

## Matthew 2:1-12

NIV Harmony 38-39; Loyal 27-29

### Introduction

1. What is on your Christmas list?
  - a. What present would you like to find under the tree on Christmas morning?
  - b. Will you be disappointed if there it is not there?
2. In this lesson, we will journey with the wisemen who came to see Jesus and to bring Him gifts.
3. First, let's sing about their visit with the Christmas carol "We Three Kings of Orient Are."
4. Now, let's read about their visit from Matthew's Gospel. **Read Matthew 2:1-12.**

### A. The Arrival of the Wisemen (1-2)

1. The Wisemen Came to Jerusalem (1)
  - a. Who were they? They were "Magi" (Gk., *magoi*) (1).
    - 1) We call them "kings" in our Christmas carol, but they were magicians, wisemen, as their name indicates.
    - 2) They had knowledge of the stars as astrologers which gave them seemingly magical insights the world and events occurring in it.
  - b. From where did they come?
    - 1) They came "from the east" (Gk., *apo anatolon*) (2).
    - 2) Most likely they came from Mesopotamia, Persia, to the northeast of Jerusalem.
  - c. How many of them were there?
    - 1) Traditionally, we answer that there were three.
    - 2) This tradition is based on the fact they gave three gifts to Jesus (cf., vs. 11).
    - 3) However, the title "Magi" is simply plural. There were at least two but most likely three or more.
    - 4) They also would mostly likely have travelled with animals, perhaps camels, and servants. It would have been quite a large caravan and would have made a big impression upon their entrance into Jerusalem.
  - d. Where did they go at first?
    - 1) They didn't go first to Bethlehem, a backwater suburb of the great capital city, Jerusalem.
    - 2) They came to Jerusalem, the home of Judea's king, in search of King Herod's heir.
  - e. Why did they come?
    - 1) They came because they had seen a "star" rise in the west.
      - a) Perhaps they saw a supernova, a comet, or some alignment of the planets. It may have been something else—a supernatural event.
      - b) Craig Blomberg notes, "Various attempts to link the star with different astronomical phenomena, especially for purposes of dating (e.g., a comet or a conjunction of planets) prove interesting but are probably irrelevant" (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* in NIV, 65).
      - c) Most likely this phenomenon had appeared near the time of Jesus' birth, but the wisemen had taken time to interpret it and follow the star from the east to the west.
    - 2) The star had appeared first in the sky in the direction of Judea. That is why they went first to Jerusalem, where they assumed the new king of the Jews would have been born.
    - 3) Their ultimate purpose in coming was "to worship" (Gk., *proskunesai*) the newborn king.
  - f. When did they arrive?
    - 1) They "saw his star when it rose" (2)
    - 2) Most likely, the wisemen did not arrive until about a year or two after Jesus' birth (cf., Mt 1:16) since Herod would later have all male children in Bethlehem under the age of two killed when his plans to find and kill Jesus were frustrated, but that passage is for our next lesson.
    - 3) It would have taken them some time to interpret the sign, gather their party, and travel to Judea.

## 2. The Wisemen's Question (2)

- a. They asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews (Gk., *basileus ton 'Ioudaion*)?" (2)
- b. Blomberg comments, "The grammatical construction makes it clear that they ask about who the child is who has legitimate claim to Israel's throne by virtue of his birth. Herod is thus viewed as a usurper to the throne. A new star in the sky was often believed to herald the birth of a significant person in the land over which the star shone. So the Magi's question is a natural inference from their observation" (Blomberg, 62).
- c. This title of "king" would haunt Jesus' existence the rest of His life.
  - 1) Claiming to be the "king of the Jews" would be the thing that drew the ire of both Jewish and Roman rulers. It would be the charge that led to Jesus' crucifixion (cf., Mk 14:61ff; 15:2ff).
  - 2) This title would hang inscribed on a placard above Jesus on the cross (cf., Mk 15:26).

