



**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**

GOD IS STILL SPEAKING TO US

**God spoke to many people during
the first Christmas story.**

What did He say?

Is He still speaking today?

**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**

Matthew 2

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, Matthew 2:1



DO YOU HEAR
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saying, “Where is
He who has been
born King of the
Jews? For we saw
His star in the east
and have come to
worship Him.”
Matthew 2:2

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

Magi were urban scholars from Babylonia (in their day, Parthia), at home among the academies and libraries of Babylon, who fastidiously studied the remnants of a rich 4,000-year-old Mesopotamian civilization. By the end of the first century BC the use of cuneiform as a literary medium had very nearly expired, but these learned and wise men of Babylon still probed the mysteries of the universe through already ancient cuneiform texts that recorded means of reckoning time and tracking the starry host. In addition, Babylon was home to a large and influential Jewish population that had found it more economically expedient to remain “by the waters of Babylon” (Psalm 137:1) than return from exile to Judea, and from them these Magi certainly knew the stories and prophecies of the Old Testament as well (cf. Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 60:3).

Magi were not merely sorcerers or magicians; nor were they simply astrologers, although they did observe the stars. They were sages, wise men, often in positions of responsibility but sometimes commanding respect because of their wisdom even when not holding office. These Magi came from the Medo-Persian Empire or Babylon.

“His star” in Matthew 2 alludes to Numbers 24:17, where Balaam prophesies, “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob.” Balaam’s prophecy would have been known by the magi from the east (Babylon) and caused them to look for a special star announcing the birth of a Jewish king. - Jewish New Testament Commentary

**DO YOU HEAR
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Balaam the son of Be'or was a Gentile oracle of Babylonian origin (Numbers 22:5, Deuteronomy 23:4). He had a strong reputation that whoever he blessed was blessed and whoever he cursed was cursed (Numbers 22:6). In this prophecy, he describes a star coming out of Jacob. The star was a symbol used in the ancient Middle East to refer to a king. For example, in the Mari Tablets (dated to a time just after the time of Abraham), kings are described as stars. This concept of kingship is further reinforced by the reference to a scepter, which is a symbol of royalty.

It is Balaam who makes the specific connection between the future Messianic King of Israel and a star. In 1967 AD, archaeologists discovered the Deir' Alla inscriptions in Jordan, written in Aramaic and dated to around 800 BC. These inscriptions are attributed to Balaam the Son of Be'or, indicating that he was still well-respected centuries later. This explains how Babylonian astrologers had access to Balaam's prophecy, which connected a future Jewish king to the symbol of a star. He was one of them, a respected Babylonian astrologer whose prophecies they revered.

But the Magi lacked one detail... where, precisely, Messiah would be born. Why? Because Micah (who prophesied that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea) was not a Babylonian and never went to Babylon, therefore the wise men never had access to the prophecies he made back in the land of Israel. Rather, their best guess was that the Messiah would be born in Jerusalem, which makes sense as this was also known as the city of David. - Nigel Christensen

**DO YOU HEAR
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What was the star?

JUPITER

The wise men referenced in the Biblical story are accepted to have been top-notch astrologers. In astrology speak, Jupiter is the King planet and around the birth of Jesus, it completed a retrograde loop (backward motion among the stars) near to Regulus in Leo, the King star! The interaction in the sky between these two objects would have been a sign to the astrologers of the birth of a new King.

A COMET

Comets occasionally produce a stunning show in our night sky with the tail of the comet giving an arrow-like appearance. There was one such bright comet in Capricorn in around 5 BC. Calculations have shown that it would have appeared low in the sky from the area surrounding Jerusalem, with its tail likely pointing almost vertically.

DO YOU HEAR
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What was the star?

CONJUNCTION

One of the more striking naked-eye events in the night sky is an alignment of two or more of the brighter planets. There are a number of conjunctions that might have been interpreted as an event that was pretty significant. Of particular interest might have been a rare conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn.

NOVA

The sighting of a new star, or 'nova', was recorded by Far Eastern astronomers in 4 BC in the constellation Aquila. This stellar outburst was visible to the naked eye and would have been visible from Jerusalem.

