



Lesson 3 December 19th, 2020

A Regal Response to Holy Light

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – Matthew 2

Background Scripture – Matthew 1-2; 7-15

Key Verse:

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, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

INTRODUCTION

Our Study looks at a critically important moment in the story of Redemption. There is probably no event which has so much by way of providing a warning and an example for our Christian life.

This story is so important that a lot of misleading information has developed around it so that the events in it look almost like a fairytale. In addition, some of the important characters such as the visiting Magi have been maligned or their behaviour and primary intention distorted. Others have had their characters somewhat twisted out of shape so that we cannot really say what was happening and make some judgment as to how bad and disappointing human behaviour can be.

In fact, we should look at this Study as a Study in repentance. God dealt with people who should have known better and those who have made a choice of staying in sin following what their fleshly desires told them to do. This Gospel shows a contrast between Gentiles and Jewish secular and religious leaders. It shows that Jewish leaders rejected Jesus and oppressed Him while in some measure Gentiles accepted Him

The Study will also look at the historical significance of Egypt. That country had become a land of security for the Joseph of Genesis 50, and it now becomes the land of security for another Joseph, namely Jesus, centuries later. In fact, prophetic Scripture seems to indicate that Egypt will have a special role to play in the time of the End and will receive a special blessing from God.

In Exodus 1-2 we had seen an imperial ruler named Pharaoh attempt to eliminate the children of the Israelites and tried to destroy them, while now another imperial ruler, a servant of Satan, feared a Child according to Matthew 2:16 and decides to kill those that he would get his hand on because he feared the people of God.

History repeats itself and the atrocities that had been committed in Egypt before the Exodus now happens a millennium later. This reminds us that the most vulnerable among us are children and most effected as awful and powerful leaders are evil and irresponsible. It is clear that the most vulnerable at-risk people are children, and we will see Matthew linking this idea

in Jeremiah 31:15 with the pain of what would come in Bethlehem when a despotic megalomaniac wanted political and spiritual relief. We see the cry of a mother often repeated reflecting the pain brought at the hands of the imperial rulers whose demands connect with demonic activity. This integration of the evil in rulers and demonic activity brings the destruction of vulnerable children and is being repeated over and over again even in our society.

Let us remember that we should be alert to discern things that will happen. We should look at circumstances happening around us which should cause us to pause and reconsider and avoid some difficulty. Sometimes it is not a direct dream or vision but it's most often a still, small voice which clearly intends to guide us in one direction over another, a guidance which will prove useful and helpful. So, let us be careful and listen and think carefully.

Bear in mind that there were very large political and oppressive circumstances when the Christ Child was born. The Child was born at the time when the stump of Jesse, the position the family held and how they were regarded, had been reduced to nothing practically. Because of this Joseph and Mary knew that they had to keep the Infant safe from the wrath of the evil tyrant Herod the Great. Obedience and reaction had to be immediate.

This Gospel makes it clear that the glory days of angels visiting and people visiting and worshiping and bringing the Gold, frankincense and myrrh did not and could not last long. But here we see true discipleship for there were people who undertook the arduous journey of 1000 miles with hardship, cold, and struggles likely ignoring the possible ridicule by those in their caste of learned men who did not go with them on their journey following some 'Star' in the East to worship some Saviour who would be King of the Jews. Observe that Wise Men left where they were, ready to pay the price with little certainty of finding what they sought and with little confidence that they would be welcomed for they would have to ask questions and be careful for they might come into the presence unaware of the evil and hostility that they might face. Do not think they were fools for their historic role was to deal with and direct Kings. The Scripture event teaches us that these visiting people were committed beforehand to obey what they knew. They obeyed what they believed, and they were prepared to be guided for they had limited knowledge. They acted in faith and God gave them more light.

Are we going to observe and follow this pattern of discipleship? Are we committed to obey, deciding beforehand that God will tell us more and more as we progress?

Are we willing to live what we know?

Have we decided already to hear God when He speaks, embrace what He says, and act on it? These Magi did that.

What about you?

Our Study also looks at religious people who knew Scripture and could readily recall them. These Theological experts and Specialists in Messianic prophecy were ready to give advice. But their religious life was one of apathy and indifference. They spoke the truth when asked but had no intention of undertaking a journey of wisdom for historical biblical truth did not make the slightest difference to them. Despite their knowledge of Scripture, Jesus or Messiah meant nothing to them so they disregarded Him. The frightening fact was that their apathy and indifference developed into outright opposition despite the proof that Jesus was Messiah and ended in what one writer called a frenzied lust for His blood.



This is also a warning that knowledge is no substitute for undertaking the journey of wisdom and submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ. This is a clear and awesome warning to every Pastor, Minister, Clergyman, Bishop, and Bible Scholar in every age that it is possible for Scriptures to become an integral part of our intellect and brain, but then we can end up with loving religious knowledge and history for its own sake without being willing to submit oneself to the truth that it contains. There is a clear necessity for journeying into ways of God.

