

Matthew Chapter 2

Verses 1-2:

“Beth-lehem of Judea” was also called Ephrath.

The town is five miles south of Jerusalem.

Its name in Hebrew means “House of Bread.”

This Judean city was the birthplace of King David. It was the original city of Joseph’s ancestors.

According to (Luke 2:1-7), Joseph and Mary traveled there from Nazareth and Jesus was born in a stable after they arrived.

“Herod the king” was known as Herod the Great, and was the son of Antipater, an Edomite.

He became king by Roman decree in 43 B.C.

“Wise men” were originally the priestly caste among the Persians and Babylonians.

These Magi from the East were experts in the study of the stars.

Tradition claims that there were three royal visitors who were also kings.

However, there is no real historical evidence to verify this.

“Born King of the Jews:”

The wise men naturally come to Jerusalem, the royal capital of Israel, seeking one whom they thought was to be born a king, on the basis of their calculations of the stars.

“His star” could not have been merely a natural phenomenon, since it led the wise men to Jerusalem and later to Bethlehem.

It almost certainly was a divine manifestation used by God to indicate the fact and place of the Messiah’s birth.

Matthew 2:1 "Now when Jesus was born in Beth-lehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,"

“Herod”, known in history as Herod the Great, because of his loyalty to Rome, was given authority over Palestine and the title of king (37 to 4 B.C.).

To win the favor of both Romans and Jews he carried out lavish building projects, including the cities of Caesarea and Samaria, and the new temple at Jerusalem.

Herod had 10 wives and the deserved reputation of being a cruel, unscrupulous despot.

Because of hatred and ambitions for power among families, and because of Herod's consuming suspicion that someone might usurp his throne, he even executed one of his wives and his three oldest sons.

Thus, the act of murdering all of the young male children in the region of Bethlehem, in an effort to eliminate the One whom the Magi had called King of the Jews, fits Herod's character (see the verses 1-16).

When Herod died, Rome divided his kingdom among three sons: Archelaus (verse 22), Antipas "the tetrarch" (verse 14:1), and Philip (Luke 3:1).

Beth-lehem is known as the city of David.

This is the city of the birth of David's greater Son, Jesus Christ (Luke 2:4-7), as predicted by Micah the prophet (5:2; Matt. 2:5-6).

In the New Testament this is mentioned only in the Gospels and always it's in reference to Christ's birth.

In A.D. 325 Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine built a church over some caves traditionally regarded as the birth site.

In the sixth century Emperor Justinian I, built on the same site a larger church which is now called the "Church of the Nativity."

However there is no archaeological remains from the first three centuries of the Christian era that have been discovered.

Today, Bethlehem is primarily an Arab town called Beit Lahm with about 15,000 inhabitants.

Matthew 2:2 "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

"Bethlehem" (Ephratah), means house of bread, and it is appropriate for the Bread of Life (Jesus) to be born there.

Contrary to the belief of many, there were not a specific number of wise men.

These wise men (called Magi by some), were probably men who were able to interpret dreams and understand prophecy, as well as being able to discern the heavens.

They knew Messiah was prophesied.

They knew that His star would appear in the east.

They did know this star proclaimed the promised Messiah, and being wise, they had come to worship Him.

“Star”:

This could not have been a supernova or a conjunction of planets, as some modern theories suggest, because of the way the star moved and settled over one place (verse 9).

It is more likely a supernatural reality similar to the Shekinah that guided the Israelites in the days of Moses (Exodus 16:21).

Matthew 2:3 "When Herod the king had heard [these things], he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

Herod was troubled, because he believed this person (born King of the Jews), had come to dethrone him.

When it speaks of "all Jerusalem", it means people who might lose their standing, if a new king were enthroned.

Matthew 2:4 "And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born."

These men that he gathered were the rabbis, the religious leaders of that day; the men who knew the law and knew of the promise of Messiah.

In the Old Testament, it was prophesied that Christ would be born in Bethlehem Ephratah (Micah 5:2).

Matthew 2:5-6 "And they said unto him, In Beth-lehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet," "And thou Beth-lehem, [in] the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

This ancient prophecy from (Micah 5:2), was written in the eighth century B.C.

The original prophecy, not quoted in full by Matthew, declared the deity of Israel's Messiah: "From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.

His goings forth are from long ago from the days of eternity."

"A Governor, that shall rule my people Israel":

This portion of Matthew's quote actually seems to be a reference to God's words to David when Israel's kingdom was originally established (2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Chron. 11:2).

The Greek word for "ruler" evokes the image of strong, even stern, leadership. "Shepherd" emphasizes tender care.