Source: <http://news.discovery.com/space/astronomy/>

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They certainly traced one of the great caravan routes of antiquity, north, west and then south along the bend of the Fertile Crescent toward Judea, following roughly the same path that Abraham had trod two millennia before. Geographical logic suggests that once the Magi reached Damascus they probably would have continued to follow the caravan route due south, toward the Arabian Peninsula.



Routes for the journey of the Magi follow the path of geographical logic—from the Transjordanian spice route to Jerusalem by way of Jericho, then back east via a more southern route. Any way they went the Magi had to skirt one or more of Herod's palace fortresses. It was a journey of great personal risk, one that took the Magi, like Abraham, far from their comfort zone into a land known only to God. Overcoming every obstacle, the travelers persisted—and rejoiced when at last they gazed at the divine child face-to-face.

<https://blog.rose-publishing.com/2017/11/29/who-are-magi-three-wise-men/#.Xgiaq0dKg2x>

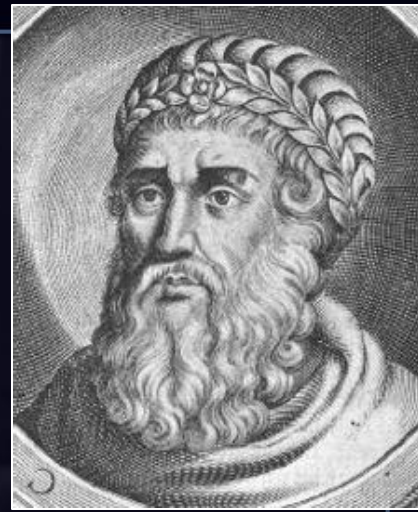
**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Matthew 2:3

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

King Herod the Great

In 40 BC, the Roman Senate appointed Herod I as king of the Jews. Herod, an Idumean, took Jerusalem in 37 BC and until his death in 4 BC, Herod ruled as king of the Jews.



Herod constructed the magnificently planned and constructed port city of Caesarea Maritima. The crown of his constructions was the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which he rebuilt on a grandiose scale. The project, begun in 20 BC, was not completed until AD 62, and it is this Temple that Jesus and His disciples knew.

Herod also fortified his realm with a string of impressive wilderness fortresses. Eventually, Herod ordered the execution of his Hasmonean wife, Mariamne, of their two sons, of other members of the Hasmonean family, and of his son Antipater.

Gathering together all the [Jewish] chief priests and scribes of the people, he [King Herod] inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”

Matthew 2:4-6 [quoting Micah 5:2]