This Study reminds us that the story of the birth of Jesus has a hard and violent side to it. It will involve not only the birth of the Saviour, but that it would involve the execution of innocent, undeserving children at the hand of a cruel tyrant.

Those that hated and wanted to kill Him when He was born would achieve their end finally. But remember that Jesus was not a victim and He died at a time and place of His choosing. But certainly, the birth of Jesus reminds us of the vulnerability and cruelty that exists in the world and so we must look at the things that are important which will last forever.

The tyrants of the world do not win. They can destroy and inflict tragedy, but they are not permitted to thwart the plan of God. So, remember that in our lives we will face tyrants such as threats, evil characterizations, words spoken against us, as well as the physical power of tyrants like evil rulers. While the tyrants of cancer, loneliness, financial chaos, personal weaknesses, though they all threaten disruption and stop any good from coming to us, they do not win for those in the family of God are protected and just as Jesus did not die as a victim so we will not die as a victim. Jesus completed His mission successfully and we will finish ours successfully and God will fulfill the plans He has for us and complete the work that He has begun in us.

As we go through the Verses before our Study Scripture for purposes of Context, we hope that you will notice that God is giving Herod the Great, THE ruler in Israel, the scholars and expert spiritual Interpreters, as well as the people of Jerusalem an opportunity to repent. They heard what was happening and they reacted in their own way. None of them were prepared to journey in the ways of God. This reminds us of the words of Jeremiah who condemned the King, the Princes, the priests, the prophets, and then finally the people for moving away from God, a move which led to the destruction of the nation and the Temple. So, we are back at that sad scene.

Verse 1.

When the Messiah did come into this world it wasn't observed and taken notice of with any great regard and His birth to most was obscure and no attention paid to it. We would have expected that when the Son of God came into the world, He should be received with all the ceremony possible, that crowns and scepters should immediately have been laid at His feet. The high and mighty princes of the world should have been His humble servants for such a Messiah as this which the Jews expected. But we see none of all this when He came into the world. The world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and they received Him not.

Having this understanding, now we can focus our attention on who it was that took notice of the Birth of Christ. Jesus was born in Bethlehem the city of David, the most important place in God's plan and Israel's tradition. Those that opposed Jesus very well knew this.

It is mentioned that there were shepherds who took first notice (Luke 2:15), who saw and heard glorious things concerning the child, the Messiah, and made it known to all abroad.

The next individuals to hear of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, was Simeon and Anna who spoke of Him, by the Spirit, to all that were disposed to heed what they said (Luke 2:38). Even with



what was mentioned by these individuals, these hints should have been taken by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to prepare or set open arms to receive the long looked for Messiah but, for the span of two years after the birth and announcement no further notice was taken of Him till these Magi or Wise men came.

One might criticize the Jews for being asleep, and missing Christ's first coming. However, before we criticize them too much, we should ask whether or not Christians today continue in the same vein or are we really watching for Christ's Second coming? Are our hearts as those Jews' hearts in the days of Christ's birth?

In the days of Herod, the king, it says three Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. Now note that there are unscriptural traditions that have developed so that this event can be turned into a commercial success. Christmas carols will tell you that there were three Kings of the Orient, but Scripture says nothing like that. It does not say that these visitors were Kings, how many there were, whether they were traveling with their families or not, and does not give their names or their nationalities. Matthew does not seem to care about our practices of Christmas cards, Nativity scenes, or our church Christmas pageant.

Scripture focuses on their intent. They had traveled all this long way to worship Him.

Herod was an Edomite, made king of Judea by Augustus and Antonius, the then chief rulers of the Roman state. Herod was known or achieved the status of being known as a great ruler, builder and administrator. However, great he was in the politics of the time he also was known for his great cruelty. In terms of Jesus' birth, the reign of Herod also gives us a chronological marking point as Jesus was said to be born before the death of Herod the Great, which is probably to be dated in four **BC**, but given this, the exact date of Jesus' birth is unknown. The discussion about Herod allows the further historical legitimacy about the birth of the Messiah as the secular world made note of Herod and his activities about the Child.

The wise men that came to honour the child, were referred to as "Magi", a word which is always used in a bad sense in the sacred writings; hence they are initially thought by some to be magicians, sorcerers' wizards, such as Simon Magus (Acts 8:9). However, some have thought that this could be a reference to their national name, from those who inhabited a country in some part of Arabia, called Magodia. That being the case these men came out of the nation of the Medes, which would agree with the character of these persons, and the word seems to be rather a name of character and office, and thus make them Wise men, and priests of the Persians. One writer gives an assessment:

“Great legends and myths have grown up around these mysterious travelers. For example, from the biblical upon we cannot be certain about the number of the Magi. Tradition says there were three men because they gave three different gifts. We do not know their nationalities for sure, and we do not know their names, or if they rode camels and wore bathrobes. Matthew does not seem to have Christmas cards scenes or Christmas pageants in mind when he records the events, but we can discover fragmentary information about the Magi from biblical and secular sources.

