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

- After Jesus' birth, wise men from the east followed a star that led them to Jerusalem.
- Once they arrived, the wise men inquired about the birth of a new king who would rule over the Jews.
- News of the wise men's arrival spread to Herod, who was troubled by the news and, in turn, so was Jerusalem.

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

- Herod gathered Jewish religious leaders in an effort to find out where the Messiah would be born.
- The leaders pointed to Micah's prophecy and identified Bethlehem as the promised birthplace.
- Herod passed this information on to the wise men and requested they report back to him their findings so that he too could worship this King.

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

- As the wise men headed toward Bethlehem, the star reappeared and led them to the house where they found Jesus.
- The wise men worshiped Jesus, presenting Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
- They returned to their home country by a different way, because they were warned about Herod in a dream.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God provides salvation to those seeking Him.

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



FOCUS ATTENTION

If you collect anything, what's the most treasured item in your collection?

- Whether baseball cards, comic books, record albums, or porcelain figurines, collectors can spend a lifetime trying to complete their collection and might pay huge sums of money to do so.
- Many of the items people collect have little inherent value. They're often valuable because of their rarity or because the collector has an emotional attachment to them.
- In today's passage, the wise men received something of infinite and eternal value when they sought to worship Jesus the Messiah.

EXPLORE THE TEXT MATTHEW 2:1-3

What details did Matthew provide to prove Jesus was an actual person in history?

- Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea establishes that He's of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:9-10) and the line of David (Isa. 9:7), both requirements of Messianic prophecy.
- Bethlehem means "house of bread," an appropriate place for the "bread of life" to be born (John 6:35).
- Herod the Great ruled Judea from 37 BC to 4 BC according to the Jewish historian Josephus.
- The wise men "from the east" were likely from Babylon or Persia, and would have been familiar with Jewish writings because of the exile. God used their curiosity and study to lead them to Jesus.

Why was Herod "deeply disturbed" at the news of Jesus' birth?

- Herod was given the title "King of the Jews" by the Roman empire. So it's significant that the wise men referred to Jesus as the one "born" king of the Jews.
- Bethlehem is only about five and a half miles from Jerusalem. In contrast, Babylon is more than 800 miles from Jerusalem. It's ironic that the wise men were aware of Jesus' birth, but Herod, who lived nearby, wasn't.

MATTHEW 2:4-8

Where can we turn when we want to understand the Scriptures better?

- Although he was nominally Jewish, Herod was ignorant of Jewish prophecy concerning the Messiah. He asked religious leaders for help in understanding what was happening.
- It isn't enough to know facts about the Bible. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ and not through simply studying the Scriptures (John 5:39-40).

Why did it matter where Jesus was born? What was special about Bethlehem?

- Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David, the greatest king in Israel's history. Micah's prophecy dates from about the eighth century BC, about 200 years after David.
- The word "shepherd" in verse 6 is significant. Before David was king of Israel, he was a shepherd. Psalm 78 describes David as one who "shepherded them with a pure heart" (Ps. 78:72). In Ezekiel 34, the prophet harshly condemned the false shepherds of Israel who didn't take care of the sheep.

What's the significance of Herod "secretly" summoning the wise men?

- Herod was afraid of a rival ruler. Throughout his life, Herod had ruthlessly eliminated any threats to his rule, including within his own family.
- Like Herod, we can be threatened by Jesus' claim to rule in our lives as well.

MATTHEW 2:9-12

How did the wise men respond to Jesus?

- The Greek word for "child" could refer to an infant or a young child. Since Herod ordered the slaughter of male children two and under (v. 16), Jesus could have been as old as two at this time.
- While seeing the star overwhelmed the wise men with joy, it wasn't until they saw Jesus that they worshiped.

How do the details given impact how we view Jesus and His purposes?

- According to verse 11, Jesus and His family were living in a house by this time.
- It's significant that God spoke to these pagan wise men in a dream. Again, this highlights Jesus as the Messiah for all people, not just the Jews. Ironically, Matthew, a thoroughly Jewish Gospel, is the only Gospel that gives us the account of the wise men.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

What can we learn from the wise men's story?

- First, there was great joy (v. 10). Then, there was humble worship (v. 11). Finally, there was extravagant sacrifice (v. 11). All three of these elements should be present in our worship of Jesus today.
- **Personal Challenge:** In the rush and busyness of the Christmas season, it can be easy to forget the joy of worship. Today, and for the rest of this week, determine that you will sincerely worship Jesus. Offer Him the gift of your joyful heart. As you look toward the new year, commit to giving Him the worship He deserves.



OBJECT LESSON

A NATIVITY SET

At the beginning of the session, display a traditional Nativity set that includes a manger, animals, shepherds, the baby Jesus, and three wise men. If this Nativity scene has a special meaning for your family, share the story, and invite people to share any stories about their own nativity sets.

Explain that there are several details about this nativity scene that don't line up with the biblical account of Jesus' birth, and invite the group to listen for those details. Reassure the group that you aren't suggesting they throw out their nativity sets. If parents wanted to reinforce the biblical sequence of events with their families, they could set the wise men up across the room from the rest of the nativity scene!

At the same time, it's important to keep straight in our own minds what the Bible says about Jesus' birth and what we think we know from tradition, Christmas carols, and TV specials. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that true worshipers would worship Him "in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). So while it isn't necessarily our job to go around correcting culture, it is our job to point to the real, true Messiah, Jesus Christ. Matthew went to great lengths to locate



Jesus both in contemporary history and in biblical prophecy. We can trust that Jesus is exactly who He said He is, and He's worthy of our joy, our worship, and our gifts.

Call attention to the nativity set. Highlight how each person represented in the set sought Jesus. Challenge the group to focus on ways they seek Jesus today and can help others who are seeking Him.



DIG DEEPER

THE SAVIOR FOR ALL

Jesus came to be the Savior for all people, not just the Jews. Even in the events surrounding Jesus' birth God was at work to give Gentiles an opportunity to come to faith in Him.

Though they weren't Jews, the magi were drawn to Jerusalem in search of the One born king of the Jews. When they saw "his star" (Matt. 2:2) in the east it wasn't a coincidence. Romans 1:18-20 teaches that God has revealed Himself through what He created—which would include the star—and Psalm 19:1 declares that "the heavens declare the glory of God." Because the magi had already been searching and studying the prophets, the Lord, in His faithfulness, responded by getting their attention with the star. The Lord promised through the prophet Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (29:13). The magi had a seeking heart, and they found Christ.

The Lord even gives opportunity to those whom He knows will reject Him. Herod (an Edomite) had opportunity through the inquiry of the magi, and the report of the chief priests and scribes to encounter

the Christ. Still, he was more interested in his own position than his own need. He chose to pretend he also wanted to worship, rather than truly worshiping. Rather than repenting or even humbling himself, Herod decided to deceive. He gave a pretense of innocent interest while all the time plotting to destroy the Child. Herod's heart was at best superficial.

Jesus, being the One who came to save people from their sin, "emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). Jesus had a sacrificial heart.

When the magi arrived they fell to the ground and worshiped the Child. Their seeking hearts were satisfied by the One who had been sought, and they were sanctified. Even at His incarnation, the Lord was fulfilling His promise in Isaiah 9:2: "a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness." The Lord's promise to Abraham is being fulfilled.