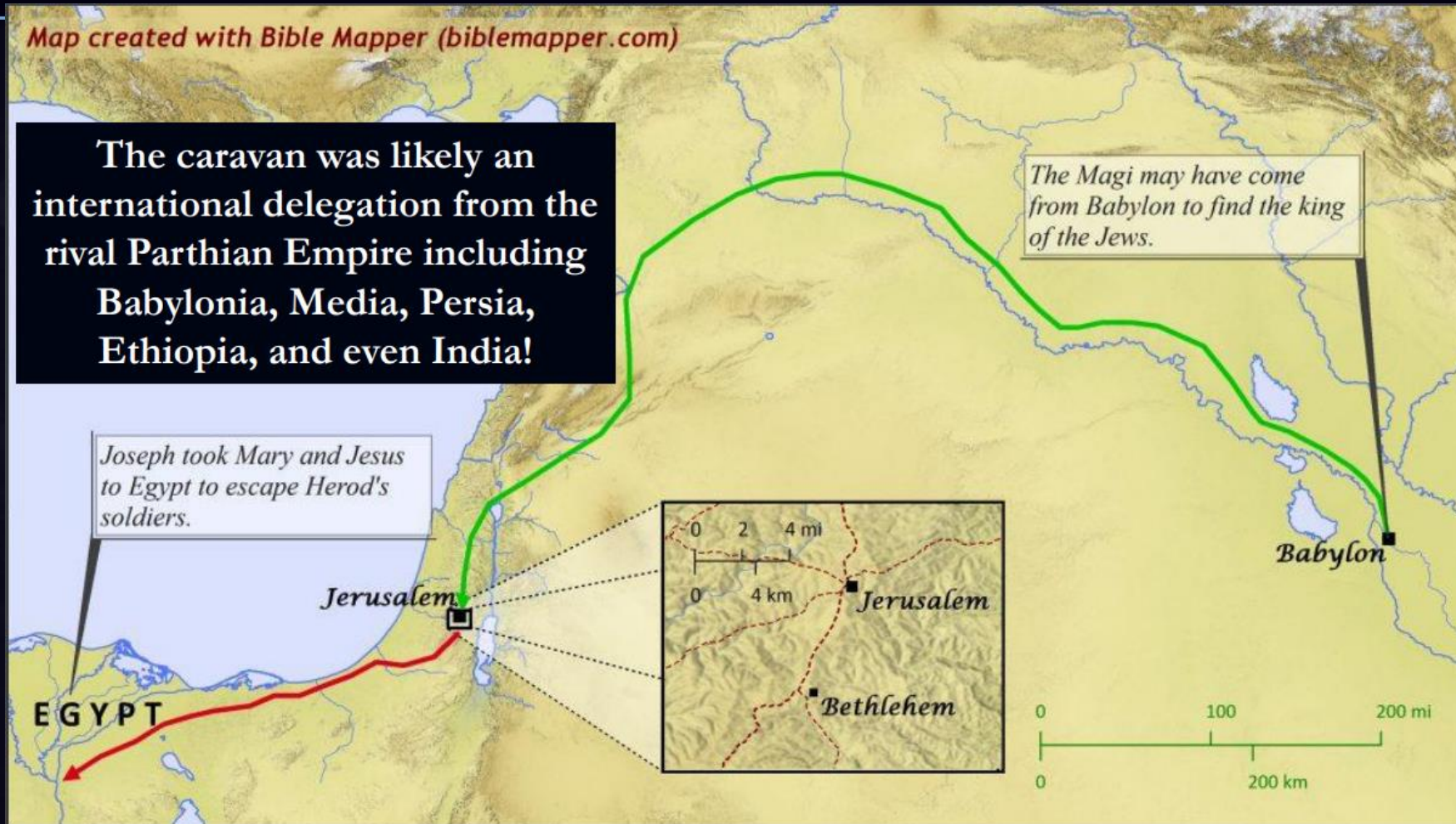
DO YOU HEAR
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Map created with Bible Mapper (biblemapper.com)

The caravan was likely an international delegation from the rival Parthian Empire including Babylonia, Media, Persia, Ethiopia, and even India!

The Magi may have come from Babylon to find the king of the Jews.

Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's soldiers.



Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. Matthew 2:7

DO YOU HEAR
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How long was the journey of the Magi?

For on the first of the first month he [Ezra] began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. Ezra 7:9

Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem for at least 40 days, until the end of Mary's purification. (Luke 2:22)

After discovering the time the Magi saw the star, King Herod orders all male children 2 years and under to be killed in and around Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:16)

Baby Jesus would have been between a minimum of 4 months old and a maximum of 2.5 years old.

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Once they determined that the new star heralded the birth of the prophesied King of the Jews, the wise men selected gifts and assembled a caravan for protection as they traveled. This took additional time. The journey would cover about 900 miles.

It is likely that the star appeared to the wise men at the time of the birth of Jesus. The time to search the royal library for a reference to the meaning of the star, the time needed to assemble the caravan in order to travel safely, selection of a departure date to have the most favorable weather, and actual travel time must be included in the interval between seeing the star and arriving in Jerusalem.

And he [King Herod] sent them [magi] to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”
Matthew 2:8

- What do you do when people lie and pretend about their commitment to Jesus? When people say one thing and live another? Have we ever done that?

