

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Two
Matthew 2:1-23

Day One

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 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." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

vs. 1&2 – I don't know who these men were and what prompted them to be looking for a significant birth in Judea. I don't know what caused them to leave their homeland to go in search of Jesus or what made them search the heavens for a star. They were obviously outsiders, for they did not know the politics of the area. That is why they went to the ruthless Herod to inquire about the baby's whereabouts, thus putting the baby in grave danger. Herod had killed his own family members to protect his throne, so this was not good news that a political rival had been born somewhere in his kingdom.

Who were these Magi? How many came? Where did they come from? When did they arrive? We will never be able to answer these questions, at least not by the information provided in the gospels. And so we must assume the answers are not important. What we need to know the Holy Spirit has provided.

I think it is more important to see this from a Jewish perspective. The Magi were Gentiles and they came to worship this baby, not just to visit Him. This is another indication that Jesus wasn't just a good man or a prophet; He was God and worthy of worship. It was also an indication that the Gentiles were to be included in the scope of God's salvation.

The Jews did not reach out for these Magi, nor did any human institution announce the birth of this child. God revealed it to them and He used natural means – a star – to do so. God is able to reveal His plan and purpose to anyone and use whatever means possible. God did not require the Magi to do anything to make them more "Jewish" before they could worship. They simply had to obey God's revelation, step out of their culture, find the child and worship Him.

In last week's study, we saw that Gentiles were included in Jesus' family tree. Now we see that Gentiles were included in the revelation that Jesus had been born. The Jews should have seen this as a fulfillment that Jesus was born for all the nations and not just the Jewish nation. They were so set in their ethnic bias, however, that they could not see His birth for what it was.

What are you doing to see that the gospel reaches all people, or are you more concerned about the gospel reaching "your" people, whoever your people may be?

v. 3 – I have often had the impression that the birth of Jesus was known only to a select few. This is wrong thinking. When the Magi gave their report, it disturbed not only Herod and his political supporters, but it made waves in all of Jerusalem. All Jews in that city heard about the report, yet that report did not change their lives or cause them to seek the child for themselves. When Jesus began His ministry 30 years later, it didn't cause anyone to go back to research and remember what the Magi had said. The word of the Lord through the Magi had no effect on Israel at the time, which is a sad commentary on the state of spiritual affairs in Israel.

Have you received any word from the Lord that has had no effect on you? Don't answer too quickly; ask the Lord to show you if you have.

Day Two

4 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. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 " '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.'"

v. 4 – My mind once again jumps ahead to the start of Jesus' public ministry. Herod consulted the leaders at the time of Jesus' birth, so these leaders should have passed down some remembrance of these historic meetings with Herod. Jesus did not just flash on the scene when He was 30 years of age. His birth was announced and discussed among the people and the leaders. They simply ignored the information. So that leads me to the question: **Have I done the same thing? Perhaps a better question is: am I doing the same thing now? Has God showed me something that I have totally ignored because it didn't fit with my image of reality or how things should be? Have you done or are you doing this as well? Ask God to show you.**

Herod inquired of the leaders as to where the Christ was to be born. Herod was a politician and a ruthless one at that. He wasn't asking so he could acknowledge or worship the Messiah. He was asking so he could protect his throne and power. Power is intoxicating and Herod was drunk.

v. 5 – The leaders gave an immediate answer, so they didn't have to go away and research the question. They knew the answer was Bethlehem. So Jesus qualified on that basis, yet 30 years later, the leaders were hung up because Jesus came from Nazareth. **That wasn't where He was born, so why did they ignore or overlook this important fact?** I can think of no other reason than the fact that God closed their eyes and minds due to their hardness of heart. They missed important information because they didn't want to see that information; it would have required that they change their worldview and theology.

How easy is it for you to change your theology? If you aren't careful, you can begin to filter out all that doesn't agree with what you believe and begin to force everything else

to align with your preconceived notions. This is dangerous. I heard someone say one time that we should put what we believe on a bulletin board with a tack instead of setting it in concrete. That makes it easier to adjust when God shows us something new. **Do you know what you believe? Are you open to the fact that you don't know or see everything there is to see and that God may want to adjust your thinking?**

v. 6 – The leaders were able to quote verse and prophet in response to Herod's question (which was Micah 5:2, by the way). Instead of launching an investigation of their own, they didn't act on the information that was available from the shepherds and Magi. What poor leaders those men were! They ignored important information and events and led their people astray or at least didn't lead their people into the ways of truth. How sad! How tragic! I want to be the best leader I can be, whenever I lead, so I don't lead people following off a cliff, still claiming that I am leading them in the right direction.

