

Bible Stories for Adults

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

What story did 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 and as far west as Arabia
Interpreted dreams, acted as astronomers and astrologers, high moral principles
Pursued knowledge (*wise men*), practiced magic (word derived from *Magi*)
What important Jewish prophet was associated with early *Magi*?
Daniel 2:1-3, 47-48

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 and myrrh are native to Arabia, gold was once plentiful in Arabia
First proposed by Justin Martyr around 140 AD
Persia (Iran)
Word *Magi* originated in Persia; early art shows Persian clothes; Jews in Persia at Jesus' time
Gold, frankincense and myrrh were traded and in good supply
In any case, *Magi* would have traveled many months over hundreds of miles

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
Comets understood to announce significant events (deaths of Julius Caesar and 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 and Jupiter in May, October and December of 7BC
Saturn, Jupiter and Mars in February of 6BC
All 4 conjunctions were far enough apart to see separately with naked eye
See www.bethlehemstar.net for further discussion of this explanation
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*)

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 and a wife because of perceived threat

Upset with Pharisees who said his reign would end when the Messiah was born

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

Matthew 2:3

Magi would have had a large entourage with servant and soldiers for protection and to guard valuables

Jerusalem residents concerned about how Herod might react to news of a new *King of the Jews*

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

Luke 3:15

Herod's Research (*Matthew 2:4-8*)

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

Quadruple Joy expressed in original text (preserved in KJV)

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy

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*)

What was significant about the gift of gold?

1 Kings 10:2, 10

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 (1:4-9)

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 do I get disturbed by Him and His calling to follow, serve and witness?
(*Matthew 2:3; 6:33-34; 7:7-8; 11:28-30; Isaiah 6:8*)
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?
(*Matthew 2:11; 7:9-11; Genesis 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:7-16*)
4. When have I tried to eliminate potential problems I perceived in ways that harmed others?
(*Matthew 2:16-18; Genesis 4:1-8; 2 Samuel 11:1-5; 14-15; 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*)

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Magus - From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

A Magus (plural Magi, from Latin, via Greek from Old Persian maguš; Old English: Mage) was a member of the Magi tribe from ancient Media, who were responsible for the religious and funerary practices. Later they accepted the zoroastrian religion, not without changing the original message of its founder, Zarathustra. They became the guardians of religion under the three persian empires. The best known Magi are the "Wise Men from the East" in the Bible. In English, the term may refer to a shaman, sorcerer, or wizard; it is the origin of the English words magic and magician.

Etymology

Greek-Persian roots

The Greek word is attested from the 5th century BC (Ancient Greek) as a direct loan from Old Persian maguš. The Persian word is a u-stem adjective from an Indo-Iranian root *magh "powerful, rich" also continued in Sanskrit magha "gift, wealth", magha-vant "generous" (a name of Indra). Avestan has maga, magauuan, probably with the meanings "sacrifice" and "sacrificer". The PIE root (*magh-) appears to have expressed power or ability, continued e.g. in Attic Greek mekhos (cf. mechanics) and in Germanic magan (English may), magts (English might, the expression "might and magic" thus being a figura etymologica). The original significance of the name for the Median priests thus seems to have been "the powerful". Modern Persian Mobed is derived from an Old Persian compound magu-pati "lord priest".

Greek use of magos

While in Herodotus, magos refers to either a member of the tribe of the Medes (1.101), or to one of the Zoroastrian Persian priests who could interpret dreams (7.37), it could also be used for any enchanter or wizard, and especially to charlatans or quacks (see also goetia), especially by philosophers such as Heraclitus who took a sceptical view of the art of an enchanter, and in comic literature (Lucian's Lucios or the Ass). In Hellenism, magos started to be used as an adjective, meaning "magical", as in magas techne "ars magica" (e.g. used by Philostratus).

English language

The plural Magi entered the English language in ca. 1200, referring to the Magi mentioned in Matthew 2:1, the singular being attested only considerably later, in the late 14th century, when it was borrowed from Old French in the meaning magician together with magic. This being the case it would appear that the original magi can be translated as more than one or even considered a large number by most scholars due to the fact that their very presence was enough for King Herod to pay attention. This would be unlikely if there were merely only three wise men showing up in a large city.

History of Frankincense and Myrrh - from www.herbaleducator.com

The pharaohs of Egypt used frankincense for perfume, medicine, and embalming the dead. Clumps of incense were discovered among the treasures buried in the tomb of Tutankhamen who died in 1339 BC.

Moses, the Hebrew prophet who led the exodus from Egypt in the 13th century B.C., received instructions from the Lord to use pure frankincense as one of the ingredients of a perfume to be used in the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:34) and pure myrrh as one ingredient of a holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:23-25).