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

After hearing the king, they [magi] went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child [παιδίον *paidion*] was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
Matthew 2:9-10

*Luke 2:12 calls Jesus a βρέφος *brephos* “infant, baby”

DO YOU HEAR
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After coming into the house [οἰκία *oikia*] they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and **worshiped** Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

It was perhaps somewhere along this Nabatean spice route that they secured gifts of frankincense and myrrh (aromatic gum resins) and gold. Turning westward at the northern end of the Dead Sea, the Magi would have crossed into Judea at Jericho, passing in the shadow of the large and sumptuous winter palace of Herod the Great. The king was suffering through the last and very paranoid years of his reign. Arriving in Jerusalem, the Magi inquired, perhaps naïvely, for the one “born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:1–2). Herod saw only Parthians, bent on grabbing control of his realm and reestablishing a legitimate (though puppet) Jewish ruling line, as they had tried to do at the beginning of his reign thirty-five years before. Herod’s response to kill all of the potential candidates who might usurp his throne is true to his character (Matthew 2:3–8, 2:16–18).

- Who Were the Magi or the Three Wise Men? <https://wp.me/p3gfPC-1Kk>

**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**

Gold has always spoken the language of royalty. Throughout Scripture, it is associated with kingship, authority, and enduring worth (cf. 1 Kings 10:18–25; Psalm 21:3). By offering gold, the Magi proclaimed that Jesus was born a King. Not one who would seize power later, but one who possessed authority right from the very beginning. Matthew frames Jesus' birth within royal expectation, quoting Micah's prophecy that a ruler would come from Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6). Even before Jesus preached a sermon or performed a miracle, the gold gifted to Him declared what Pilate would later question and the cross would paradoxically affirm "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

– Undaunted Disciple

**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**

Frankincense belonged to the realm of worship. In Israel's sacrificial system, it was reserved for sacred use, burned on the altar and mixed into holy incense as an offering pleasing to the Lord (Exodus 30:34–38; Leviticus 2:1–2). The psalmist describes prayer rising to God “like incense” (Psalm 141:2), and Revelation echoes this image, linking incense with the prayers of the saints before God's throne (Revelation 5:8). By offering frankincense, the Magi acknowledged that Jesus was not only royal but holy, the One through whom true worship would be made possible. This anticipates Jesus' later declaration that worship would no longer be confined to a place, but centered on Himself (John 4:21–24). Frankincense quietly announces that Jesus would be our High Priest, the mediator between God and humanity (Hebrews 4:14–16).

– Undaunted Disciple

**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**

Myrrh introduces a sobering note into the story. It was used medicinally (Mark 15:23) but also, significantly, in burial practices. John records that after Jesus' crucifixion, Nicodemus brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight" to prepare His body for burial (John 19:39). The presence of myrrh at Jesus' birth foreshadows His death. It reminds us that His mission from the beginning included suffering. Isaiah had already spoken of a Servant who would be "pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). And Jesus Himself later taught that the Son of Man came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Myrrh stands as a quiet witness that the cradle was always moving toward the cross. Together, the gifts form a complete testimony.

Gold proclaims Jesus as King (Matthew 2:2). **Frankincense** proclaims Him as Priest and divine mediator (Hebrews 7:26–27). **Myrrh** proclaims Him as the Suffering Savior (Isaiah 53:3; John 19:39). They reveal the fullness of who Jesus is and the purpose of His first coming, to reign in righteousness, to reconcile humanity to God, and to redeem through sacrifice. The Magi did not preach sermons. They offered gifts. Yet those gifts spoke clearly, prophetically, and enduringly.