Herodotus, a Greek historian of the times describes the Magi as a priestly class in Medea, or Persia, which is now Iran. They were active throughout Babylonia during much of Old Testament history. The book of Daniel in the Old Testament tells about their influence under King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon in the sixth century before Jesus was born.



At its heart, the religion of Magi was satanic, based on superstition and fear. They observed numerous demonic practices-- sorcery, astrology, witchcraft, divination of dreams, soothsaying. In short, the Magi of ancient near East were occult practitioners. Our word "magic" comes from their name.

The ancient world made little distinction between superstition and science. The science of astronomy was blended with the superstition of astrology, and the Magi were experts at both. They were considered sages, the scholars of their time. They were also politically powerful since no person could become King unless he mastered the scientific and religious disciplines of the Magi. They were not themselves Kings, but the kingmakers of the Middle Eastern world. Their political and legal expertise resulted in the highest legal code in Medeo-Persia. In the book of Daniel and Esther, in the Old Testament, their teaching is described as "the law of the Medes and the Persians". Our modern word "magistrate" is a direct descendent of the word of Magi. Daniel, the godly young Jewish prisoner of King Nebuchadnezzar, was appointed chief of the Magi in Babylon because of his amazing wisdom, intuition and knowledge that came from the Lord God.

These details give us our first clue as to how our first Century Magi might have known about this one who was to be born in Israel as king of the Jews 1500 miles to the west. Although we are not certain how much Old Testament truth informed the Magi when they came to Jerusalem looking for the Messiah, we do know that Jews stayed in Persia after they returned from exile in the sixth century B.C. this people had the Jewish Scriptures and additional Old Testament writings that were circulated Throughout the Middle East when they were completed. We do not know how the Magi knew the messianic prophecies had been fulfilled, but obviously the Lord revealed it to them some way and then confirmed it by a sign, the star. Perhaps they drew a connection between that star and an Old Testament prophecy in Numbers 24:17. Balaam, a prophet whom the text says spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, relates that a star was to come: *"I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall arise out of Israel"*.

Had they read that passage; it would have special significance to them as an astrologer's since it is the only verse in the Old Testament that mentions a star in any kind of sign. The phrase, "a scepter coming out of Israel" does suggest a King of the Jews".

What was the star? Was it a comet, some kind of planetary conjunction, or a supernova? I don't know. Planetariums purport several theories about the star at the Christmas season, as do astronomers who try to prove that it was some sort of natural phenomena. Perhaps the star was a visible manifestation of the glory of God, like the pillar of light which led Israel by night, or like the glory of the Lord that shone on the shepherds when Jesus' birth was announced to them. We could discuss it at length, but Matthew is not concerned with scientific details. At the heart of his account is worship, the submission and adoration of the Magi for Jesus for as soon as they arrive in Jerusalem, they announce, *"We have come to worship him"*.

It is commonly accepted, that immediately after the departure of the Magi, Joseph with his wife and child were ordered into Egypt, which could not be done before Mary's Purification, a ritual carried out after childbirth. This points to the fact that their coming was near upon two years after the birth of Christ; since it is afterwards observed, that "*Herod sent 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”.

What induced these wise men to make this inquiry? Remember that in some writings we read that some regard these Magi as fools because their power had obviously degenerated by the time of the Romans. There would have been disagreements in their caste and some members would have thought that this group of Magi who wanted to travel to Israel were being foolish. But note that they believed in the Texts that they had, and they were prepared to commit themselves beforehand to take all kinds of risks to see this child that was born to be King of the Jews.

We can only wish that we are beforehand committed to the knowledge of God for we know much more than the Magi about the Lord Jesus Christ. They had relatively limited knowledge that they believed but they committed themselves to search. They therefore stand as an example to us in how we should seek knowledge and obey the little knowledge that we have. Extraordinary appearances of God in the created world should put us upon enquiring after His mind. It is by signs given in Scripture that Christ foretold His coming in the heavens.

The birth of Christ was communicated to the Jewish shepherds by an angel, and to the Gentile philosophers by a star. To both, God spoke in their own language, and in the way they were best acquainted with.

Some therefore think that the light which the shepherds saw shining round about them, the night after Christ was born, was the very same which to the wise men, who lived at such a distance, appeared as a star but this cannot easily be confirmed, because the same star which they had seen in the east they saw a great while after, leading them to the house where Christ lay. This would encompass a span of two years.

However, it occurred, it was a candle set up on purpose to guide them to Christ.

In eastern nations idolaters worshipped the stars as the host of heaven, especially as the planets have the names of their idol-gods. Thus, the stars that had been misused came to be put to the right use, to lead men to Christ and so the gods of the heathen became His servants.

