

## *Book of Matthew*

### *Chapter 2:1-12*

<sup>1</sup>Now after *Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,*

**Jesus was born** > The New Scofield > In the 708th year from the foundation of Rome (46 B.C. by Christian reckoning) Julius Caesar established the Julian Calendar, beginning the year with January 1st. But it was not until the sixth century A.D. that Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk living in Rome, who was confirming the Easter cycle, originated the system of reckoning time from the birth of Christ. Gradually this usage spread, being adopted in England by the Synod of Whitby in 664, until it gained universal acceptance. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII reformed the Julian calendar. However, more accurate knowledge shows that the earlier reckonings of the time of Christ's birth were in error by several years. Thus it is now agreed that the birth of Christ should be placed c. 6-4 B.C."

**Bethlehem of Judea** > Barnes > Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, was a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem.

- The word "Bethlehem" denotes "house of bread" - perhaps given to the place on account of its great fertility.
- It was also called Ephrata, a word supposed likewise to signify fertility
- It was called the city of David because it was the city of his nativity.
- It was called Bethlehem of Judea, to distinguish it from a town of the same name in Galilee.
- This Bethlehem (house of bread, the name means) of Judah was the scene of Ruth's life with Boaz (Robertson)

**Herod** > Carson > Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 BC and was named king of Judea by the Roman senate in 40 BC. By 37 BC, he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun in 20 BC) admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabeans), and at least two of his sons.

Barclay > “Augustus, the Roman Emperor, had said, bitterly, that it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.”

Traditionally, some have argued that Herod died in 4 BC; so Jesus must have been born before that. Josephus (Ant. 17.167 [6.4]) mentions an eclipse of the moon shortly before Herod’s death, and this has normally been identified as having occurred on 12–13 March 4 BC.

**Behold** > Precept Austin > Again the NASB and NET both omit the important demonstrative particle (*idou*) which means “Lo and behold!”, serving to call attention to something external or exterior to oneself. *Behold* is the second person singular aorist middle imperative of *eidon* which means to see, perceive, look at. In the NT *idou* is used as a demonstrative particle that draws attention to what follows. *Idou* in the middle voice means “you yourself look, see, perceive!” The aorist imperative is a command emphasizing “Do it now! Don’t delay!”

**Magi** > Precept Austin > *magos* is derived from the Persian word *magus* meaning “great” (thus “great, powerful men”) and in the plural (“magi”) as in Mt 2:1, 7, 16, *magi* referred to the high priestly caste Persians (also Medes and Babylonians) who are affectionately called the “wise men.” The other sense of *magos* is that of a magician or sorcerer, one who used magic crafts or “witchcraft.” We know that the *magi* were not kings because this specific title means “wisemen” or more specifically, “astrologers.”

Barnes > The original word here is μάγοι *magoi*, from which comes our word magician, now used in a bad sense, but not so in the original. The persons here denoted were philosophers, priests, or astronomers. They lived chiefly in Persia and Arabia. They were the learned men of the Eastern nations. devoted to astronomy, to religion, and to medicine. They were held in high esteem by the Persian court, were admitted as counsellors, and followed the camps in war to give advice.

Constable > (Regarding the timing of the Magi’s visit) there are several factors that point to a time about a year after Jesus’ birth.

1. First, Matthew described Jesus as a “Child” (Gr. *paidion*, v. 11), not an infant (Gr. *brephos*, cf. Luke 2:27).
2. Second, Jesus’ family was residing in a house (v. 11), not beside a manger (cf. Luke 2:1-20).
3. Third, Herod’s edict to destroy all the male children two years old and under (v. 16) suggests that Jesus fell within this age span.
4. Fourth, Joseph and Mary brought the offering of poor people to the temple when they dedicated Jesus about 40 days after His birth (Luke 2:24). But after receiving the Magi’s gifts, they could have presented the normal offering (cf. Lev. 12).

5. Fifth, Joseph and Mary's decision to return to Judea from Egypt (v. 22) implies that Judea is where they had lived before they took refuge in Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> *“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.”*

**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?** > Carson > We must not think that the Magi’s question meant, “Where is the one born to become king of the Jews?” but, “Where is the one born king of the Jews?” His kingly status was not conferred on him later on; it was his from birth.

Barnes > By computing the time mentioned by Daniel (**Daniel 9:25**), they knew that the period was approaching when he would appear.

**Daniel 9:25** > <sup>25</sup> *So you are to know and understand that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with streets and moat, even in times of distress.*

**King of the Jews** > Utley > This was Herod the Great's title. This was the same title that was placed on Jesus' cross (cf. Matt. 27:37). It was a way of referring to the Messiah (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7; Ps. 10:16; 29:10; 98:6).