In the middle of the 10th century BC, the Queen of Sheba, ruler of a southern kingdom in Arabia, traveled by caravan to Israel and, it is thought, questioned King Solomon regarding his merchant fleet based at Eilat on the Red Sea and his trading policies which could greatly affect her kingdom, the main producer of frankincense and myrrh and a key player in the world's spice trade.

It is recorded that Jerusalem imported frankincense prior to its capture by Nebuchednezzar in 587 BC (Jeremiah 6:20). During Jewish captivity, Esther, who became queen to the Persian King

History in the Persian Empire

According to Herodotus, the Magi were the sacred caste of the Medes. They organized Persian society after the fall of Assyria and Babylon. Their power was curtailed by Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, and by his son Cambyses II; the Magi revolted against Cambyses and set up a rival claimant to the throne, one of their own, who took the name of Smerdis. Smerdis and his forces were defeated by the Persians under Darius I. The sect of the Magi continued in Persia, though its influence was limited after this political setback.

During the Classical era (555 BC - 300 AD), some Magi migrated westward, settling in Greece, and then Italy. For more than a century, Mithraism, a religion derived from Persia, was the largest single religion in Rome. The Magi were likely involved in its practice.

The Book of Jeremiah (39:3, 39:13) gives a title rab mag "chief magus" to the head of the Magi, Nergal Sharezar (Septuagint, Vulgate and KJV mistranslate Rabmag as a separate character). It's also believed by Christians that the Jewish prophet Daniel was "rab mag" and entrusted a Messianic vision (to be announced in due time by a "star") to a secret sect of the Magi for its eventual fulfillment (Daniel 4:9; 5: 11).

The Maga in India

Zoroastrians form a very small ethnic group in India known as the Parsis. After invading Arabs succeeded in taking Ctesiphon in 637, Islam largely superseded Zoroastrianism, and the power of the Magi faded. Many (but not all) of the mages fled the advent of Islam in Persia (Iran) by emigrating to India, settling in western principalities which form the modern states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. As one can only be Zoroastrian by birth, the number of Parsis and Zoroastrians in the world is shrinking, and the remaining population risks passing down genetic defects as with any small community. Suffice to say Parsis are very rare, and Magi are even rarer.

Ahasuerus, used oil of myrrh for six months as part of a purification process for women (Esther 2:12).

When Jesus Christ was born, the Holy Land was under the rule of the Roman Empire. At this time, frankincense and myrrh were literally worth their weight in gold. Frankincense was used for state meetings and in religious ceremonies. The Emperor Nero (A.D. 37-68), at the funeral of his second wife Poppaea, burnt in excess of the total annual production of Arabia!

In later history, we find the medicinal use of frankincense recorded in the Syrian Book of the Middle Ages and in Chinese texts of the 12th and 13th century AD. However, the demand for frankincense and myrrh had diminished with the decline and fall of the Roman Empire (337-476 A.D.) The discovery of new, more efficient waterways and trade routes broke Arabia's trade monopoly and the trade balance shifted throughout the known world. Arabia did continue to sell frankincense and myrrh but with a much reduced profit.

Today, although gold is still an internationally recognized commodity, we hear little mention of frankincense and myrrh in the marketplace. Yet, treasures they remain.

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Herod the Great - From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

Herod I, also known as Herod the Great, was a Roman client-king of Judaea (c. 74 BC - March 4 BC in Jerusalem). The details of his biography can best be gleaned from the works of the 1st century AD Jewish historiographer Josephus. To the majority of non-specialist Christians Herod is best known from the Gospel according to Matthew that gives in chapter 2 an account of the events leading up to and including what subsequently has come to be referred to by Christians as the Massacre of the Innocents, of which however no mention in other contemporary sources has come down to us.

Biography

Herod the Great arose from a wealthy, influential Idumaeen family. The Idumaeans, successors to the Edomites of the Hebrew Bible, settled in Idumea, formerly known as Edom, in southern Judea. When the Maccabean John Hyrcanus conquered Idumea in 130-140 BC, he required all Idumaeans to obey Jewish law or to leave; most Idumaeans thus converted to Judaism.

Herod identified himself as Jewish, although according to the Law he was not. For he was the second son of Antipater the Idumaeen, founder of the Herodian dynasty, and his wife Cypros, a princess from Petra in Nabatea (now part of Jordan). The family rubbed shoulders with the greats in Rome, such as Pompey, Cassius, and in 47 BC his father was appointed Procurator over Judea, who then appointed his son governor of Galilee at the age of 25.

After his father was poisoned in 43 BC, allegedly by a tax-collector, Herod had the murderer executed. After returning from a campaign, he was offered the betrothal to the teenage princess Mariamne from the Hasmonean dynasty who were the titular rulers of Judaea. As he was already married, he banished his first wife Doris and her 3 year old son, also named Antipater, and married Mariamne.

In 40 BC Antigonos and the Parthians invaded Judea, and Herod fled Jerusalem to Rome for the first time. There he was titled King of Judaea by Mark Antony.