Verse 2-6. They came from the east to Jerusalem, in further quest of this Prince. They came to inquire about this King, instead of letting time and others bring news of this birth to people of their nation. They had the mind to be better acquainted with Him, that they took a long journey on purpose to inquire after Him. Note that those who truly desire to know Christ, and find Him, will not regard pains or perils in seeking after Him.

Their question was, ***where is he that is born King of the Jews?*** They do not ask whether there were such a one born? (they are sure of that, and speak of it with assurance, so strongly was it set home upon their hearts) but, where is He born?

Those who know something of Christ cannot but covet to know more of Him. They call Christ the King of the Jews, for so the Messiah was expected to be, and He is Protector and Ruler of all the spiritual Israel, He is born a King.

The Magi or Wise men came to Jerusalem expecting to find all Jerusalem worshipping at the feet of this new King, but they went from door to door still possessed with this question (Where is he that is born king of the Jews?), and no man can give them any information.

There is more gross ignorance in the world, and in the church too, than we are aware of. Many that we think should direct us to Christ are themselves strangers to Him. They are never the wiser. The Wise men however continued in their inquiry even as though some asked them,



what do you mean? They should have known better. These visitors were asking because they had seen His star in the east. Maybe they were asked, "What business have ye with Him? What have the men of the east to do with the King of the Jews?" They have their answer ready, "We are come to worship Him". They conclude He will, in process of time, be their King, and therefore they will in good time ingratiate themselves with Him and with those about Him. Have we seen Christ's star? Let us study to give Him honour.

Verse 7. The cunning Herod did not want to show his overwhelming and all-consuming interest but badly wanted to find out the age of the Child King. But first he called the Jewish scholars and Bible experts to ask them when the Scriptures have stated their Messiah was to be born. The Jewish scholars told him the truth. He would be born in Bethlehem, the house of bread. This was written in the book of Micah 5: 1-3. Note that Bethlehem was the place where the first announcement of the Temple was made, and this was where the true temple of God was to be born. It was where Jacob buried Rachel, where Ruth and Boaz met, and it was where David lived and reigned.

But Herod needed more information. Herod called the Magi secretly to find out when the star they followed to Jerusalem first appeared. The rising of the star would show the birth date of the child and so it appears that Herod had already decided to kill the child, and if he somehow escaped, to massacre all the baby boys not only in Bethlehem but in all the nearby areas, to make sure he eliminated all possible threat.

Note that though Herod rejected the Messiah and wanted to kill him, he did not leave Jerusalem to join the Magi on their journey of wisdom and worship. He simply confined himself at the time to diligently probing the Magi for any information they could give him, so he could put two and two together. This was a master politician and manipulator.

We must never forget that the days of Herod the Great were days of violence, evil and wicked despotism. He was not a Jew but an Idumean or Edomite who was half Jewish and half Jordanian. He hated Jews. He had serious character flaws, had an enormous ego, was insanely suspicious and he became a murderous old man. If he suspected anyone of being a rival for his power and authority, he eliminated them promptly. He assassinated his own wife, her mother, and then three of his own sons. When he came to power, he assassinated 3,000 of the Sadducees to confirm his political power and teach them a lesson in politics. We are told that Caesar Augustus said it was safer to be one of Herod's pigs than to be one of his sons. His paranoia was so extreme that when he was 70 and terminally ill, he moved from Jerusalem to Jericho and ordered that a group of Jerusalem's most distinguished citizens be arrested on false charges and imprisoned with the instructions that they would be executed once he died. He knew that no one would mourn his death and so he wanted to guarantee that tears of grief would be shed when he died.

But on the other hand, he was smart, and he made himself useful to the Romans during the many civil wars and political strife and trouble in Rome and the strife in Palestine and against the government of Rome. So, the government of Rome trusted him and appointed him governor in 47 B.C. and gave him the title of King of Israel in 40 B.C. during this turbulent period. He survived and died a natural death and in so doing was a marvelous example of survival. On the other hand, he was called Herod the Great and deserved the title because he did keep his in Israel for 33 years under Roman occupation, building cities, building the Temple in Jerusalem that Jesus visited 33 years later. In difficult economic times he even cancelled



taxes though he had the reputation of a greedy and demanding tax collector, and when the famine was terrible in 25 B.C., he even melted down his gold plate to buy corn for the starving population.

Remember therefore a ruler can be good in some respects and terrible in other respects. In the sight of God, he was evil and would suffer recompense in the lake of fire. He was a man of blood and in order to protect his interest in the throne without any compunction or second thought he would slaughter innocents in and around Bethlehem.

He had his chance at repentance, but he refused to join the Magi in their journey of wisdom because he hated and feared anything and anyone that threatened his self-centeredness. He was afraid of any possible rival for he lusted for power and he became corrupted. When therefore the Magi came and asked for the King of the Jews he was agitated and in turmoil and entire population shared in this turmoil. The common people did not enjoy any special privilege or power, but they feared Herod's inevitable reaction for they would suffer his violent anger. Do not be surprised therefore when people know what is wrong, but they go along with powerful and evil people and their actions. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, the educated, the rich, as well as the poor, were being selfish for they submitted to Herod's godless power based on this self-interest.

