

Matthew 2 Flight from Herod

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

We are now introduced to a king named Herod, who was the ruler of the land of Judea at the time of Jesus birth. Herod was a very cruel man who craved power and authority. He was not Jewish, he was a descendant of Isaac’s son Esau, the brother of Jacob. He had been appointed to the position of king of Judea by the current Roman Caesar, who was a world leader at the time. Herod was a true politician and built a great temple to the God of Israel to gain backing and control from the Jews. He also built temples to honor Caesar and some of the Greek gods in some of the gentile cities. Herod would not tolerate anyone to challenge his kingship. He had gone as far as killing his own family members. This included one of his ten wives and two his sons. If he considered anyone to be a threat to his power, he would eliminate them.

He maintained control of many Jews, through the Jewish temple. He had even appointed the temple priest and sold the position of High Priest.

Matthew doesn’t cover the story of the birth of Jesus, like you find in the gospel of Luke. Luke covers details starting with the messenger angles marking the path to Jesus, through John the Baptist to Jesus birth in a manger. In Texas we call a manger a barn. Matthew tells the story of a coming king and how He effects the history of a nation.

Chapter two picks up after the birth of Jesus. This is not the Christmas story you saw in your church play. It addresses the actions of the reigning king, known as Herod. Why should the king of the land be concerned with the birth of a child to a poor family headed by a carpenter? Something occurred which got Herod’s attention. He was curious of a large group of wise men, known as magi.

We always see a Christmas play with three kings but there were no kings other than Herod and the child Jesus. Matthew introduces a group of men known as magi. They were most likely Persian astrologers and dream-interpreters, who studied the stars. In their day they would have been considered men of science. Some of them studied ancient writings such as Persian, Greek and Jewish (old testament). Add to this God probably guided them by dreams, because the king of the Jews was born. The magi didn’t show up on the day of Jesus birth, months had gone by. They didn’t greet Jesus in the manger (barn), but in a house. Joseph and Mary did not leave Bethlehem but stayed for months, after Jesus birth, this was part of God’s plan. The magi had journeyed from the east to greet a king. The first place you look for a king is in a palace. They would have come to the king’s palace in Jerusalem, to find the new king of the Jews. They would have come with a large caravan, to bring gifts and meet the new heir to the king of Judea. They told king Herod they had come following a star. Not just any star, but a star that marked the

birth of a great king. Men will ask, what star was it? It was the star God provided to fulfill prophecy. I could not find any information about the star in the bible. The magi had some traditions or writings detailing a star that would proclaim the time and location of the birth of a king in Judea. The bible doesn't even tell how long the magi had followed the star, probably months. We only know the bible says they followed the star, so there was a star.

It's amazing no Jewish scribes or Pharisees weren't there following the fulfillment of prophecy leading to the coming Messiah.

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

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled, when the large group of magi, including their caravan showed up at the palace of Judea to greet the new king of the Jews. If there was a challenge to the throne of Herod, he wanted to know about it.

Herod called together the chief priest and the scribes to find out if there were scriptures of prophecy that would tell where the Messiah was to be born. While the priest were Herod's appointees, the scribes were men who had devoted their lives to searching the scriptures. They were men who had great head knowledge of scripture but lacked spiritual discernment.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

The scribes finally get around to finding something about the birth of their Messiah. They searched the scriptures and determine He will be born in Bethlehem. Rather than going to Bethlehem to meet the new king and promised Messiah, they simply give the information to the ruthless Herod.

One place the scribes find is Micah 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Isaiah 9: 6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. *These are prophetic scriptures being fulfilled.*

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

Herod met with the magi and questioned them about when the star first appeared. He wanted to have an idea of how old the child would be. He would use this information to protect his position as king. He sent the magi on peacefully to bring back the child’s location so he could worship the child and honor the King of the Jews.

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

The star they saw was in the west. When they saw the star, they were in the east. If they had followed the star, to the east, they would have traveled in the direction of China. They saw the star, when they were in the east and called it the eastern star. They followed the star to the west and came to Jerusalem and on to Bethlehem.

I don’t know if this was an actual star in outer space or a bright light in the sky. To them it looked like a star and could be seen, in the sky. Whatever it was, God provided them with a sign to locate Jesus, the King of the Jews.

11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The star was so specific it stopped over the very house where Jesus lived. They stopped the caravan and entered the home. They saw the child and his mother and fell to the ground and worshiped the child. Notice they didn’t worship His mother, they worshipped Him. They didn’t recognize him as a child who one day would be the king, they honored him as a King. They brought Him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Traditionally gold represent a king or power; frankincense, a form of incense, represents worship; myrrh represents death. These would be gifts worthy of a king. These were gifts of great expense, which the common man could not afford. These gifts were offered joyously by the magi. These three gifts, the gold, frankincense and myrrh are the only gifts listed in the scripture. Based on the three gifts, many assume there were only three wisemen, but there could have been many more. These three gifts are listed, because they are worthy of a king and can have other symbolic meaning.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

The group of magi were told by Herod to locate the child king then return to Herod and inform him of the location of the child king, so Herod could worship him too. God warned the magi not to return to Herod and to return to their home.

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”

The magi have left, to return to their homeland. One of God’s angels appears to Joseph and tells him to flee to Egypt and stay there until he is told to leave Egypt. Now that the magi have come and left their presents; Joseph doesn’t need to worry about financing the trip to Egypt or how to support his family there.

14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Joseph didn’t wait any time. He arose and took his young family and left for Egypt. Joseph waited till dark. He knew Herod would send soldiers to follow and didn’t want the neighbors to see which direction he went. In Egypt there was a large Jewish presence living there, especially around Alexandria, Egypt. The family would have blended right in. Going to Egypt was also a fulfillment of prophecy.

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”

After time had passed, Herod realized the wise men were not returning. He became so angry he sent soldiers to murder all the male children in Bethlehem and in districts beyond Bethlehem, in case the child’s family had left Bethlehem and moved to another town. He knew from talking with the magi, they had seen the star from a certain time, maybe a year. To be sure he had all the male children two years and under murdered.

This caused a lamentation and weeping that was as bad as in the days of Jeremiah. Read Lamentations of Jeremiah.

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.” 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

It is believed by many scholars Joseph only stayed in Egypt for a couple of yeassr, because king Herod died. Joseph gathered his family and returned to Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 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.”

When Joseph returned to Israel, probably the same area near Bethlehem, he learned one of Herod’s sons was reigning over Judea. God warned him of the danger and Joseph left Judea and headed north to Galilee. In the land of Galilee, Joseph and his family settled in a small city called Nazareth. This fulfilled another old testament prophecy.

Within the book of Matthew, there is no information about the childhood of Jesus. Matthew is presenting all the information needed to show Jesus as a king. The next time Matthew talks about Jesus, He will be thirty years of age and preparing to start His ministry and carry out the will of the father.