

## Matthew Lesson 02

### Matthew Chapter 2

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Memory verses for this week: *Luke 12:42 And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?*

**Introduction:** We continue our study this week on the book of Matthew. In last week's lesson, we reviewed the lineage of Joseph and discussed how that while this proved him to be of the tribe of Judah, he was not the father of Christ. Jesus was born to Mary who was a virgin. We discussed how his birth was according to the prophecy of the Old Testament.

This chapter contains a major portion of the account of the birth and early life of Christ. It encompasses the coming of the wise men, Herod's slaughter, and the flight of the holy family into Egypt. The presentation focuses on the coming of the King of the Jews. Herod understood that and reacted accordingly.

#### I. Visit of the Wise Men

*Mat 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the latter years of the reign of Herod the Great. Herod was a powerful and cruel, surrogate ruler of the Roman province of Judea. It is likely that Herod died not long after Jesus was born. Matthew notes the "wise men from the east." These likely were men whom the Babylonians considered to be astrologers, physicians, or scribes.

The word translated as **wise men** (magov *magos*) is either a Babylonian or Persian word, it is likely that these men came from that area. That is plausible in as much as they likely were aware of the Hebrew Scriptures. Large numbers of Jews had lived in that area for hundreds of years as a result of the Babylonian captivity. There has been much speculation as to exactly when the wise men saw the star. Some have thought it was several years earlier because of the time it would have taken to travel to Israel. However, it would have taken them only a month or so to journey from the Persian gulf area to Jerusalem even if they came on foot.

Another consideration is the murder of the infants two years and under, as noted in 2:16. It may be that the wise men saw the star two years prior to their arrival in Jerusalem. The ancients were astute astronomers and intimately acquainted with the night skies. A new and bright star was something worthy of investigation.

They may have pondered and investigated it until they concluded that it was the fulfillment of Numbers 24:17. Therefore, it might be inferred that Jesus was of that age upon their arrival.

There is a lot of information in verse one. It tells us the exact place of Christ's birth, who the king was who was reigning at the time, and that the wise men of the east came to Jerusalem. By identifying the birth place as Bethlehem of Judea, it clearly distinguished it from the Bethlehem in Zebulun.

*Josh 19:15 And Kattath, and Nahallal, and Shimron, and Idalah, and Bethlehem: twelve cities with their villages.*

*Josh 19:16 This is the inheritance of the children of Zebulun according to their families, these cities with their villages.*

Bethlehem means the "House of Bread." The wise men were possibly not wise in the world's viewpoint, but they were wise in God's sight. Back then, a man who sought Jesus was considered a wise man. I'll say that is still true today. These came seeking Jesus from a far away land.

Matthew Henry had this about the birth of Christ in his commentary.

It was a *mark of humiliation* put upon the Lord Jesus that, though he was the *Desire of all nations*, yet his coming into the world was little observed and taken notice of, his birth was obscure and unregarded: herein he emptied himself, and made himself of no reputation. If the Son of God must be brought into the world, one might justly expect that he should be received with all the ceremony possible, that crowns and sceptres should immediately have been laid at his feet, and that the high and mighty princes of the world should have been his humble servants; such a Messiah as this the Jews expected, but we see none of all this; he *came into the world*, and the *world knew him not*; nay, he *came to his own*, and *his own received him not*; for having undertaken to make satisfaction to his Father for the wrong done him *in his honour* by the sin of man, he did it by denying himself in, and despoiling himself of, the honours undoubtedly due to an incarnate

Deity; yet, as afterward, so in his birth, some rays of glory darted forth in the midst of the greatest instances of his abasement. Though *there was the hiding of his power*, yet he had *horns coming out of his hand* (Hab. 3:4) enough to condemn the world, and the Jews especially, for their stupidity. The first who took notice of Christ after his birth were the shepherds (Luke 2:15, etc.), who saw and heard glorious things concerning him, and made them known abroad, to the

amazement of all that heard them.

*Mat 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.*

Notice that they enquired, "**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**".

They obviously had become aware with the prophecy of Numbers 24:17. There, it was prophesied that some day the Great King would rise out of Israel who would not only smite Moab but all the children of Sheth. Sheth (or Seth, as it is more commonly spelled) was the third son of Adam and the progenitor of the godly line of the ancient races.