Few cared about biblical truth or right or wrong and very few thoughts that God would fulfill His Messianic promises through the Child that had come. So, the Magi went alone to Bethlehem. Nobody from the citizens of Jerusalem joined them. The people would reject anything that would upset the status quo. So, no wonder then that the same population would scream for Jesus' execution even though He did so many mighty miracles among them and they benefited from these miracles.

Herod was like many of the ancient as well as modern day rulers. We see many examples of those kind of rulers today in many countries.

Note that when the Magi visited and went to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Matthew described Jesus as a "child" and did not use the word which means "infant". So, we know that Jesus was probably a little boy over a year old at the time. This also would explain why Herod issued the edict restricted to destroy all the male children two years old and under. We also know from Scripture that Jesus was no longer in a manger but living with His family in a house when the Magi visited. This visit of the Magi took place after Joseph and Mary brought the offering to be made by the poorer people to the Temple and which is stipulated in the Law. Jesus would have been dedicated about forty days after His birth. Joseph and Mary were certainly poor before the visit of the Magi with their gifts.

Verse 8. The journey of about five to seven miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem would not have taken the Magi very long. Under the pretext of wanting to worship the King of the Jews, Herod enlisted the aid of the visitors to locate the child and bring him word.

Obviously, the wise men were deceived by his hypocritical humility and so Herod sent no escort, for he trusted that they would return to him.

The chief priests and the scribes made no effort to check out the birth or existence of Messiah and so the Magi, these Gentiles outside of the Commonwealth of Israel, went alone on their journey, searching for this new king. We do not read of any of the inhabitants of Jerusalem following the Magi to Bethlehem.



Obviously, the Magi firmly believed in the prophecies about Messiah King and the obvious disinterest of the Jews themselves did not deter them. They were believers. The people in Jerusalem might have been in turmoil and might have even laughed at them for having traveled so far on a wild goose chase, but they persisted.

It is amazing how God works. The people who should know better did not honor their King and did not give Him the praise and glory due to Him and so God took the rejects of the world, those “who were not a people” to recognize and honor Jesus. God determined that there would be Gentile disciples to worship and welcome His Son and provided what He needed to achieve His aims.

Note that if you do not give Him what He deserves, the Father will work out events so that He does receive what He deserves. The rage of the heathens and their wild imaginations of vain things will simply cause God to laugh.

May God help us who claim to be believers to have that level of commitment to seek the Lord and obey and worship Him. We also pray that men will search for Him, for God has promised that those who seek Him will certainly find Him.

Verses 9 - 10. The Magi left Jerusalem, with no large group of the citizens of Jerusalem, or no scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, or Sanhedrin members joining them on their journey. The King was rejected by people and rulers. In contrast the Magi had come on an arduous, long journey of hundreds of miles which probably took several months. They probably left people in their country that laughed at them behind their backs for following a star that was referred to in some ancient writings of some long dead prophets.

Note that these Magi did not know if the people of Israel would welcome them or whether or not they would find the One they sought. They probably did not know how the king would be born, the circumstances of His birth or His environment. They had to ask questions, and this brought them in contact with evil men, whose nature they did not recognize. Their trust of Herod showed their relative ignorance or Herod’s guile.

Note however that these men acted on with what they knew. They committed themselves to obey what they knew. God first showed them the star and gave them the understanding that they should inquire about this king. When it disappeared, they inquired.

It can readily be said that they believed what they were told because God gave them a little understanding and they had the faith to believe that God would tell them more as required. One writer advises:

“It is not required that disciples begin with great knowledge, being able to gather together all the great themes of Scripture into a coherent whole, being able to articulate them well and teach them to others. As wonderful as that is, will we obey what we know? Have we already decided that we will hear God when he speaks, embrace what he says, and act on it?

Once the Magi acted in faith, the Lord gave them more light. It’s always true that when you act on the little bit of light that you have; the Lord gives you more. They followed a star with scraps of prophecy, and they found their way to Jerusalem. There Jewish scholars could open the scrolls of the Prophets and say, “The Child will be born in Bethlehem.” They followed a star and were taught the Bible.

Finally, the Lord himself spoke to them in a dream to warn them. Their obedience led to more information, more access to the heart and mind of God.”

More warning and conclusion from this thought:



“We have immeasurably more information about the ways of God than the Magi. We have the Bible and aids available for study. We are surrounded by people who can help us understand and give us direction. The hard question remains: is it our firm conviction that what God says, we really believe?”

When the Magi left Jerusalem and immediately saw the Star appear again, for whatever it was, it was so bright that the Magi could see it as they traveled, and they were very joyful. The star led them toward Bethlehem, and amazingly over the exact location, the exact house of Joseph and Mary.

