

# Stories of Christmas

## Wise Men Visit Jesus

Matthew 2:1-23

### Opening

Gathering: How can people offer gifts to Jesus today?

Today's Focus: God led Gentiles to see and worship the newborn Savior of the world.

Key Verses: *Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.* Matthew 2:2

*They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts.* Matthew 2:11

Opening Prayer

### Lesson

Matthew's Beginning (*Matthew 1*)

What was Matthew's purpose in writing his gospel and who was his intended audience?  
Matthew 5:17

How does Matthew's story of Jesus begin and give a transition between the Testaments?  
Matthew 1:1-2, 6, 16-17

What story does Matthew begin with to introduce us to Jesus?  
Matthew 1:18-21, 24-25

Why did Matthew include this story in his book showing Jesus as the promised Messiah?  
Matthew 1:22-23

How many of the wonderful stories of Jesus' birth did Matthew find important to include?  
Matthew 2:1

"We Three Kings of Orient Are ..." (*Matthew 2:1*)

How many Magi were there?

What were their names?

Were they kings?

Where were they from?

How old were they?

What race or skin color were they?

When did they show up?

We three kings of Orient are  
Bearing gifts; we traverse afar  
Field & fountain, moor & mountain,  
Following yonder star.

Born a king on Bethlehem's plain,  
Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever, ceasing never  
Over us all to reign.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom:  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to Thy perfect light.

Frankincense to offer have I;  
Incense owns a Deity nigh;  
Prayer and praising all men raising,  
Worship Him, God on high.

Glorious now behold Him arise,  
King and God and Sacrifice;  
Alleluia, Alleluia!  
Sounds through the earth & skies.

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### Who Were the *Magi*?

A caste of Zoroastrian priests originating in Persia 400-500 years before Jesus  
Spread by Jesus' time as far east as India & as far west as Arabia  
Interpreted dreams, acted as astronomers & astrologers, high moral principles  
Pursued knowledge (*wise men*), practiced magic (word derived from *Magi*)

### Where Did the *Magi* Come From?

#### *Orient* (Far East)

Not accepted by scholars, disagrees with understanding of *Magi*

#### *Mesopotamia* (Babylon)

Babylon was the cradle of Middle Eastern astronomy

Could have learned of Old Testament from Jews who stayed in Babylon after exile

#### *Arabia*

Frankincense & myrrh are native to Arabia, gold was once plentiful in Arabia

Earliest claimed location by a church father (Justin Martyr)

Refers to Ramah in Matthew 2:18 as Ramah in Arabia

#### *Persia* (Iran)

Word *Magi* & caste originated in Persia, early art shows Persian clothes

Communities of Jews in Persia at Jesus' time

Gold, frankincense & myrrh were traded & in good supply

### The Star of Bethlehem (*Matthew 2:2*)

Why did the *Magi from the east come to Jerusalem?*

Matthew 2:2

How was this star a fulfillment of Messianic prophesy?

Numbers 24:17

Were the Jews really looking for a king?

Jeremiah 23:5

### What Was the Star?

*Aster* - Greek word meaning any of a variety of celestial objects or phenomenon

#### *Comet*

God often uses His created nature to produce His miracles

Comets understood to announce significant events (deaths of Julius Caesar & Nero)

Haley's comet was too early (12 BC)

#### *Nova* ("New Star")

Star would have exploded and no longer exist

#### *Planetary Conjunction*

Planets align on same celestial longitude and look like one bright star (pre-telescope)

First proposed by Johannes Kepler in 17th century

Traced planet movement backwards to show four potential conjunctions

Saturn & Jupiter in May, October & December of 7BC

Saturn, Jupiter & Mars in February of 6BC

All 4 conjunctions were far enough apart to see separately with naked eye

#### *Supernatural Star*

Couldn't the God who created the world by speaking place a special star?

Could the star have been a slight revelation of God's glory?