Essentially, the prophecy in Numbers said that the coming King of Israel would rule the entire human race (i.e., the world), exalting the godly and destroying the ungodly. That will ultimately take place in the Millennium.

The sign that this was about to take place would be a star arising out of Jacob (the land of Israel). The astronomers and astrologers of the ancient Middle East knew the stellar heavens precisely. They had mapped them for centuries and studied them assiduously.

When this unusual star (of no doubt some magnitude) appeared in the west, they were startled. I believe God saw to it that some of them were aware of the prophecy in the book of Numbers. They perceived that the King of kings had been born and therefore set out for Jerusalem to worship Him.

God revealed to the wise men that Jesus was to be the King of the Jews. This was the title placed over his cross when he died there on Mt. Calvary.

*John 19:19 And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

*John 19:20 This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.*

*John 19:21 Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.*

*John 19:22 Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.*

God had promised Israel a king and the Jews were looking for one to come and overthrow the Romans and take the throne and rule. This was not the way Christ came the first time, but when he comes this second time, He will take the throne of David and rule. It says the wise men came to worship and they saw

His star in the East.

*Rev 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.*

*Mat 2:3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

*Mat 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.*

This was all alarming news to Herod, the powerful, surrogate ruler for the Romans. The source of these tidings gave credence to the report and it caused Herod to take the matter seriously. Herod therefore “gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together and demanded of them where Christ should be born.” This indicates that he likely realized the implications of who had been born.

The announcement that the King of the Jews had been born troubled Herod. He feared that he would perhaps lose his throne. It says it also troubled all of Jerusalem. Herod then inquires where Jesus should be born.

*Mat 2:5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,*

*Mat 2:6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.*

Herod brings in the religious leaders and scribes who were the writers and interpreters of the scriptures. So where did they go to find the answer? The word of God was the source they turned to. When you and I need answers, we need to turn to the bible also. It contains answers for the problems we face each day. They find that the answer lay in the book of Micah as the prophet spoke of the birth place of Christ. Out of Judah was to come a governor to rule the people of God. And as I said earlier, one day Christ will return to reign on the throne of David.

The priest and scribes therefore informed him, *"In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel"*. Notice the statement, “it is written.” (The phrase is translated from (gegraptai) *gegraptai* and is in the third person, perfect tense, and passive voice.

Implied is that what has been quoted has been and continues to be written, thus implying the preservation of the Word of God.) It is another reference to a

quotation of Old Testament Scripture. This will be encountered frequently throughout Matthew. Matthew intended to convince the Jewish mind of the fulfillment in their own Scriptures of the person of Jesus Christ. The text quoted here is from Micah 5:2.

*Mic 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.*

*Mat 2:7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.*

*Mat 2:8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, 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.*

Herod's inquiry as to the time the star appeared, when taken with his order to kill all the children in Bethlehem two years and younger, indicates that the wise men may have first seen the star two years earlier. It can be conjectured as to whether the star appeared precisely when Christ was born, or if God set the star in the heavens prior to His birth as an announcement of His coming.

In any event, the wise men evidently pondered this for some time and finally left for Jerusalem. It would seem that this entire time frame involved several years.

The duplicity as well as the jealousy of Herod is apparent in verse 8. Though he was an elderly man, he was deeply jealous. Moreover, as the text will unfold, he had no scruples against killing Him. Revelation 12:3-4 makes clear that Satan was ultimately behind this evil. Moreover, the devil himself appeared ready to destroy the Christ child as soon as He was born, according to Revelation 12:4.

Herod asks the wise men about what time the star had appeared. He pretended to want to come to worship Christ, but in his mind, he intended to destroy Christ. He wanted to know the exact age of Jesus, so he could have all the young male children near his age put to death. Herod never intended to come and worship Jesus.

*Mat 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.*

*Mat 2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

Here is an unmistakable miracle of God. It would seem that the star originally gave all appearances to being in outer space as all other stars are. But now, as the wise men took the brief journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star

appeared again, seemingly at a low level and guided them to the specific place where the young child was.

It is noteworthy that the word translated as **young child** is (paidion) *paidion*. It is not the word usually translated as 'babe' or 'infant' (brefov *brephos*) as in Luke 2:12. The implication is that when the wise men arrived, Jesus was no longer a new-born infant.

The star guided them from the east to where Jesus was at that time. Today, He is still a guiding star to all who will seek after him. They rejoiced when they come to the place where the young child was. It says the wise men present gifts to Jesus. (gold, frankincense, and myrrh.) After that, they were warned of God not to return to Herod.