Obviously, this was the supernatural guidance of God, guiding the seekers to Messiah. We can speculate as to whether the star was a conjunction of planets, a comet or a supernova, but these astronomers certainly recognized that this was a unique phenomenon, which had great spiritual and cosmic meaning. They knew now that they were not deceived. They did not take this long trip in vain. They were sure God was with them. They received their reward.

Verse 11. The Magi had followed the direction of the star and finally they arrived at this house where Jesus and his family were staying. The star had steadied itself over the house. They were now completely prepared to worship the King as intended. They would have seen that their trek did not land them on a mansion or palace but at some modest cottage. The Bible does not mention that they thought any less of the Messiah King. This could only mean that the Spirit had allowed them to see past the current state of this family and look at this King and understand what He was and intended to become and do. These wise men did not balk but continued on their mission to worship the King and so they presented themselves and their gifts to the one that was most deserving of it. They offered joyous and spontaneous worship. Note that there is no indication that the Magi had treated Herod the king with any great kind of honour. They had reserved their worship for the Christ whom they had adored and to whom they had submitted themselves.

It will be the wisdom of the wisest of men that allows them to behave in such a fashion when they follow the leading of the Spirit and accept and are willing to know Christ and understand themselves and their true interest as humble, faithful worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Magi gave of their best to the Master, setting the example for all of those that would follow and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. They gave of their earthly possessions, but they also gave of themselves, willing to worship Him and be servants to Him.

These probably impressively dressed visitors prostrated themselves before the young child. As was the custom when one sought and found themselves in the presence of a King they presented him with gifts of great material value.

They gave Him gold, the most precious metal known to mankind, frankincense, a rare and extremely expensive, exotic incense used in Jewish temple worship, and myrrh, an aromatic spice used in embalming the dead, which also when mixed with wine was an anesthetic. This was a curious gift for a newborn and introduced an ominous note into their worship. But in any case, these gifts obviously indicated that this was a new king and a royal person.

The men were still listening to God and He again spoke to them. God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod and in obedience they left and went back to their country using a different route. They were worshiping and they were obedient. These Wise Men had obviously learned much more about the God of Israel. We see that they had given of themselves by their obedience when God spoke to them.



One writer summarizes that there are several contrasts in this section as follows:

“Herod the wicked Idumean usurper king, contrasts with Jesus, the born righteous king of Israel. The great distance from which the Magi traveled to visit Jesus contrasts with the short distance Israel’s leaders had to travel to see Him. The genuine worship of the wise men contrasts with the feigned worship of Herod and the total lack of worship of the chief priests and scribes. The Gentile Magi’s sensitivity and responsiveness to divine guidance also contrasts with the insensitivity and unresponsiveness of Israel’s leaders.”

We note the antagonism toward Jesus. Herod had asked the Magi to bring him word on whatever contact they had made, and it is probable that they would have done so if they had not been countermanded. They might not have suspected that they were being made tools in a wicked design. The Magi seemed to have been trusting in Herod’s words since he said that he too wished to worship the King. They might have been impressed when they saw Harold surrounded by all the scribes and Pharisees and the Jewish experts in the law giving him advice which he seemed to have accepted. But we know that Herod must have been very convincing and based on his reputation whatever he wanted to do would be consistent with how he eliminated those that he thought were competing with his rule. He certainly was good at what he did for he succeeded in having the Romans trust him longer than they had trusted anyone else in their subjugated territories.

It is interesting to note that the Magi did depart for their own country by another way to carry their good tidings to their countrymen telling them what had happened to them. But it is strange that we never hear any more of them, or that they after this attended to Jesus in the Temple though they had worshiped in the cradle. But nevertheless, we know that they had heard from God and that their faith in this Child had been confirmed by the Lord from Heaven. We are warned that formal knowledge of the Scriptures does not lead to knowing who Jesus really is and what He means to mankind’s salvation.

Here in contrast, we see people who knew the prophecies but who were blind to the spiritual teachings of Scripture. They were apathetic. Their king and rulers were like most of those in leadership and in governmental authority only interested in their throne and their political well-being.

Verses 12-15. Now for the second time we read that an angel appeared to Joseph. The angel told him to take the young child and his mother and immediately flee into Egypt and to stay there until he again brought further instructions. They were to do so to escape the wrath of Herod who wanted to destroy the young child. Joseph is instructed by the angel to **flee** with his family to sojourn for a short while where it was once a place of bondage and oppression, but which would become a haven of refuge for the little family escaping imminent danger.

Flee carries the idea of a fugitive on some dangerous flight. The word “departed” (*anachoreo*) implies danger. See Matthew 4:12. Egypt was only seventy-five miles from Bethlehem and Herod had no authority there and so it would be a natural place of refuge. In addition, a large Jewish community was there and so they would not feel isolated.

