

MATTHEW 2 – WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN YOU HEAR ABOUT JESUS?

Some say life is a game, while others say it is a play. I prefer to think of it as a play/ drama rather than a game. Life is too important to 'play at.' What we do here determines where we spend eternity. That is not a game. It is a serious endeavor. Today we will go through the second chapter of Matthew. There are three major players in this act: Herod, the Magi and Jesus.

We have already seen how Matthew has gone through hoops in order to prove Jesus is qualified legally to be the Messiah. He will continue to do that in the second chapter while at the same time giving us a brief but important narrative of the events which went on within a couple years of Jesus' birth. Please remember that Matthew is authenticating Jesus' qualifications as the Messiah to an audience and people that for the most part, as you will see, were against Him from the outset. There are various reasons for that, both spiritual and cultural. The theme of God's sovereignty is displayed in what is called by scholars, "The infancy narrative." Jesus did not operate according to typical human expectations and ambitions. He did not come with typical human power, fame, strategies, fanfare or power. And He often ran counter to typical human strategies in that He was a humble servant to both Jew and Gentile alike as He offered healing and hope in His Gospel.

And once again, we will see that there is nothing new under the sun and all things are common among men. People respond to the Good News of Jesus now in the same ways they did when He was a mere child. As we get to the end of the message you will have the same opportunity as those we read of today. The question is, "What will you do with it?"

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." 9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child

with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

There is a gap of somewhere around two years between chapters one and two. Jesus was born into a time of great expectation. Josephus, Seutonius and Tacitus all wrote that there was a feeling of expectation in the air which spread beyond the borders of Palestine, that the time was ripe for a man to come and rule the world from the Davidic throne. This expectancy was more than a hope among the Jews. There was a tension among leaders throughout the region that something or should I say someone was on the horizon. They were correct, but only a few foreigners could see it.

The term, 'wise men' comes from the Greek word, 'magoi.' In this instance it is used of a priestly class from the environs of Persia. I believe these men to have been Zoroastrian priests. Zoroastrianism is an eastern religion that started roughly six centuries earlier. It morphed from time to time but it does have some vague similarities here and there in its theology, to Judaism and Christianity. These priests were a combination of scholar, astronomer and astrologer. They would have been exposed to the Old Testament when they encountered Jews from the Babylonian exile. They would have included the Jewish scriptures in their own libraries and apparently they took heed of the OT prophecies. The same ones in which Matthew is bringing to light.

Contrary to popular culture there most likely wouldn't have been only three in the party. Kings and leaders from all over consulted these men. They often traveled to greet kings, make treaties and even make changes from time to time, depending on the politics of the day. So this wasn't some small group of pointy-headed geeks coming into town. This was a major motorcade and would have caught the attention of anyone within sight of them. When these guys came to town there was a reason for it – a good reason. And this is why we read that Herod was troubled when he heard they were in town.

Herod's bio:

- Half Jew / half Idumean, (Edomite, Arab)
- Known for his paranoia; was known to have people killed if he felt they threatened his reign. Had two of his sons put to death. Caesar Augustus is reported to have said, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son."
- The Parthian invasion in 34 BC... Herod had to flee to Rome for protection and military support.
- Herod had placed people he controlled – "yes men" in power within the Temple precincts. Therefore, "All Jerusalem" was troubled. If Herod was in danger, then so were they.

Herod was something of a puppet king. This is why the question asked by the Magi is something of an insult. They asked, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" Herod was appointed. The Magi were looking for the rightful ruler.

At any rate, Herod asks the priests and scribes where this child was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem, quoting Micah 5:2. Herod then enquired as to how long the Magi had been watching/ following the star. They answered him and from verse 16, it can be inferred that the “star” was first seen two years prior. Therefore the Magi were not at Jesus’ birth. They saw Him when He was a toddler.

The Magi then go in search of Jesus and find Him in Bethlehem.

What was the star?

- A conjunction? According to Babylonian astronomical records, (the realm of the Magi,) there was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn on May 27, 7 B.C. Jupiter represented the primary deity; Saturn represented the Jewish people. These two planets came together in the constellation Pisces, which represented Palestine. Therefore, Jupiter represented the star of the king with Saturn (the Jews) and Pisces (Palestine) showing the nationality of the king and geographical location of his birth.
- However, when it comes to a star settling over the home of Jesus, for that we either have a supernatural occurrence of some other sort of star OR the star would have to have been an angel.

At any rate, the Magi were able to find the house, give their gifts and worship Jesus. They were then warned not to return to Herod and sought another way home. This was quite a feat due to the size of their entourage.