Christ's rule involves both (Rev. 12:5).

You see, these religious people knew where He was to be born.

They just did not want to give up their literal way of looking at the law.

They were expecting a mighty king, who would rule them and overthrow the Romans.

Matthew 2:7-8 "Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared." "And he sent them to Beth-lehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found [him], bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

You see, Herod was a liar.

He had no intention of worshipping Him.

He wanted to kill Him. He was afraid of Him whom he saw as a potential threat to his throne.

The wise men did go and find Him.

Beth-lehem is only 5 miles from Jerusalem.

It is a short journey.

Herod thought he had tricked the wise men.

Matthew 2:9 "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

These wise men of old followed the star in the east and they were led to Him.

Matthew 2:10-11 "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

"Into the house":

By the time the wise men arrived, Mary and Joseph were situated in a house, not a stable (see Luke 2:7).

"The young child with Mary his mother":

Whenever Matthew mentions Mary in connection with her Child, Christ is always given first place (verses 13-14, 20-21).

I guess, because there were three types of gifts mentioned, people erroneously believe in three wise men.

As I have said many times before, the three gifts brought were spiritual meanings of who Jesus is, was, and always will be.

The "gold" recognized Jesus as God.

The "frankincense" recognized Jesus as the perfect Lamb sacrifice.

The "myrrh" recognized Jesus as the groom of the bride of Christ.

"Gold" spiritually means purity of God.

"Frankincense" accompanied the lamb offering in the temple sacrifice, and "myrrh" was the sweet aloe for the wedding bed.

Can't you see the spiritual meaning?

The "gold" was not just a piece of gold, but enough for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to live on while they were in exile.

We might learn a lesson from the wise men.

When they were in the presence of Jesus, they "fell down, and worshipped him".

We come into God's house with such irreverence.

Verses 12-18:

“Being warned of God”:

A special divine revelation in the form of a warning was given both to the wise men and to Joseph in the form of a dream.

Thus instructed, the wise men did not return to Herod, and Joseph and Mary fled with the baby into Egypt.

There was a large Jewish population in Egypt at that time, and especially in and around the city of Alexandria.

The holy family would have been inconspicuous during their stay and would have been welcomed by members of their own race.

“The death of Herod” occurred in 4 B.C.

Herod's death is recorded in detail by Josephus (Antiquities xvii 6.5).

Josephus calls him "a man of great barbarity towards all men."

"Rachel weeping for her children" (verse 18), is a quotation of (Jeremiah 31:15).

The calamity of Israel's mourning at the time of the Exile is correlated here to this renewed calamity brought on by Herod, whose very act of ruling is a direct result of that captivity.

Rachel refers to Benjamin's mother, who died outside Bethlehem (Gen. 35:19).

Matthew 2:12 "And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

These wise men heeded the warning of God.

God does speak in dreams sometimes.

We must be able to follow God's instructions, and not man's.

They did not even go back to Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:13 "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

"Angels" are ministering spirits, and God sent a message to Joseph by this "angel of the Lord".

You see, God knows everything even before it happens.

This is called foreknowledge, not predestination.

As we said before, "Egypt" has always been a refuge.

Here, Joseph would hide Jesus, until the danger was over.

Matthew 2:14 "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:"

Joseph heeded God's warning.

They left in the darkness, so that no one would be aware of which direction they went.

Most people did not travel by night, and Herod would not expect them to travel at night either.

Matthew 2:15 "And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."

“The death of Herod”:

Recent scholarship sets this date at 4 B.C.

It is probable that the stay in Egypt was very brief – perhaps no more than a few weeks.

“Out of Egypt” This quotation is from Hos. 11:1, which speaks of God’s leading Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus.

Matthew suggests that Israel’s sojourn in Egypt was a pictorial prophecy, rather than a specific verbal one such as verse 6 (1:23).

These are called “types” and all are always fulfilled in Christ, and identified clearly by the New Testament writers.

Another example of a type is found in (John 3:14).

Every detail of prophecy was fulfilled, as we said in the earlier lessons.

It is interesting to note, again, that Joseph, (the coat of many colors Joseph), who was a type and shadow of Jesus, was a refugee in Egypt as well.

Matthew 2:16 "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Beth-lehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men."

“Slew all the children”:

Herod’s act is all the more heinous in light of his full knowledge that the Lord’s Anointed One was the target of his murderous plot.

Herod killed all the male children, not only in Beth-lehem, but in all the villages of that city.

Unbridled wrath, armed with an unlawful power, often carries men to absurd cruelties.

Matthew 2:17 "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,"

Again this prophecy is in the form of a type (verse 18 quotes Jer. 31:15, which speaks of all).