Note interestingly that Joseph and Mary were poor and the gifts from the Magi provided much-needed funds for their travel. They previously traveled from home to Bethlehem under difficult circumstances and suffered much hardship. These young people had to leave in the middle of the night on a dangerous journey not knowing if there was anyone to welcome them in Egypt.



It is however very interesting that in one instance we have the Magi or wise men worshipping the King and then the king is fleeing into Egypt.

Scriptures make it clear therefore that this is a rejected King. He is the royal king of prophecy, but He has to live as a rejected King because of the nature of human beings. Egypt is near but there is a matter of the fulfillment of prophecy.

Historians tell us that Egypt had over the centuries become a haven for Jews as various oppressors marched into the land and subjugated the people. Egypt became a natural asylum for them especially from the time of the Maccabean revolt. Between the Old Testament and the New Testament Israel had been ruled by a Greek government which preceded the Roman rule of the New Testament. That rule followed the rule of Babylon and Medeo- Persia. During the Greek period there was a revolution led by some persons and a patriotic Jewish family called the Maccabees. In this time many Jews fled into Egypt to the city of Alexandria which Alexander the Great had established as a place of refuge for the Jews. The immigration which had decreased again began to increase under the reign of Herod and Egypt became filled with Jewish residents.

When Herod heard that the wise men had left without coming back to him to report his wrath was kindled and he began the execution of all male children under age 2.

Never forget that Herod the King was a servant of Satan and was far more interested in the facts of the birth of the Messiah and where the Messiah was born than the high priest and the scribes who knew exactly where He was born. They had no interest in whether He had been born or not.

Note therefore that Satan was exercising his three titles. First, he exercised the title of dragon by his malice. Then he exercised his title of serpent by his subtlety and then he exercised his title of lion by his strength. Herod allowed Satan to act as a dragon for he was Satan's servant and verse 16 shows us the horror that he carried out.

God certainly calls on His saints to go through tremendous difficulty. We should not complain about the little difficulties we experienced today. We remember what Mary and Joseph went through, and what our Savior went through when He left glory and came down to earth, marked for death.

Joseph was a righteous man and he immediately obeyed everything the angel instructed him. He stayed there until the death of Herod in 4 B. C. God knew what was going to happen and before Herod knew that the Magi were not going to come back to him and that he was outsmarted, God acted because He cared for His Son and His people.

We know that God cares for us and we don't have to run around trying to do all kind of things to protect our self. God knows what will happen and has the right plans. We must stay close to God and listen to His call and His direction.

CONCLUSION

God's response to how people on earth responded to His actions are most important.

We are called by Scripture to pay attention to the contrasts in people and in rulers.

Matthew tells us that the flight into Egypt was referred to by the prophet in Hosea 11:1 and that this was fulfilled in Jesus. God said that He would call His Son out of Egypt. It appears that the history of Israel, the son of God in a different sense, anticipated the life of Messiah.

Interestingly Matthew does not make any attempt to describe Jesus Himself.



Instead, he stresses that Messiah received an amazingly hostile reception when He came into the world. Herod and his corrupt court were hostile, while the Jewish religious leaders were indifferent to Him. This tells us that Matthew intended and did show throughout his book that these were the typical responses to Jesus during His ministry.

The prophecies in this section however continue to emphasize that Jesus was the promised Messiah who fulfilled everything that the prophets had predicted. It also showed that God was in complete control and provided all necessary care for His Son.

In these verses we read of the recognition by Gentiles that the Messiah had come but we are also presented with the tragic aftermath following the visit of Magi to the newborn Jesus, where they paid homage to the newborn king and offered gifts. So here we have a picture of the old community that did not belong to God, as well as some newcomers who typified those who would be in the new community and who would be combined with the remnant called out of a bad situation by the grace of God. Herod was a murderous, paranoid maniac who was 'king' of Judea at the time and held his office at the behest of the conquering Romans. One writer describes him as follows: **Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named King of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically, 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 20 B.C.) 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 Marianne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabeans) and at least two of the sons." "Herod was not only an Idumean in race and a Jew in religion, but he was a heathen in practice and a monster in character".**

Then we have the Magi, who are described by a word which means experts regarding the stars and constellation. They were considered to be from the ancient group of Chaldeans who could interpret dreams (Daniel 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7). We are told that later the term described men interested in dreams, magic, astrology and the future, some of them being honest enquirers after the truth, but some of them were charlatans.

Remember therefore your background does not have to determine who you become. A bad family background does not make you a bad person. So, you choose the way and the journey of wisdom.

The bad but smart self-centered Herod had assembled the leaders of Israel to investigate the Magi's inquiry. He sought information from the chief priests, drawn from the Sadducees at this time, and the scribes, the teachers of the law, drawn mainly from the Pharisees. Herod learned that the Magi were looking for the Christ or the Messiah (verse four) and so this information was important for him, since he wanted to protect his right to the throne.



The assembled advisers told Herod that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem but showed no interest in checking out the story of the Magi. Though Jerusalem was *troubled*, the residents made no attempt to investigate like the Magi. This was remarkable indifference by the religious leaders, the chief priests and scribes, as well as the people in Jerusalem.