Now we return to Herod.

The Flight to Egypt

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Joseph is warned in a dream and heeds the warning by quickly leaving the country.

- There was and had been for a long time, a substantial Jewish population in Egypt. They probably had family there.
- "Out of Egypt I called my son. When Joseph and the young family left Egypt, Matthew, by his quotation of Hosea 11:1, sees Jesus' leaving Egypt as a "second Exodus." This paints the picture to his audience of a second founding of the nation of Israel, in a sense. This would have really spoken to the Jewish audience to whom he was writing.
- History tells us that Herod died shortly thereafter. So they didn't have to stay in Egypt too long.

Herod Kills the Children

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*18 "A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

- Herod attempts to rid himself of another challenger to his throne.
- Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15. In its original context, Ramah was a gathering point for young men as they were taken away to exile.
- Rachel personified the mothers of Israel mourning as their sons were taken away. Matthew likens this to that slaughter.
- Why no record of the "slaughtering of the innocents?" Bethlehem was a remote backwater town. There were perhaps no more than 20 children of the targeted age. Therefore it most likely wouldn't have made the newspaper.

The Return to Nazareth

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land

of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Joseph was told of the death of Herod by an angel and accordingly left Egypt to return home. However, he was subsequently warned that Herod's son Archelaus was now the ruler of that region and chose to go to the Galilee. It was ruled by Herod's other son, Antipas, who was not seen to be nearly as evil.

- Upon Herod's death, his kingdom was divided into four parts or tetrarchies. Archelaus was soon removed from power due to the complaints of the Jews because of his cruelty.
- Palestine was divided into three regions: Galilee, the northernmost part around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, Samaria, the central part, and Judea the southernmost part.
- Most of Jesus' ministry would be accomplished within a small triangle in the area of Galilee.
- Matthew makes reference to a prophecy stating that He would be called Nazarene. However, there is no specific prophecy in the Bible.
- *The best explanation of the origin of this name appears to be that which traces it to the word netzer in Isa 11:1--the small twig, sprout, or sucker, which the prophet there says, "shall*

come forth from the stem (or rather, 'stump') of Jesse, the branch which should fructify from his roots." The little town of Nazareth, mentioned neither in the Old Testament nor in JOSEPHUS, was probably so called from its insignificance: a weak twig in contrast to a stately tree; and a special contempt seemed to rest upon it--"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Joh 1:46)--over and above the general contempt in which all Galilee was held, from the number of Gentiles that settled in the upper territories of it, and, in the estimation of the Jews, debased it.

That is the basic narrative and the backstory to our chapter. Matthew has given us the basics of Jesus' early childhood. He has given prophecies in order to support Jesus' claim of being the Messiah. We can see God's sovereign hand protecting, notifying and warning those that will listen without any evil intentions. But there is much more that we can ask ourselves in order to apply this to our lives. There is more here than history.

First of all, with the attention of the Magi being drawn to Bethlehem we can see what is referred to as 'natural revelation.' That is, a revelation of who God is which comes from outside the scriptures. The writer of Hebrews alludes to this:

Heb. 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

One can look at what we can see and understand there is a God. Though the Magi were pagan priests, they took the revelation they had in the sky seriously. This brought them to Jerusalem, but it could get them no closer to Jesus on its own. At that point they had to consult the scriptures. This brought them to Christ. We can only come so close to God outside of scripture. We have to delve into His Word in order to truly seek His face.

Let's look at Herod. He had access to the scriptures. In fact, he was part Israelite. He had some "Biblical background, but no relationship to God. Herod was an insider, in that he was a Jew. The priests and scribes that told Herod as well as the Magi where the Messiah was to be born had the head knowledge, yet they did nothing with it. It was the outsiders that took heed of the word when they heard it. Sadly, this pattern will be acted out again and again in the New Testament.

Herod heard the same location, 'Bethlehem' as did the Magi, but he did nothing with the revelation. The priests and scribes knew of the location but did nothing with it. Only the Magi acted upon what they heard.

What was the result? They (Magi) sought after Jesus and they found HIM!! And what did they do when they found Him? They worshiped Him!!

But the question for us all today is, "What will you do with the revelation of Jesus and His being our savior? Will we do

as Herod, seek our own will and kingdom or will we do as the Magi and seek out Jesus in order to worship Him? Most of us have heard the same words, sermons, and Bible passages as anyone else. But what have we done with this knowledge? That is what I want to leave you with today. What will you do with Jesus the Christ? Ignore Him in order to continue to build your own kingdom or seek Him in order to worship and serve Him? What say ye?