– Undaunted Disciple

**DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?**



And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.
Matthew 2:12

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

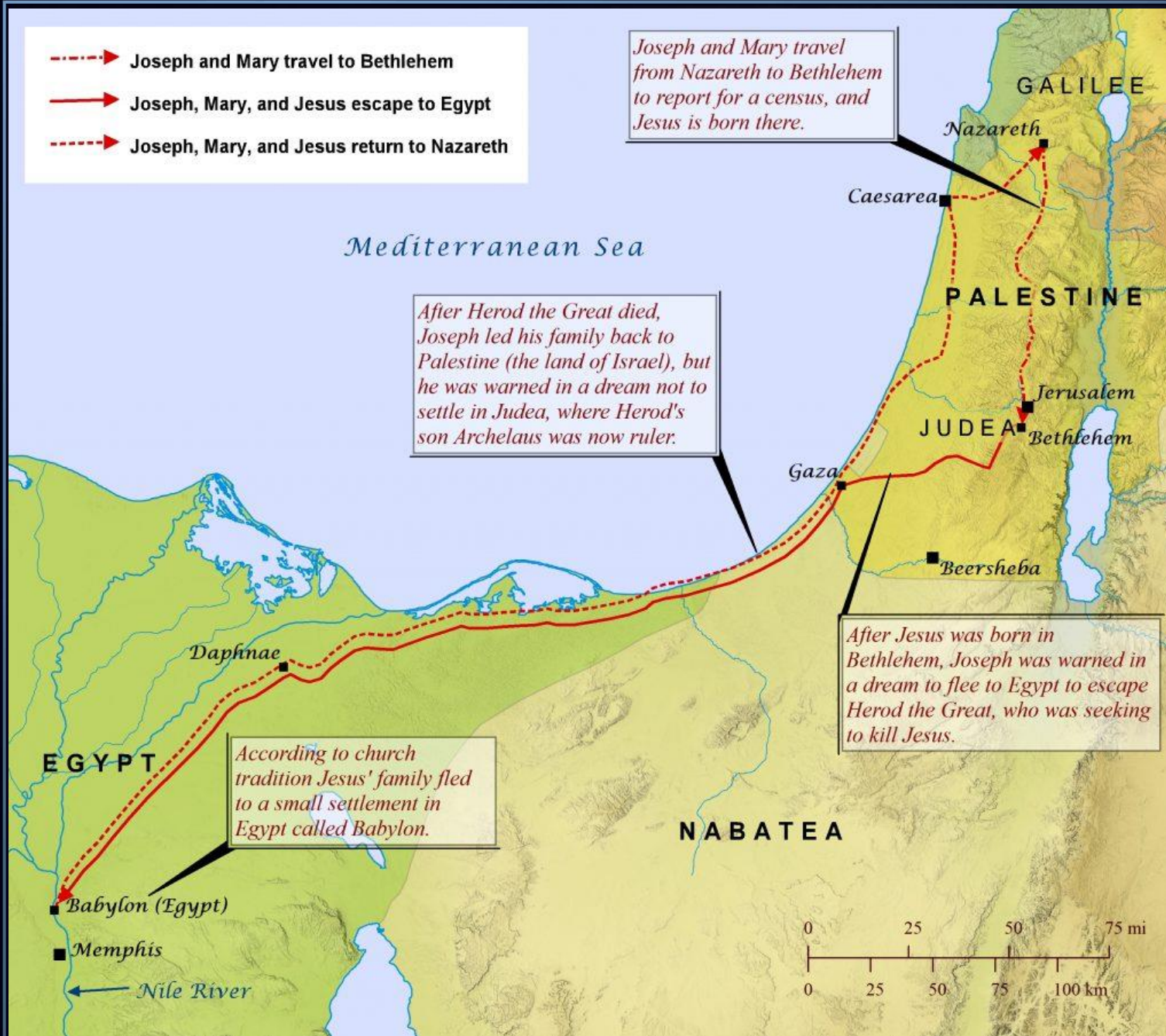


Possibly they left Bethlehem by following the narrow, twisted bottom of the Kidron Valley, winding their way through the wilderness and past Herod's fortress at Hyrcania to the upper end of the Dead Sea, then around its top to the Transjordanian highway and home. This became the "monk and pilgrim" route connecting Jerusalem and Bethlehem with the Judean Wilderness monasteries during the Byzantine period. Or, they followed the ridge heading southeast out of Bethlehem past the Herodium to En-gedi, then crossed the Dead Sea at the Lisan Peninsula. Either way would have minimized contacts with Herod and his henchmen.

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Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.” So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod [the Great]. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” Matthew 2:13-15 [quoting Hosea 11:1]

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?



Family flees to Egypt in Matthew chapter 2

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

When Joseph and Mary escaped with the baby Jesus to Egypt in 5 or 4 BC, it was a friendly neighbor of Judaea with a large Jewish community. Following the defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII (the last Ptolemaic (Greek) ruler of Egypt) by Octavian (Augustus Caesar) at the Battle of Actium in 31BC, Egypt had become part of the Roman Empire.

