

Seek Jesus  
January 3, 2021

There are several miracles associated with the Christmas story. The virgin birth is the most prominent. But there are also the three angel visits, the old-age pregnancy of Elizabeth, and the special star that the magi saw.

The word magi is an English pronunciation of the Greek word *mah-gose*. This word was used as a label for various people. It may have been used for those who practiced slight-of-hand like our magicians. It was used of advisers to kings. It was used for men of great wisdom, like King Solomon. And it was used as a label for men who studied the stars.

So, we can't nail down exactly what all these particular magi were. They may have been more than stargazers. But they were at least that, for they had noticed a new and special star. We read their story in Matthew 2.

**Matthew 2:1-11 (NIV)** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "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."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

The miracle of the magi story is the star. The star appeared again to show them the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. That special star was a miracle from God. This star moved and then stopped. If you go out tonight and look straight up, you may notice some stars directly overhead. If you could instantly travel a hundred miles in any direction those same stars would still look directly overhead.

The star these men saw moved south of their position in Jerusalem, and then stopped moving once they were in Bethlehem, a small village scarcely 6 miles south of Jerusalem. It did not act like any star they had ever seen before.

We do not know from where the prophecy about this star came. It might have come from one of the Old Testament prophets. If so, it was not recorded among the books by their names. Or it may have come from an additional prophet of God to the ones we know of. We DO know that there are other ancient documents of the Jews and Christians that we do not have available to us today. Let me give

you several examples. The first comes at the end of King Jeroboam's life in the book of First Kings. The passage details some of what Jeroboam experienced as king of Israel. Then it says of him...

**1 Kings 14:19 (NIV) The other events of Jeroboam's reign, his wars and how he ruled, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.**

There are three such books mentioned in 1 & 2 Kings of the Bible. There is the Book of the Annals of the King Solomon. There is the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah. And there is this one, the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. None of the three have survived the centuries. These three books did not fit in God's plan for the Bible.

A New Testament example is in Paul's letter to the church in the city of Colossae.

**Colossians 4:16 (NIV) After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.**

So Paul wrote a letter to the church of Laodicea, a town about 9 miles from Colossae. But that letter did not make it into the New Testament. It was not part of God's will for us to read it.

I point these extra-biblical writings out to show that God picked certain writings to become part of the Bible. The books we have are not a collection of all that was available to Jews and Christians back then. The ones that made it into the Bible did by God's hand.

It is no stretch of the imagination, then, to hypothesize that God had prophets other than the ones named in the Old Testament, and prophecies meant only for the ancient peoples.

But these magi were not Jews. So how did they have these prophecies? Why did they know what the new, special star meant?

I remind you from ancient Jewish history that the Jews lived in exile in Babylon for 70 years. In that time they learned about the Babylonian religion even as the Babylonian religious leaders learned about the Jewish religion. Some of these pagan priests did not see in the Jewish religion a rival to their own. Instead, like some Hindus of today, they incorporated aspects of Judaism into their own belief system. The prophecy about the star was shared with them during these 70 years and they took it seriously enough to keep watch for the several hundred years its arrival.

It may be that the Jews of the first century also had access to this ancient prophecy, but it appears that they were not looking for the star. So we see their surprise when the magi came with the news.

We have some further clues about the magi from the text. We can surmise that since it took so long to make this journey they were either rich individuals themselves, or they came as emissaries from an eastern king. Likely they had servants and guards with them for safer traveling.

We do not know how many magi there were. Tradition makes it three simply because three different gifts are mentioned. But Matthew, like most writers of the time, was not giving us an exhaustive list of the gifts. He simply mentions three, maybe the most valuable ones. There may very well have been more kinds of gifts, or multiples of these three gifts by more than three magi.

The magi traveled to the capital of the Jewish people, the city of Jerusalem. At that time Herod the Great was king over Israel, under the Romans. Let's go back to the text and learn more of Herod.

**Matthew 2:12-18 (NIV)** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Some readers of the Bible find it hard to believe that Herod had all these young boys killed. But other ancient documents record what kind of man Herod was. Herod was a tyrant king. He was evil. Herod banished one wife and son so that he could marry another woman. Later he killed her and her two sons, her grandfather, and others who he thought might plot to steal his throne.

So it is not beyond moral imagination that he would end the life of a hundred or so peasant children. The arrival of the magi with news of a rival king did indeed bring out the worst in King Herod. That is why the whole city was troubled by this news.

But the magi were treated well. Herod seeks to find out where to look for this rival king and do away with him. So he calls in the Jewish religious experts to see where the Messiah was to be born. For that is who they believed the prophecy to be about. The king asked specifically where the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one, was to be born. The word Messiah means "anointed one" in Hebrew. And the word Christ means the same in Greek. The term "anointed one" comes from the ancient practice of pouring oil upon the head of the one chosen to be king. We see the prophet Samuel do this to both King Saul and King David in the Bible. The Messiah is the anointed one of God, chosen to rule the Israelites.

We don't know if the religious leaders knew off the top of their heads the answer or had to google it. But the answer was in the Old Testament prophecies.. The place was Bethlehem, a small village only 6 miles south of Jerusalem. Anyone could have walked there in a day.

Now, make note of this. As far as we know, no one accompanied the magi to Bethlehem. None of the Jewish priests or experts in the law bothered to go themselves to Bethlehem. They probably feared Herod's wrath. But even so, this was the Messiah. Surely SOMEONE was interested enough to seek out his new king? But no, no one accompanied the magi to Bethlehem. Of those Jews who SHOULD have been looking for the arrival of Jesus, none sought him out. None was seeking Jesus.

It is much the same today. Many people around the world celebrate Christmas, but few seek Jesus.

For example, Christmas Eve is a big deal in Japan. But it is not seen as a religious day. Japan's view of Christmas more resembles our Valentines Day. It is a time to buy your girlfriend a special gift and have a chicken dinner. KFC in Japan does its biggest business on Christmas Eve. Very few people there know of the origin of Christmas. Even fewer seek Jesus.

In our own country Christmas is a big deal. It is the biggest holiday of the year. But how many people really associate it with Jesus? For many people Christmas is about traditions of their childhood, getting a big present, visiting relatives, special lights and other decorations. But how many are seeking Jesus?

Even for those who call themselves Christians, how many are seeking Jesus? They seek church or some romanticized Christmas spirit, whatever that is. But they do not seek Jesus.

Christianity is first a relationship with the Lord Jesus. He intends it to be a intimate and personal.

But for that to happen, you must seek Him. You must spend time with Him. You must communicate yourself and your life to him. And you must listen for his response. That response may come through the Bible or the Holy Spirit as you meditate on something in the Bible. But relationships are built on communication. I am talking about prayer.

**Whatever else you hope for in this new year make it a goal to seek a closer relationship to Jesus.**