30s BC

39 BC-37 BC War against Antigonos. After winning Jerusalem and victory over Antigonos, Marc Antony executes Antigonos.

36 BC Herod makes his 17 year old brother-in-law Aristobulus III of Judea high priest, fearing that the Jews would appoint Aristobulus "king of the Jews" in his place.

35 BC Aristobulus drowns at a party. Historians claim there is insufficient evidence against Herod for his death.

32 BC Start of the war against Nabatea, with victory one year later.

31 BC Strong earthquake in Judea. Octavian defeats Mark Antony, so Herod switches allegiance to Octavian, later Augustus.

30 BC Herod was then shown great favor by Octavian who at Rhodes confirms him as King of Judaea.

20s BC

29 BC Josephus writes that Herod had great passion and also great jealousy concerning his wife Mariamne. She learns of Herod's plans to murder her, and stops sleeping with him. Herod puts her on trial on a trumped-up charge of adultery. His sister Salome (not Herodias's daughter Salomé) was chief witness against her. Mariamne's mother made an appearance and incriminated her own daughter. Historians say her mother was next on Herod's list to be executed and did this only to save her own life. Writings state that Mariamne was calm and serene at her execution at the age of 25 years, having given birth to 5 children in 7 years.

Alexandra, Mariamne's mother, then made a bid for power, declaring herself Queen and stating that Herod was mentally unfit to serve any longer. Josephus wrote that this was Alexandra's strategic mistake and Herod executed her without trial.

28 BC Herod executed his brother-in-law Kostobar (husband of Salome, father to Berenice) for conspiracy. Large festival in Jerusalem, as Herod had built a Theatre and an Amphitheatre.

27 BC An assassination attempt on Herod is discovered in time. To honor Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (Augustus) Herod rebuilds Samaria and renames it Sebaste.

25 BC After a great drought there is hunger and epidemics. Herod imports grain from Egypt and starts an exemplary aid program. He also waives a third of the taxes.

23 BC Herod builds a palace in Jerusalem and the fortress Herodian in Judaea. Herod marries his third wife, also named Mariamne, the daughter of high priest Simon.

22 BC Building starts on Caesarea Maritima and its harbour. From the Romans he obtains the regions Trachonitis, Batanaea and Auranitis under his rule.

Circa 20 BC Expansion starts on the Second Temple.

10s BC

Circa 18 BC Herod travels for the second time to Rome.

14 BC Herod supports the Jews in Anatolia and Cyrene. Owing to the prosperity in Judaea he waives a quarter of the taxes. He argues with his sons.

13 BC Herod makes his firstborn son Antipater (his son with Doris) first heir in his will.

12 BC Because Herod suspects both his sons (from his marriage to the first Mariamne) Alexandros and Aristobulos of threatening his life, he takes them to Aquileia to be tried; but Augustus is able to reconcile the three. Herod supports the financially strapped Olympic Games and ensures their future. Herod amends his will so that Alexander and Aristobulos rise in the royal succession, but Antipater would be higher in the succession.

Circa 10 BC The newly expanded temple in Jerusalem is inaugurated. War against the Nabateans.

0s BC

9 BC The inauguration of Caesarea Maritima is a marvellous spectacle with a festival. Owing to the course of the war against the Nabateans Herod falls into disgrace with Augustus. Herod again suspects Alexander intends to kill him.

8 BC Herod accuses his sons from the first Mariamne of high treason. Herod is reconciled with Augustus, which also gives him the permission to proceed legally against his sons.

7 BC The court hearing takes place in Berytos (Beirut) before a Roman court. Mariamne's sons are found guilty and executed. Now the succession is changed so that Antipater is the exclusive successor to the throne. In second place the succession incorporates Herod Philip, the son from the second Mariamne.

6 BC Herod proceeds harshly against the Pharisees, who had announced that the birth of the Messiah would mean the end of his rule.

5 BC Antipater is brought before the court charged with intended murder of Herod. The sentence must first be approved only by the Roman emperor. Herod makes his son Herod Antipas from his 4th marriage with Malthace as his successor. Herod is seriously ill.

4 BC Young Torah-students smash the golden eagle over the main entrance of the Temple of Jerusalem after the Pharisee teachers claim it is a Roman symbol. Herod arrests them, brings them to court, sentences and punishes them. Emperor Augustus approves of the death penalty for Antipater. Herod executes his son.

As he has just executed his sole heir, Herod again changes his will: Archelaus (from Malthace) will rule as King over the Herod's entire kingdom, while Antipas (from Malthace) and Philip (from Cleopatra of Jerusalem) as Tetrarchs over Galilee and Peraea, also over Gaulanitis (Golan), Trachonitis and Panias.

Herod died at the end of March, or early April of 4 BC. As Augustus does not confirm his will, no one gets the title of King. However, the three sons do get the stated territories.