Day Three

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 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." 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

v. 7 – Herod was doing his research to find out when this baby could have been born, and he was using the Magi for his own purposes. He did this in secret so no one would suspect his intentions. Herod consulted with the leaders of Israel and the Magi, but it wasn't to find Jesus and worship. It was to find Jesus and destroy Him.

v. 8 – Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem to find the child with strict orders to report back to him. Herod knew how to use religious language, since he was part Jewish. He told the Magi that he wanted to worship the child as well. There are many politicians who want to use God for their own purposes, but their purpose is to get votes or support and not to worship Him.

I have lived 57 years and I have come to the conclusion that politics and spirituality, even religion, should be kept separate. The two just don't mix well. I am not saying that politicians should not be moral; they should. And I am not saying that spiritual people should not vote or be involved in public affairs; they should. I am saying that both disciplines should not try to use the other for their own ends as Jesus indicated in the story below:

Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 1 Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?"

he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. (Mark 12:13-17).

v. 9 – I don't know what this star was or how its existence can be explained. Someone said that it was probably an angel. That makes sense, except that Matthew has referred to angels already. If it had been an angel, he would have told us. This seems to me to be some indication of the connection between all of creation and spiritual matters.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently (Romans 8:22-25).

v. 10 – The star led the Magi to the exact house where Jesus was and it stopped there. When the Magi saw all this unfold, they were overjoyed! God had rewarded their faith and journey. When was the last time you were overjoyed? What were you doing? Was there faith involved? What can you do to experience that again?

Day Four

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. 13 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." 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 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."

v. 11 – The Magi knew that Jesus was God! They didn't just honor Him and they didn't just pay Him respect. They worshipped Him! You don't worship a prophet, you worship God and Jesus was indeed God! This is so exciting, for I believe there will be another day when men from the east, Middle East that is, will also fall down and worship Jesus.

The Magi brought three different gifts, which is where we got the tradition that there were three kings. There could have been a 100 Magi for all we know. The number isn't important. What they did is. They traveled to acknowledge Jesus as King, worshipped and gave Him gifts. That is exactly what we should do as well. The Christmas story set many people in motion, moving here and there. When God moves, people are set in motion. **Are you in motion or standing still?**

v. 12 – God is smarter than any earthly king and He outsmarted Herod’s plans by sending the Magi a dream. They were warned not to go back to Herod. Guidance should not be an issue for believers. If you want to know and do God’s will, He has many means at His disposal to let you know what He wants you to do. The problem isn’t whether God will speak, the problem is whether or not I am listening. **Are you listening? If so, what is God “saying”?**

The Magi were smart and returned to their country by another route so that Herod’s men would not find them.

v. 13 – God once again foiled Herod’s plans, for He warned Joseph in a dream to flee. It would have been more “efficient” if God had removed Herod, but instead, God relocated His Son. God had other purposes for Herod to fulfill in office, and wasn’t ready to remove him just yet. So Jesus’ family had to be inconvenienced and make the trip to Egypt as political refugees.

Herod plotted in secret, but God knows the secrets of the heart. His purposes and plans will prevail.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters. "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." (Psalm 2:1-6)

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Proverbs 16:4 NAS)

vs. 14&15 – I am glad Joseph didn’t wait for confirmation. He knew there was danger so they left immediately. Once again, Matthew wanted to show how Jesus’ early years fulfilled a prophecy, this time that God’s Son would be called out of Egypt. This reference, however, is found in Exodus 4:22. Without Matthew’s insight through the Holy Spirit, we would not have known that this reference was concerning Jesus. This is why we need the Bible to interpret the Bible and why we should be careful when we try to do that ourselves.

Day Five

16 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. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 18 "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."

v. 16 – Herod was furious. The sure sign of an authoritarian leader is anger. That kind of leader believes they own their position, the people and everything else that goes on around them. When someone messes up what is “theirs,” these leaders can be ruthless and mean because someone has tried to take what belongs to them.

Yet Herod set himself up for being outwitted, because he tried to match wits with God. **Did you know that in some ways you control God?** How you act toward God determines how He reacts toward you. Consider these verses to understand what I mean:

To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty (Psalm 18:25-27).

