

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 = Show Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promised Messiah; Jews

How does Matthew's story of Jesus begin and give a transition between the Testaments?

Matthew 1:1-2, 6, 16-17 = Traces Jesus' legal genealogy from Abraham & David

What story does Matthew begin with to introduce us to Jesus? = Jesus - Greek for Joshua

Matthew 1:18-21, 24-25 = Angel tells Joseph to marry Mary, child is God's

Why did Matthew include this story in his book showing Jesus as the promised Messiah?

Matthew 1:22-23 = It directly fulfilled a key Messianic prophecy (*Isaiah 7:14*)

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

Matthew 2:1 = Starts after Jesus was born; others not key prophecy fulfillments

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

How many Magi were there? = Doesn't say; legend says 3 because of 3 gifts

What were their names? = Doesn't say; legend calls them Gaspar, Balthasar & Melchior

Were they kings? = Doesn't say; probably not

Where were they from? = Only says the east; legend says Orient, Babylon, Persia, Arabia

How old were they? = Doesn't say; legend says 1 young, 1 middle aged, 1 elderly

What race or skin color were they? = Doesn't say; legend shows yellow, black & white

When did they show up? = Doesn't say directly; legend implies within days

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.

Stories of Christmas

Wise Men Visit Jesus

Page 2

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) = Most widely accepted

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 = *We saw his star ... and have come to worship him (King of Jews)*

How was this star a fulfillment of Messianic prophesy?

Numbers 24:17 = *A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter ...*

Were the Jews really looking for a king?

Jeremiah 23:5 = *A King who will reign wisely*

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?

Stories of Christmas

Wise Men Visit Jesus

Page 3

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 = He was upset; Jerusalem disturbed by potential revolution

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

Luke 3:15 = Yes, *the people were waiting expectantly*

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

Matthew 2:4 = Where this Messiah (Christ) was to be born

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

Matthew 2:5-6 = Yes, they quoted Micah 5:2 to show it was Bethlehem

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

John 7:40-43 = Didn't know Jesus was born in Bethlehem, only knew Galilee

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

Matthew 2:7 = Child's age, Secretly asked the Magi when they first saw the star

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

Matthew 2:8 = Sent the Magi to Bethlehem and told them to report back

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 = Moved the star to where it seemed to point to Jesus' house

Had the Magi been *following yonder star* like the song says? = Overjoyed to see it again

Matthew 2:10 = No, they had seen it back home, then not again until Bethlehem

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

Matthew 2:11 = They worshipped Him, Gave gifts of gold, frankincense & myrrh

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

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

Matthew 2:12 = No, God sent them home another way

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

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

Psalm 72:10 = Fulfilled prophesy that "kings" will present *Him gifts*

Why were these particular gifts significant? = Sheba was in southwest Arabia

Isaiah 60:6 = Fulfilled prophesy of worshippers from Sheba bearing gold & incense

What was significant about the gift of gold? = All 3 were very expensive

1 Kings 10:2 = Gold was a gift for a king - Jesus was King

What was significant about the gift of frankincense? = white/yellowish gum, burns sweet

Psalm 141:2 = Frankincense was for God - Jesus was God, great high priest

What was significant about the gift of myrrh? = red gum used as incense & in burial oils

John 19:39-40 = Jesus buried in myrrh - Jesus would die for mankind's sins

Stories of Christmas

Wise Men Visit Jesus

Page 4

Epiphany

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

What does *Epiphany* mean? = *Shining forth*

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

Isaiah 60:1-3 = *Arise, shine, ... nations will come to your light*

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

John 8:12 = *I am the light of the world* - Jesus came for all people

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 = He killed all boys around Bethlehem 2 yrs old or less

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

How did Herod's action fulfill another Messianic prophecy? = Jeremiah 31:15 quoted

Matthew 2:17-18 = Rachel (Jacob's wife) buried at Bethlehem (*Genesis 35:19*)

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 = God told Joseph to take Jesus & M to Egypt (funded by gifts?)

How would this event help fulfill another Messianic prophecy? = Hosea 11:1 quoted

Matthew 2:15 = Later called out of Egypt - Jesus' life paralleled Israel's history

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 = God called them out after Herod died (Joseph's 3rd vision)

Why didn't they return to their home in Bethlehem? = Archelaus began by killing 3000

Matthew 2:22 = Joseph warned in another dream to avoid Judea (Archelaus rule)

How did this result in yet another fulfillment of Messianic prophecy? = Num 6 on Nazirite

Matthew 2:23 = *Branch* of Isaiah 11:1 is same word as *Nazarene* (without vowels)

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*)