## B. A Question and a Secret Meeting (3-8)

### 1. Herod's Question (3-6)

- a. "When King Herod heard this news from the wisemen about a new king, he was disturbed (Gk., *etarachthe*)." (3)
  - 1) The translation "disturbed" is not strong enough. He was in great turmoil, terrified, and extremely agitated. He feared for his throne and perhaps his life.
  - 2) To slightly modify a common saying, "If the king ain't happy, ain't nobody is happy." All Jerusalem, especially the leaders serving with Herod were also "disturbed" (3).
  - 3) Remember the cruelty and jealousy of King Herod even toward his own sons and family.
    - a) Herod the Great (75 BCE – 4 BCE) was the founder of the Herodian Dynasty,
    - b) Herod was an Idumean. His father was an Edomite, which displeased the Jews whom he ruled.
    - c) Herod was appointed King of the Jews by the Roman Senate in 40 BCE.
    - d) He was a tyrannical and paranoid ruler who banished several family members and executed three of his own sons.
- b. Herod called the "chief priests and teachers of the law" together, and asked them, ". . . where the Messiah was to be born" (4).
  - 1) Many of these leaders, especially the priests, would have been members of the Sanhedrin.
  - 2) Some of those who served may even have been a part of the Sanhedrin that would try Jesus some thirty-three years later and condemn Him to death (cf., Mk 15:64).
  - 3) These men were experts in Jewish prophecy and Law. They knew the answer.
- c. Herod's advisors quickly answered his question.
  - 1) Based on the prophecy of Mi 5:2,4, Bethlehem was the place the wisemen needed to look.
  - 2) Micah was an eighth century BCE prophet in Judah. Over seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, Micah had decried the poor leadership of the kings of Judah and looked forward prophetically to the coming of a just and righteous king to rule God's people.
  - 3) G. Campbell Morgan writes, "Micah's is the message of authority. He thundered denunciations against the false rulers of his own time, and looking on down the centuries, saw the revelation of the coming of the true King. It is the voice of the prophet of order, of authority; the voice of the prophet who uttered the sob of the nation for the King, and fore-announced His coming" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 16).
- d. Warren Wiersbe concludes, "The magi were seeking the King; Herod was opposing the King; and the Jewish priests were ignoring the King. These priests knew the Scriptures and pointed others to the Savior, *but they would not go to worship Him themselves!* They quoted Micah 5:2 but did not obey it. They were *five miles* from the very Son of God, yet they did not go to see Him! The Gentiles sought and found Him, but the Jews did not" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 28-29).

### 2. Herod's Secret Meeting (7-8)

- a. Once Herod knew where to send the wisemen, he called them back for a secret meeting.
- b. He asked them the "exact time (Gk., *chronon*) the star had appeared." This information would let him know the approximate age of the newborn king (cf., Mt 1:18), which was about two years old.

- c. Then Herod sent the wisemen to Bethlehem with a two-part command:
  - 1) “Go and search carefully for the child” (8a).
  - 2) “As soon as you find him, report to me” (8b).
- d. Herod lied when he told them that he too would “go and worship him.” (8b). The only worship Herod had in mind would be done with a sword.

### C. The Wisemen Meet Jesus (9-12)

1. Following the Star (9-10)
  - a. Miraculously, the star now led them to Bethlehem.
    - 1) The star “stopped over the place where the child was” (9).
    - 2) Blomberg notes, “. . . its motion here seems to require a supernatural event” (Blomberg, 65)
  - b. When the wisemen saw the star reveal their final destination, “they were overjoyed (Gk., *megalen sphodra*)” (10).
  - c. “What the Magi recognize as divine guidance fills them, literally, with exceedingly great joy” (Blomberg, 65).
2. Meeting Jesus (11)
  - a. Apparently, Joseph and Mary had found more suitable lodging than a stable for their little family.
  - b. First, the wisemen fulfilled their journey’s main purpose as they “bowed down and worshiped him” (11a).
  - c. Second, they offered their gifts to the new king.
    - 1) “gold” (Gk., *chruson*)
    - 2) “frankincense” (Gk., *libanon*)
    - 3) “myrrh” (Gk., *smurnan*)
  - d. Blomberg states, “The gifts used to honor the new king were typically associated with royalty. Because Matthew has not yet introduced the theme of Jesus’ death, it is not likely that he is implying it here, even though myrrh was a spice often used in embalming. Rather, all three gifts honor the Christ child as King. Gold, then as now, was a precious metal prized for its beauty and value, an appropriate regal gift. Frankincense and myrrh were fragrant spices and perfumes equally appropriate for such adoration and worship” (Blomberg, 65-66).
  - e. By giving these precious gifts, they returned to God a portion of that with which He had blessed them.
3. Returning Home (12)
  - a. One or more of the wisemen had a “dream” (Gk., *onar*)
  - b. The dream was a “warning” (Gk., *chrematisthentes*) from God to not return to Herod.
  - c. They obeyed the instructions in the dream and “returned to their country by another route” (12).

### D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. How long did you search for Jesus until you found Him, or He found you?
2. Are you still seeking Jesus in your life every day?
3. What was your response when you first met Jesus as your Savior and Lord? What is your response to His presence in your life today?
4. What gifts (e.g., money, time, talents) has God entrusted to you? Are you giving them back to Him in loving service and submission as your Creator and Redeemer?
5. Are you listening to the Spirit’s guidance in your life? If not, you may encounter serious problems. We must listen, hear, and obey God’s direction each day in every situation of life.

# We Three Kings of Orient Are

We three kings of orient are,  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar  
Field and fountain,  
Moor and mountain,  
Following yonder star.

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

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

[Chorus]

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

[Chorus]

Myrrh is mine,  
Its bitter perfume breathes  
A life of gathering gloom.  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

[Chorus]

Glorious now behold Him arise,  
King and God and Sacrifice!  
Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia,  
Heaven to earth replies.

[Chorus]