Its large Jewish community dated from the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 BC. Six months after the appointment of Gedeliah as Governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, Ishmael (a descendent of the King of Judah) had assassinated Gedeliah at Mizpah and had escaped to Egypt. Fearing reprisals, all the Israelites at Mizpah had fled to Egypt, taking with them the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 40:6, 41:1-2, 41:16-18, 43:1-5). The Jews settled at Migdol, Tahpanhes and Memphis in the Nile Delta region of Lower Egypt (see Jeremiah 44:1).

After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, the Jewish community prospered under the Ptolemaic (Greek) pharaohs, and adopted Greek as their native language. As new generations grew up unfamiliar with Hebrew, a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (the 'Septuagint') was made for the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt in the 2nd century BC.

After the sacking of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC and the erection of the 'abomination of desolation' (a statue of Zeus) in the Temple (see Daniel 11:31, 12:11), the Jews in Egypt built their own Jewish temple near Memphis, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah (see Isaiah 19:18-21). This Jewish temple was destroyed by the Romans in 72 AD, at a time of intense hostility towards the Jews following the Romano-Jewish War of 66-70AD and the fall of Masada – the last Jewish stronghold – in 73 AD. But this temple would have been the center of a large Jewish community when Mary and Joseph arrived in Egypt in ca. 5BC.

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.
Matthew 2:16

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

The 'massacre of the innocents' was typical of Herod's extreme behavior recorded independently by the Jewish historian Josephus. Herod was intensely jealous and chronically insecure. He had suffered a severe breakdown in 29 BC after he murdered his favorite wife Mariamne and his brother-in-law Joseph after falsely accusing them of having an affair.

As recently as 7 BC, Herod had executed his own sons Aristobulus and Alexander (whom he accused of plotting to take the throne) and the following year, around the time of Jesus's birth, he tortured each of his slave-girls in turn to reveal any further threats to his authority. In 4 BC Herod executed his own son Antipater.

Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.”

Matthew 2:17-18 [quoting Jeremiah 31:15]

The first mention of Bethlehem in Scripture is in connection with the death of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel (Gen. 35:16–20). Rachel died giving birth to a son whom she named Benoni, “son of my sorrow.” Jacob renamed his son Benjamin, “son of my right hand.” Both names relate to Jesus, for He was a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), and He is now the Son of God's right hand (Acts 5:31; Heb. 1:3). Jacob put up a pillar to mark Rachel's grave near Bethlehem.

Jeremiah's prophecy was given about 600 years before Jesus was born. It grew out of the captivity of Jerusalem. Some captives were taken to Ramah in Benjamin, near Jerusalem; and this reminded Jeremiah of Jacob's sorrow when Rachel died. However, now it was Rachel who was weeping. She represented the mothers of Israel weeping as they saw their sons going into captivity. It was as though Rachel said, “I gave my life to bear a son, and now his descendants are no more.”

Jacob saw Bethlehem as a place of death, but the birth of Jesus made it a place of life! Because of His coming, there would be spiritual deliverance for Israel and, in the future, the establishment of David's throne and kingdom. Israel, “the son of my sorrow,” would one day become “the son of My right hand.” Jeremiah gave a promise to the nation that they would be restored to their land again (Jer. 31:16–17), and this promise was fulfilled. But he gave an even greater promise that the nation would be regathered in the future, and the kingdom established (Jer. 31:27). This promise shall also be fulfilled.