**Star** > Ponder ....

- Have you ever seen a bright star in the sky as you were driving along?
- If so ... what did it appear to do as you were traveling?
- What did THIS star eventually do that caused the magi to “rejoice exceedingly”?
- Do stars do that? Do they STOP as you are moving?
- Therefore, the suggestions that this was a nova ... or a comet ... or any other normal astronomical answer will not meet the need

Utley > The star moved and stopped! This phenomena did not fit a standard pattern. Therefore, it was not solely a natural phenomenon.

**Worship** > Precept Austin > There are a number of prophecies that allude to Messiah as King and considering that Daniel was captive in Babylon (in the east), and wrote his prophecies while in Babylon, and Da 2:4-7:28 were in Aramaic, the common language of the land (cf Da 12:4±), it is certainly possible that the *magi* had access to his prophecies which would have included predictions of a great King such as below:

**Daniel 7:13-14** > <sup>13</sup> *“I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a son of man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.*

<sup>14</sup> *And to Him was given dominion, honor, and a kingdom, so that all the peoples, nations, and populations of all languages might serve Him/ His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14+)*

<sup>3</sup> *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.*

**He was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him** > Strong's > *tarasso* > to stir up, to trouble, of uncertain affinity; to stir or agitate (roil water)

HELPS > causing inner perplexity (emotional agitation) from getting *too stirred up inside* ("upset").

Precept Austin > One can almost see him shaking which is the literal meaning of the Greek verb *tarasso*. Most of the NT uses of *tarasso* are figurative and describe the state of one's mind as stirred up, agitated or experiencing inward commotion.

Utley > Herod the Great was so cruel and unpredictable that when he was upset, everyone was afraid! A notable example of his cruelty was that when he was near death, he was afraid no one would mourn his passing, so he imprisoned many Pharisees who were to be crucified when he died. This would ensure that the day of his death would be a day of grieving. The order was not carried out, but this illustrates his character.

Constable > Herod was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, and the prospect of a Jewish Messiah's appearance was one that he could not ignore.

Bruce > The foreigner and usurper feared a rival, and the tyrant feared the rival would be welcome

**Chief priests ... scribes** > Vincent > The reference here is not to a meeting of the Sanhedrin, since the elders, who are not mentioned, belonged to this; but to an extraordinary convocation of all the high-priests and learned men.

Vincent > A rabbi is quoted as saying that the first temple, which stood about four hundred and ten years, had only eighteen high-priests from first to last; while the second temple, which stood four hundred and twenty years, had more than three hundred high-priests.

Carson > As far as we can tell, the Sadducees (and therefore the chief priests) had no interest in the question of when the Messiah would come; the Pharisees (and therefore most teachers of the law) expected him to come only somewhat later. The Essenes alone, who were not consulted by Herod, expected the Messiah imminently (cf. R. T. Beckwith,

**He inquired of them** > Utley > This is in “imperfect tense” meaning (1) he asked repeatedly or (2) he began to ask.

**The Messiah** > Constable > Notice that Herod called the King, whom the Magi had spoken of, *the Messiah* (Why the change in nomenclature?)

Walvoord > Matthew adroitly answers Jewish unbelief concerning Jesus Christ by quoting their own official body to the effect that the prophecy of His birth in Bethlehem was literal, that the Messiah was to be an individual, not the entire Jewish nation, and that their Messiah was to be a King who would rule over them."

<sup>5</sup> *They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for from you will come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.’”*

**In Bethlehem of Judea** > Precept Austin > The priests were to teach the people and they did apparently know the facts but there was a problem (Ezek 44:23) There is no record of them going to Bethlehem!

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**By** > Carson > The NIV (and NASB) misses the preposition *dia* (lit., “what stands written through the prophet”), which implies that the prophet is not the ultimate source of what stands written

**Micah 5:2** > *But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will come forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His times of coming forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”*

**Who will shepherd My people Israel** > Not in the Micah passage

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod **secretly** called for the magi and **determined** from them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them 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."

**Secretly** > Strong's > (we saw this in 1:19 when Joseph was going to send Mary away *secretly*) *lethra* > from *lathano* > to escape notice

Precept Austin > (*lathra* from *lanthano* = to be hidden) is an adverb that means in a secretive way, doing so without others noticing. Four uses in NT – here, and ...

1. Of Martha when she "called Mary her sister, saying **secretly**, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." (Jn 11:28)
2. Of Paul after being falsely beaten and jailed asked and "now are they sending us away **secretly**?"