I wonder why we think there were 3 wise men. All the Christmas cards show it that way, but nothing in scripture mentions there being three men. Also, they show them bringing the gifts to the manger.

J. Vernon McGee points out that it was a long journey for these wise men, and it may have taken close to a year.

“Behold there came three wise men from the east to Jerusalem.” Is that what your Bible says? You say, “No, you’ve inserted the number three.” Well, isn’t that what you’ve been taught by your Christmas cards? I think a great many people know more about the Christmas story from Christmas cards than from the Bible, and therefore they have many inaccurate impressions. I’ll attempt to correct several of them in this chapter.

First, you will notice that the record doesn’t tell us there were three wise men. I don’t know how many there were, but I doubt whether three wise men would have disturbed Herod or have excited Jerusalem. I do believe that three hundred men would have done so. These wise men who came from the East evidently came from different areas. They had been studying the stars, and when this new star appeared, they joined forces and came to Jerusalem. I don’t know how many there were, but I’m almost sure it wasn’t three, and I believe three hundred would be more nearly true. But, please, don’t say that I said there were three hundred!

I am going to make a statement now and will try to prove it later: The star had appeared in the night sky sometime before the wise men appeared in Jerusalem. Remember that they made the trip by camel—not by jet plane. It is a long, hard trip by camel! I am of the opinion that they didn’t arrive in Jerusalem until at least a year after the appearance of the star. This wasn’t just a little Christmas celebration for them. As they traveled the long, weary miles, they had been hanging on to the hope of seeing Him and presenting their gifts to Him.

I don’t want you to think I’m teaching there were 300 wise men... but I do think it is interesting how we have always ‘thought’ there were only three. Sometimes we need to study the word of God and be sure that what we perceive and believe

aligns with scripture.

*Mat 2:11 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.*

*Mat 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.*

Notice also "**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**".

It is evident that when the wise men came to the Lord and family, they now were living in a house and not in the stable. They, knowing whom they had found, "fell down and worshipped him."

Though we are not told how many wise men came, because three gifts were given, it has been *assumed* that there were three of them. However, that is just an assumption.

It also is noteworthy that *giving* to the King was a direct part of their worship. There has been much speculation as to the significance of the gifts given.

(1) *Gold* is of obvious value and is the currency of kings.

(2) *Frankincense* was a product that is essentially an expensive incense. It was used in the Jewish Temple worship (Leviticus 24:7) and therefore had a relationship to the office of priest. It was also used by the apothecary in healing.

(3) *Myrrh* was an expensive perfume used in the Middle East. In the Old Testament, it was a principal ingredient in the holy anointing oil prescribed in Exodus 30:23-25. Such oil was used to anoint the prophets.

Hence, it may be surmised that these three gifts signified the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Myrrh also was an ingredient used by the Jews to embalm their dead and, therefore, may be a prophetic significance to Christ's death (John 19:39).

God providentially warned the wise men of Herod's impending terror and they returned home another way.

## II. The Flight into Egypt

*Mat 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.*

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

God providentially preserved His Son by warning them to flee to Egypt. The history of Herod the Great reveals a man who was paranoid. He had achieved his power largely by climbing over the dead bodies of his opponents, rivals, and family.

He even killed his wife, thinking she was plotting against him. He evidently had a continual fear of being betrayed and overthrown by everyone around him. It was not out of character for him to kill all the infants in and about Bethlehem if he thought a rival had been born.

God consequently warned Joseph and Mary through an angel in a dream to flee to Egypt with the young child. The sense of urgency is noted in that they departed by night—apparently that very night.

*Mat 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 young family thus “was there” (in Egypt) “until the death of Herod.” Again, Scripture is fulfilled and so noted. Here the fulfillment is of Hosea 11:1, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

*Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

It would seem apparent that God’s providential deliverance of Israel from Egypt as recorded in the book of Exodus was a type of Christ. Hosea 11:1 clearly refers to Israel in its context. The Holy Spirit revealed to Matthew that Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy. Therefore, another prophecy of our Lord was fulfilled, even in His infancy.

Israel as a nation spent a lot of time in Egypt. While in bondage, they were there 430 years. We know Abraham went down into Egypt. God directs Joseph to take the child and go into Egypt. Note the obedience of Joseph. No arguing, just gets up and does as God tells him to do. We should all be so faithful. God tells Joseph that Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. Joseph going into



Egypt was a fulfillment of prophecy.