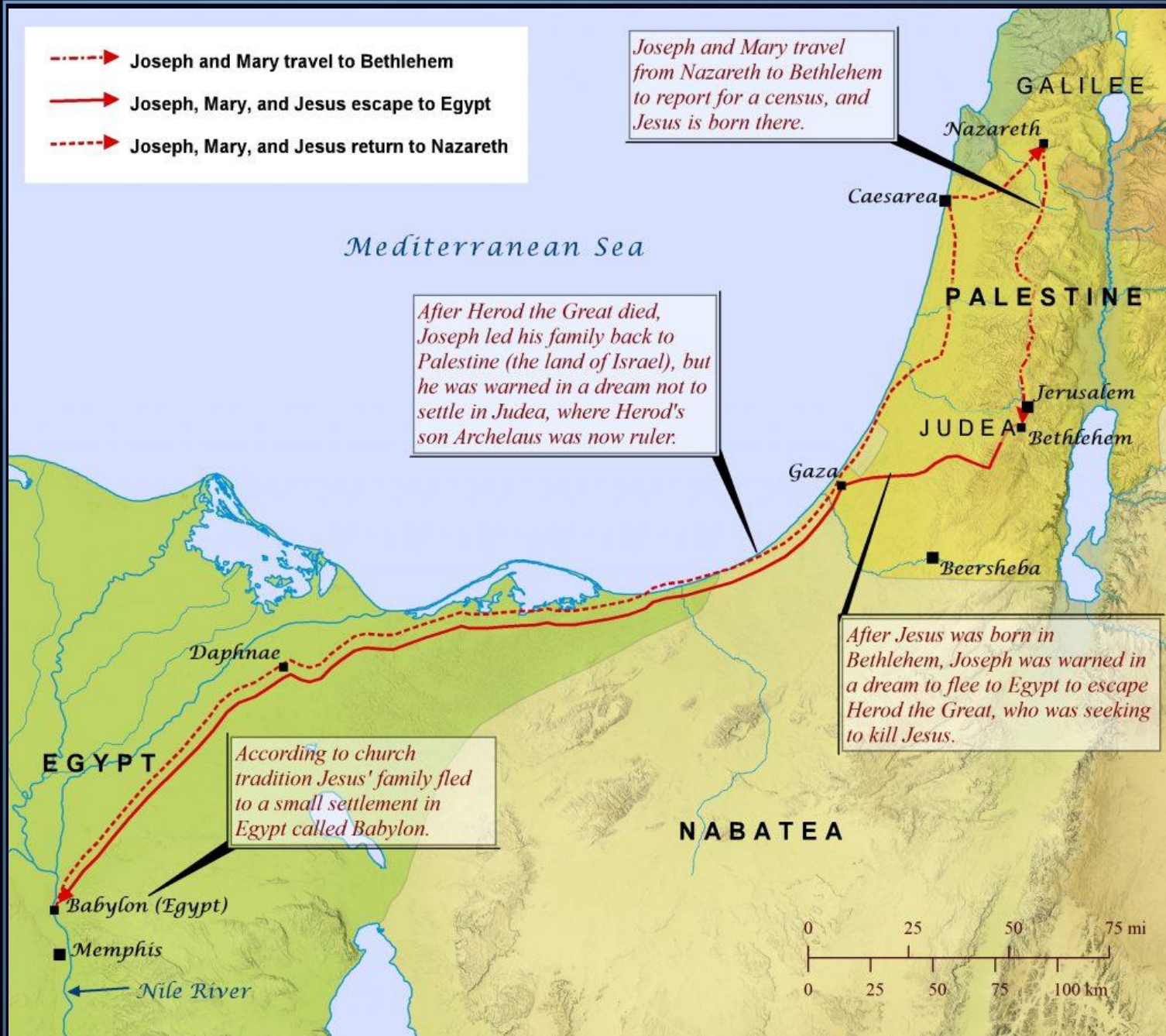
Joseph's 3rd of 4 Dreams

But when Herod [the Great] died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." Matthew 2:19-20

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” Genesis 4:19

*As God’s Son, Jesus was in Egypt and was called out to go to Israel. Moses was outside Egypt, hiding for his life, and he was called to return to Egypt. But in both cases, God’s program of redemption was involved. It took courage for Joseph and his family to leave Egypt, and it took courage for Moses to return to Egypt.



Family
leaves Egypt
in Matthew
chapter 2 to
return to
Judea

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus [son of Herod the Great, ruler over Judea and Samaria] was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he [and Mary and Jesus] left [Egypt] for the regions of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: “He shall be called a Nazarene.” Matthew 2:21-23

DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR?

