

# 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 prophesy (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 prophesy 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.

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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) = 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 prophecy?

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?

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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 = 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?

Psalms 72:10 = Fulfilled prophecy that "*kings*" will present Him gifts

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

Isaiah 60:6 = Fulfilled prophecy 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

Psalms 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

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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? = *Shining forth*

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

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

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