The Magi went on their way and were successful; finding the King that they had sought. They were godly men and God warned them not to return to Herod and they obeyed and left the country secretly without informing Herod of the whereabouts of Jesus. These godly men sought Jesus, looked for Him, and God allowed them to find Him.

God will guide us in the same way if we seek Him. One writer points us to several contrasts as follows:

“Several contrasts in this section reveal Matthew’s emphasis. Herod, the wicked Idumean usurper King, contrasts with Jesus, the born righteous King of Israel.

The greatest distance from which the Magi traveled to visit Jesus contrasts with the short distance Israel’s leaders had to travel to see Him.

The genuine worship of the wise men contrasts with the feigned worship of Herod and the total lack of worship of the chief priests and scribes.

The Gentile Magi’s sensitivity and responsiveness to divine guidance also contrasts with the insensitivity and unresponsiveness of Israel’s leaders.”

When Herod found out the Magi had fooled him, he was furious and ordered the murder of all male children under two years old. Israel knew the prophecies, but they did not care about spiritual realities. They had formal knowledge of Scripture, but that in itself did not lead them to seek Jesus. Gentiles worshipped Him, but His own people were apathetic and did not bother, for they were cold and indifferent.

Now we will see how God’s predictions about His Messiah would come to pass and how He would protect His Messiah. His obedient servants would obey Him.

The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh brought by the Magi (3:11) would turn out to be God’s provision for the little family so that they could live in Egypt. These were very valuable and could be sold or traded for things the family needed to live on, until Joseph could find some work for the time they were in the country.

Joseph had obeyed the angel and their night departure gives a sense of their imminent danger. It is important to note that the Father sent our Lord Jesus Christ into this world with a death sentence. His Son would fight the greatest of all battles to conquer sin and death. He came to earth to die, to take our place so that we would not die.

Herod was a mere tool used by Satan in an attempt to snuff out the new community of God at its birth, by killing the progenitor. This tyrant did not win though he fully meant to destroy the life of Jesus, to inflict unbelievable tragedy on the human race, so that they would have no hope.

It is interesting to note that God was so merciful that He allowed the wicked and murderous Herod nearing the end of his life to be confronted with witnesses that the Messiah was born and that they had come to worship Him.



Herod was given the opportunity to repent. What a gracious God! The spiritually bankrupt scribes and priests in Jerusalem were also given an opportunity to repent. All of them could have repented and cried to God for mercy, and God would have heard them. But of their own free will they forged the chains of their wicked lives that had now bound them. They had made the chain link by link, tied it to themselves, and bound themselves by its heavy weight of evil. They were the authors of their own misfortune.

Note that Herod was disturbed, which literally means shaken, frightened, coiled up inside by some kind of stirring motion. Satan's servants do not like when things do not go their way. When he realized the Magi had outwitted him, he was furious, and made the choice that he had always made, namely, to kill his rivals and promote himself.

So, what will we decide? Shall we carry the chain of death that we had forged all our lives? Or shall we turn to the One who came to take for us what we deserve?

It is only He that can win for us. He was born so that men did not have to die. So, wisdom says we should hold onto His promise. John 1:5 tells us: *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it"*. We know that the darkness cannot overcome the 'light'. So, let us understand that the 'light' still shines, and we must take the journey of wisdom, the same journey taken by the Magi. Let us never like Herod and the scribes and Pharisees orchestrate our own eternal death.

Let us join the new community by accepting Jesus, buried with Him in baptism, and rising to new life out of the water, living always in the way of righteousness.

It is most important to look at ourselves in the light of the comments by this writer:

"Our lives are like this journey to Egypt. We know the promise of God that he will complete what he has begun in us, that we are part of some plan that is bigger than ourselves. We know that he has promised to make us like his Son.

But very often the next stage of the journey doesn't look that way at all, does it?

It looks dangerous and chaotic.

We are clearer about the tyrants who issue threats than we are about the Lord who promises protection. The Christian life has hardships, regrettable failures, confusing stretches of wilderness, circumstances that have no explanation. But in all of that, God is redeeming and remaking things. He has a good end in mind....

Sometimes in our lives there are tyrants, threats, awful words spoken against us. Sometimes the tyrant is something like cancer. It may be loneliness or financial chaos or personal weakness. Tyrants threaten destruction from which no good can come.

But they don't win. This family is protected, and Jesus does not die as a victim. And God will fulfill the plans he has for us, complete the work he has begun in us."

Attacks on the 'new community' have continued over the centuries and will only intensify.

The supernatural birth of Jesus is the only way to account for the life that He lived. Members of the new community have been 'born again' of the Spirit and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live holy lives and strive to be like Jesus.

Joseph was said to be a righteous man, let us also endeavour to be likewise spoken of, understanding that obedience to the word of God is the hallmark of those in the new community.