Herod chose to show himself shrewd and God “out-shrewded” him. It is futile to try and match wits with God, yet people try to do it all the time. **Did you ever consider that how God is treating you now is an indication of how you treat Him? Think on that today.**

Herod’s fury was unleashed and he ordered all the male children from the age of two and younger to be massacred. He still hadn’t learned any lessons, for he still tried to outwit the Magi and God. Instead of operating in secret and slowly, he now acted openly and decisively, albeit ruthlessly.

How many young do you think were slaughtered? Probably not that many, for Bethlehem was only a village at the time. I am not minimizing the pain or criminal activity of the slaughter, but just trying to put it into perspective. Herod was confident he could destroy his rival since it wasn’t hard to locate and terminate the male children.

Some have interpreted the fact that Herod had all the two-year-olds killed to ascertain that the Magi came a few years after Jesus’ birth. This is possible, but Herod also could have allowed some leeway on age to make sure that he had destroyed the child.

vs. 17&18 – Again Matthew related the event of the slaughter to a biblical prophecy found in Jeremiah. There are many who today still try to locate biblical prophecies that fulfill current events. In most cases, this is bogus. The Bible is not a book of predictions about the future. It is a book about God’s redemptive plan through Jesus. The predictions we do have were mostly focused on the events in the Bible that have already taken place and are not meant to interpret the headlines in the papers today. **Does this offend you? Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

Day Six

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

v. 19 – Herod died. All leaders die, but authoritarian leaders like Herod think they will live forever. When they realize that they won't, they then work to leave a legacy, like a building, a monument or some other public work, as Herod did. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and did many other public works, yet tried to kill Jesus. His name and that of his family will be remembered as a scoundrel, a ruthless, godless leader, in spite of his attempts to earn the respect of his peers and history. At the end of the day, there is only one legacy that a leader or any of us can leave:

The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot (Proverbs 10:7).

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold (Proverbs 22:1).

It is much more important that your name be written and remembered in heaven than it be remembered here on earth as Jesus advised:

However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:33-34).

What are you doing to lay up treasure in heaven? What are you doing to give yourself a good name? It seems that great deeds don't insure a good name, but integrity does. So be a leader and person of integrity, and your legacy will take care of itself. Or should I say God will take care of your legacy if you do His will.

v. 20 – A dream once more directed Joseph as to where he needed to go with his family. I am glad that God is smart and knows everything. When He says go, I can go, trusting that He knows what He is talking about and that He has my best interests at heart. It is interesting that the angel appeared to Mary once and then appeared to Joseph after that. Both Mary and Joseph had to trust that the other was hearing from God. That is how a good marriage should work. I don't think God will always speak to or through the one or the other partner. Both must be sensitive to what the other is sensing in the will and purpose of God.

Day Seven

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

vs. 21&22 – Joseph did not delay, to his credit. He brought his family back home to Israel and at first considered going back to the area of Judea. He was afraid because Herod's son was reigning in his place and Joseph felt that Jesus could still be in danger. So what happened? He was warned in another dream! This was the fourth dream that we know of that directed Joseph's steps. I am glad that Joseph paid attention to these dreams, aren't you?

As I have stated earlier, guidance should not be a problem for the believer. If your heart is to know God's will, God's heart is to reveal it. One key principle in releasing this dynamic is found in John 7:17:

“If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own” (John 7:17).

If you commit to do God's will before you know what it is, then you will know His will. It's that simple. If you reject your right to veto what God wants and commit to do it no matter what it is, then He will move heaven and earth to make sure you understand what it is.

How clear are you concerning God's will right now? If you aren't, then perhaps you haven't made a total commitment. I urge you to tell God you will do whatever He wants and then trust that you will hear:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does (James 1:5-7).

I promise that God will not allow you to be led astray if you ask Him with integrity and sincerity:

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13).

v. 23 – Matthew pointed out one more way that Jesus life fulfilled the predictions of Scripture. He explained how Jesus ended up in Nazareth, so that he would be called a Nazarene. The problem is that there is no Scripture that predicts that the Messiah would be from Nazareth! What happened here? In my quick research, here are three options I found:

What are the options here?

1. There was no prophecy, "He will be called a Nazarean." Matthew made it up, because it fit his narrative and preconceived notion that everything that happened to Jesus was foretold in the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.
2. There was a prophecy, "He will be called a Nazarean," but that prophecy was in a book or collection of prophecies that were lost and not included in the canon of scripture.
3. The original of Isaiah 11:1 or some other passage of scripture actually says, "He will be called a Nazarean," but the text has corrupted in between Matthew's time and ours.

I opt for number two, for Matthew has been so accurate to this point that he did not need to invent any prophecy to justify who Jesus was and where He came from.