**Determined** > Strong's > to inquire with exactness

**Carefully** > with exactness

HELPS > *akribōs* (from *akribes*, "the high point, extreme," see *akríbeia*, "highly accurate") – properly, extremely accurate, very exact; "more (very) accurate" because researched down to the finest detail ("factually precise").

<sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went on their way; **and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over the place where the Child was to be found.** <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, **they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.**

Precept Austin > Verses 9-10 suggest that the Magi saw the star again only upon their departure from Jerusalem. It led them unfailingly to Bethlehem. The account would seem to indicate that the star was a supernatural and not a natural phenomenon.

**And behold, the star, ...** > Prior to this passage I had always thought the star had led them to Jerusalem and then on to Bethlehem. The way this is written seems to indicate that the star had appeared earlier which alerted them to the birth of the King ... and they, logically, headed to the capital city (Jerusalem) to find the King ... and now the star re-appears the second time to lead them directly to Jesus.

Constable > The presence of the definite Greek article with "star" in verse 9 points to the same star mentioned in verse 2. It seems to me that it would be very unlikely that a planetary conjunction or other natural star could have given the wise men such specific guidance.

**Went on ahead of them ...** > Precept Austin > is *proago* in the imperfect tense picturing the star as going on and on in front of them toward it's target. They knew the town was Bethlehem but the star was directing them to the specific location of the *Child*.

**They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy** > Precept Austin > Matthew could have simply said "they rejoiced" and we would have understood him. Instead, he piles up words that literally read "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy"

<sup>11</sup> **And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

**House** > Strong's > home, household. From *oikos*; properly, residence (abstractly), but usually (concretely) an abode (literally or figuratively); by implication, a family (especially domestics) -- home, house(-hold).

**Child** > Precept Austin > it is notable that *Child* is the noun *paidion* and not *brephos* (most often of a literal baby), the word used to describe the shepherds visit to the "baby (*brephos*) wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Lk 2:12+), Luke adds that the shepherds "came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby (*brephos*) as He lay in the manger." (Luke 2:16+).

So notice the distinctive features of the two visits to Jesus - (1) the magi see the *child* (*paidion*) in *the house* (*oikia*) by following a sign (**His star**) and in contrast (2) the shepherds see a baby (*brephos*) in the *manger* by seeing the sign of "a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Lk 2:12+)

This contrast between the magi and the shepherds would support the premise that while the shepherds saw the newborn baby Jesus, the magi saw the infant Jesus, sometime after His birth. In addition, the fact that Herod chose the age of 2 years and younger to be killed supports that the magi did not visit Jesus as a newly born infant but later as a young infant.

**Gold, frankincense, and myrrh** > Sproul ...

- The first gift was gold, which was the only fitting gift to give a king in the ancient world. Gold was the metal of royalty, and the fact that gold was lavishly spread at the feet of Jesus' parents, and Jesus Himself, is another indication that the men were paying homage to Him as a king.
- The reason behind the gift of frankincense is more difficult to pinpoint. In the ancient world incense was primarily used by priests in worship. Central to Jewish worship in the tabernacle and then in the temple was the altar of incense, which was tended by the priests.

It symbolized the sweet aroma and fragrance of the prayers of God's people to Him. Matthew in his Gospel makes much of Jesus' being both a king and a priest. (Our High Priest)

- Barnes > Frankincense is a white resin or gum. It is obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark and suffering the gum to flow out. It is highly odoriferous or fragrant when burned, and was therefore used in worship, where it was burned as a pleasant offering to God.
- The third gift, myrrh, is the strangest of the three. The chief use of myrrh among ancient people was for anointing the dead at the time of their burial. When Jesus died and was laid in the tomb, women came early in the morning with precious spices in order to anoint His body, and myrrh is what they would have used for that occasion.
  - Barnes > This was also a production of Arabia and was obtained from a tree in the same manner as frankincense. The name denotes bitterness and was given to it on account of its great bitterness. It was used chiefly in embalming the dead, because it had the property of preserving dead bodies from putrefaction.

McGee > It is very interesting to study the facts concerning His second coming as they are related to us in Isaiah 60:6: "The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD." What gift is left out at His second coming? Myrrh! They do not bring myrrh because that speaks of His death.

<sup>12</sup> *And after being **warned** by God in a dream not to **return** to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.*

**Warned** > Precept Austin > *chrematizo* in the NT means to impart a divine message (an injunction or warning). *Chrematizo* in this sense speaks of a divine oracle or declaration as to Simeon to whom "it *had been revealed* to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Lk 2:26+). Here and in Mt 2:22 it is a divine warning.

Vincent > The verb means to *give a response to one who asks or consults*: hence, in the passive, as here, *to receive an answer*. The word therefore implies that the wise men had sought counsel of God;