- We will not find any specific prophecy that called Jesus a “Nazarene.” The term Nazarene was one of reproach: “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) In many Old Testament prophecies, the Messiah’s lowly life of rejection is mentioned; and this may be what Matthew had in mind (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53:2–3, 8).
- The term “Nazarene” was applied both to Jesus and His followers (Acts 24:5); and He was often called “Jesus of Nazareth” (Matthew 21:11; Mark 14:67; John 18:5, 7).
- Perhaps Matthew, led by the Spirit, saw a spiritual connection between the name “Nazarene” and Hebrew word *netzer* נֶצֶר, which means “a branch or shoot.” Several prophets apply this title to Jesus (Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12–13).
- Jesus grew up in Nazareth and was identified with that city. His enemies thought He had been born there; for they said that He came from Galilee (John 7:50–52). Had they investigated the temple records, they would have discovered that He had been born in Bethlehem.
- Who ever heard of a king being born in a humble village and growing up in a despised city? The humility of the King is certainly something to admire and imitate (Philippians 2:1–13).

A journey from the East to Judea was not casual. Traveling hundreds of miles across deserts required protection, resources, servants or attendants, supplies, animals, security. It is far more likely that the Magi arrived as a delegation, not as three solitary travelers. Their arrival caused enough disturbance that “all Jerusalem was troubled with him” (Matthew 2:3). That level of alarm suggests a visible, noticeable group, not a quiet trio slipping into town. This was not a small visit. It was a public arrival. It reveals something profound about the Gospel. Jesus was not revealed only to Israel’s shepherds. He was also revealed to the nations’ scholars, to Gentiles. The Magi represent the reach of Christ beyond ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries. From the very beginning, the Messiah was drawing the world, not just one people, to Himself. When we shrink the Magi to three familiar figures, we unintentionally shrink the scope of the story. This was not a private moment. It was a global announcement. Matthew is deliberate in what he includes and what he leaves unsaid. He does not number the Magi because the point was never their count, it was their posture, their intentions. They traveled far. They searched diligently. They bowed humbly. They gave generously. And then, warned by God, they obeyed quietly and went home another way. They were not part of the covenant people. They did not grow up with the prophets. Yet they saw the sign and followed it faithfully. Indeed, sometimes those we least expect are the ones who see Christ most clearly. And sometimes the story is far bigger than the version we’ve always been told. There were more Magi than we thought. And from the very beginning, Jesus was never meant to be small.

Prophets Predicted The Arrival Of The Magi

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather together, they come to you. **Your sons will come from afar**, and your daughters will be carried in the arms. Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, the wealth of the nations will come to you. A multitude of camels will cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba will come; **they will bring gold and frankincense, and will bear good news of the praises of the Lord**. All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; they will go up with acceptance on My altar, and I shall glorify My glorious house.”

Isaiah 60:1-7

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The first recorded worshipers of Jesus outside Israel were Gentiles. Outsiders. Foreigners. Men who did not have the Law or the Prophets in full, but who responded to the light they were given. They traveled years for a glimpse. The Magi crossed deserts and empires to find Christ. They searched the skies, studied signs, and risked their lives for one encounter. We are invited to meet Him daily. We have Scripture in our language. We have prayer without distance. We have access without danger. And yet, we still sometimes have the audacity to say we are too busy. Too tired. Too distracted. Too occupied. The Magi remind us that Jesus is worth the journey, no matter the cost. And they quietly confront us with a sobering question If they traveled years to worship Him once, what excuse do we have for neglecting Him when He is always near? We do not need to read the stars or travel far for so long anymore. The Messiah has already been found. The question is no longer how far must we travel, but why do we still hesitate to come?

How do we respond to the baby born at Christmas?

- **Like Herod** – with hostility, hate, wanting nothing of God's way except to attack and destroy it
- **Like the chief priests and scribes** – with indifference, paying little attention to God or His way; what they know of God they do not accept or obey
- **Like the Magi** – with worship; they accept the Lord when He comes to them; they believe, obey, and then worship; their lives are changed forever

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