Israel’s mourning at the time of the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.).

That wailing prefigured the wailing over Herod’s massacre.

Matthew 2:18 "In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping [for] her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

These words, quoted from Jeremiah 31:15, were originally spoken concerning the captivity of the ten tribes; but are here elegantly applied to the murder of the innocents at Bethlehem.

As if he had said, Bethlehem at this time resembled Ramah; for as Rachel might be said to weep over her children, which were slaughtered or gone into captivity; so in Bethlehem, the mothers lamented bitterly for their children, because they were slain.

In an earlier lesson, we discussed this fulfillment of prophecy.

This reminds us of the babies being killed in the days of Moses, as well.

Verses 19-23:

“When Herod was dead” he was succeeded by his son Archelaus, who was the son of his Samaritan wife, Malthace.

Archelaus was as brutal as his father.

Joseph, again warned in a dream, returned to Nazareth, avoiding any further residence in Judea.

The following phrase “He shall be called a Nazarene” is a reference to Christ’s coming from the city of Nazareth.

It should not be taken to mean that He was a Nazarite (see Num. chapter 6).

Matthew 2:19-20 "But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt," "Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

We discussed before, that Joseph listened to messages from God that came in dreams.

Matthew 2:21-22 "And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel." "But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:"

“Archelaus”, a son of Herod the Great, was given the most important district of his father’s realm – Judea, Samaria, and Idumea.

He was more wicked and cruel than his father and was deposed by Rome.

He ruled from (4 B.C. to A.D. 6).

History records that Archelaus was so brutal and ineffective that he was deposed by Rome after a short reign and replaced with a governor appointed by Rome.

Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of Judea.

Herod Antipas is the main Herod in the gospel accounts.

He was the one who had John the Baptist put to death (14:1-12), and examined Christ on the eve of the crucifixion (Luke 23:1-12).

It seems, this son of Herod was a murderer and, probably, as bad or worse than his father.

Joseph had obeyed God and came back into the land of Israel, but was afraid to go to Jerusalem.

God gave Joseph a dream and told him to go to an area away from Jerusalem and then, "into the parts of Galilee".

Matthew 2:23 "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."

God takes care of all the prophecies.

One thing to note is that Jesus was a Nazarene, not a Nazarite.

"Nazareth" is situated in lower Galilee just north of the Plain of Esdraelon (Armageddon), and about 70 miles north of Jerusalem.

It is a somewhat isolated town and thus is significant only in that it was the hometown of Joseph and Mary and the place where Jesus spent most of His first 30 years.

When Jesus began His public ministry He made Capernaum His headquarters (chapter 4:13-16).

The only significant relation between Nazareth and Christ's ministry was His rejection by its inhabitants (Luke 4:16-30).

Few significant archeological discoveries have been made at Nazareth except for demonstrating that Nazareth did exist long before New Testament times.

Since it is not mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Apocrypha, or by Josephus the Jewish historian, some have imagined that it did not exist historically at the time of Jesus.

Presently Nazareth is a town of over 26,000 primarily Arab inhabitants.

It was said that nothing good could come out of Nazareth (John 1:46), but with Jesus all things are possible.

Matthew Chapter 2 Questions

1. Where was Jesus born?
2. What does "Bethlehem" mean?
3. Why did the wise men come to Jerusalem?
4. How many wise men were there?
5. What other name were the wise men known by?
6. What three attributes did they have?
7. Why was Herod worried about the King of the Jews?
8. When Herod called the chief priests and scribes together, what did he ask them?
9. Who were these people he called, really?
10. What were these religious people expecting Him to be?
11. What lie did Herod tell the wise men?
12. How far is Bethlehem from Jerusalem?
13. Who is the Star in the East?
14. Name the three gifts the wise men brought?
15. Which gift meant that Jesus was God in the flesh?
16. Which gift recognized Jesus as the perfect Lamb sacrifice?
17. Which gift recognized Jesus as the Groom of the bride of Christ?
18. How much gold was given?
19. What lesson can we learn from the wise men?
20. Why did the wise men not return to Herod?
21. Does God ever speak in dreams?
22. How did Joseph know to flee into Egypt?
23. What are angels?

24. What country has always been a refuge?
25. Why did they leave at night?
26. What earlier Bible personality, also, was a refugee in Egypt?
27. When Herod found he had been tricked, what did he do?
28. When God told Joseph to come back to Israel, how did Joseph get the message?
29. Why did Joseph turn into Galilee?
30. Was the new ruler better, or worse, than Herod?
31. What was the name of the city they settled in?
32. What was Jesus to be called?