### III. The Slaughter of the Innocents

*Mat 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.*

*Mat 2:17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,*

*Mat 2:18 In Rama 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.*

Herod's cruel slaughter of children two years and under hints that the wise men first saw the star two years earlier. Whether this was the time when Jesus was born is not clear. However, it would seem to lend credence thereto. It would appear therefore that Jesus by this time was about two years old.

Herod ordered all two-year-old boys in and about the region to be killed. Herod's cruelty was legendary. Caesar Augustus once said he would rather be Herod's dog than Herod's son.

The Scripture is again fulfilled. Here, Matthew quotes from Jeremiah 31:15.

*Jer 31:15 Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.*

Rachel, of course, was the mother of Benjamin and Rama was part of the ancestral territory of Benjamin, not far from Bethlehem on the ancient border between Judah and Benjamin. In modern terms, it is called *Ramalah* and has been the headquarters of Yasser Arafat.

Of significance is that yet another Old Testament prophecy pertaining to Jesus was fulfilled while He was still a small child. Matthew will routinely note every fulfilled prophecy pertaining to Jesus, particularly for the Jewish mind. They gave credence to the Old Testament and it was they to whom Matthew was seeking to convince.

Herod was a very wicked king. It is amazing what wicked men will do to protect their little kingdoms in this world. He has all children put to death from 2 years of age and under. His thinking was that Christ might be as old as 2 years of age at

this time.

Rachel's children are destroyed by the one who calls himself the king of Israel. Rachel is introduced as the mother of Bethlehem lamenting over their children.

Albert Barnes made this comment about verse 18.

**Title:** Barnes Notes on the New Testament

**Author:** Barnes, Albert

**In Rama was there a voice heard**—Rama was a small town in the tribe of Benjamin. Rachel was the mother of Benjamin, and was buried near to Bethlehem, Gen. 35:16-19. Rama was about 6 miles northwest of Jerusalem, near Bethel, and was some 10 or 12 miles from Bethlehem. The name Rama signifies an eminence, and was given to the town because it was situated on a hill. Rama is commonly supposed to be the same as the Arimarthea of the New Testament the place where Joseph lived who begged the body of Jesus. See Matt. 27:57. This is also the same place in which Samuel was born, where he resided, died, and was buried, and where he anointed Saul as king.

#### **IV. The Return from Egypt to Nazareth**

*Mat 2:19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,*

*Mat 2:20 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.*

The angel of the Lord knew what Herod intended to do and knew that Herod was dead. So he tells Joseph to arise and go back to the nation of Israel. I am impressed with how Joseph showed to be a man of faith. He didn't seem to question the guiding of the Lord, he simply listened to God's directions, and obeyed. I wonder how many other Christians there would be today if all of God's people obeyed the Lord's voice each day. Today we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, and he directs our paths and guides us to do the perfect will of the Lord.

*Mat 2:21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.*

*Mat 2:22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea 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:*

*Mat 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 again providentially notified Joseph through an angel. It would seem apparent that Joseph knew he was known as a fugitive when he had fled

Bethlehem earlier. Despite Herod's death, he avoided the area altogether. Fearing Herod's son Archelaus, Joseph decided not to return to Judea, but rather to his home area in Galilee.

Joseph takes his family and goes back into Israel through Galilee. He dwells in the city of Nazareth, again not by chance. This was another fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus was called a Nazarene, although this does not mean he was a Nazarite. There were specific rules involving a Nazarite that we don't have a record about concerning Christ. It meant that Jesus was a citizen of this city.

*Isa 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:*

*Isa 11:2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;*

*Isa 11:3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:*

*Isa 11:4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.*

*Isa 11:5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*

Again, prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus being brought up in Nazareth. The word *Nazarene* means one from Nazareth. Its literal meaning is of a *Nazarite*, as described in Numbers 6. It has the sense of a 'separated one.'

And indeed Jesus was "separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26).

*Heb 7:26 For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;*

Not one prophet had declared in express terms that he should be called a Nazarene. However, the Nazarites, of whom Samson was one, were typical of Christ.

The meanness and contempt in which Nazareth was held was itself a prophecy of one who was "despised and rejected of men." See Isaiah 53:3, Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, and Zechariah 3:8, 6:12.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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