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### Herod's Paranoia (*Matthew 2:3-8*)

Herod became *King of the Jews* in 40 BC

Near the end of his life (died 4BC), Herod became paranoid about threats to his throne

Even killed three of his sons & a wife because of perceived threat

How would Herod feel about Magi looking for *the one who has been born King of the Jews*?

Matthew 2:3

Would Herod believe this long-promised Messiah would actually come at this time?

Luke 3:15

What information did Herod research first to be able to take care of this threat?

Matthew 2:4

Were the chief priests and teachers able to give him an answer?

Matthew 2:5-6

How did this later hinder some Jews from accepting Jesus as the promised Christ?

John 7:40-43

What was the second piece of information Herod wanted and how did he get it?

Matthew 2:7

What final tactic did Herod take to track down this new threat?

Matthew 2:8

### The Magi Meet Jesus (*Matthew 2:9-12*)

How did God help the Magi find the *King of the Jews* they were looking for?

Matthew 2:9

Had the Magi been *following yonder star* like the song says?

Matthew 2:10

How did the Magi show their excitement when they found the child they were looking for?

Matthew 2:11

Note: *House* indicates they were no longer in the *stable*

Did the Magi go back and report to Herod as instructed?

Matthew 2:12

### Significance of the Gifts (*Matthew 2:11*)

Why did Matthew find it significant that the Magi presented gifts to Jesus?

Psalm 72:10

Why were these particular gifts significant?

Isaiah 60:6

What was significant about the gift of gold?

1 Kings 10:2

What was significant about the gift of frankincense?

Psalm 141:2

What was significant about the gift of myrrh?

John 19:39-40

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### Epiphany

We celebrate the Magi's visit on the 12th day of Christmas (January 6) as *Epiphany*

What does *Epiphany* mean?

How does this name help remind us how this story fulfilled another Messianic prophesy?

Isaiah 60:1-3

In addition to the star, what light does this prophesy refer to?

John 8:12

### Herod's Back-up Plan (*Matthew 2:13-18*)

What was Herod's "Plan B" when the Magi never returned to take him to the new king?

Matthew 2:16

Assuming Herod added a margin to the time from v7, Jesus probably around 1 yr old

How did Herod's action fulfill another Messianic prophesy?

Matthew 2:17-18

Ramah was a town north of Jerusalem where Jews were assembled for exile

How did God prevent Herod's action from interfering with His plan to save the world?

Matthew 2:13-14

How would this event help fulfill another Messianic prophesy?

Matthew 2:15

### Called Out of Egypt (*Matthew 2:19-23*)

How long did the family stay in Egypt and what prompted them to return?

Matthew 2:19-21

Why didn't they return to their home in Bethlehem?

Matthew 2:22

How did this result in yet another fulfillment of Messianic prophesy?

Matthew 2:23

### Closing Prayer

**Response** - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. Do I truly seek Jesus or am I sometimes disturbed by Him and His calling to follow, serve and witness?  
(Matthew 2:3; 6:33-34; 7:7-8; 11:28-30)
2. What gifts (time, talents, treasures) do I present to Jesus?  
(Matthew 2:11; 6:19-24; 25:40; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Timothy 4:14-16)
3. What gifts (time, talents, treasures) has God given me for use in service to Him?  
(Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 7:9-11; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:7-16)
4. When have I tried to eliminate potential problems I perceived in ways that harmed others?  
(Genesis 4:1-8; 2 Samuel 11:1-5; 14-15; Matthew 2:16-18; Acts 26:9-11)
5. Do I listen for and follow God's direction in my life or do I try to find my own way?  
(Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23; Deuteronomy 1:32-33; 10:12-13; Psalm 23:3; 25:4-5; 43:3; Proverbs 5:21; 16:1-9; Isaiah 30:19-21; 58:11; John 14:5-6)

Next Week - *The Boy Jesus Visits the Temple* (Luke 2:41-52)