

Lesson #3- Matthew Chapter 2 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, **there came wise men** from the east to Jerusalem,". What do you think qualified these men as "wise" men?

Help for Teachers:

- There are many fascinating points to be made concerning the wise men.
 - Concerning the coming of the wise men, Matthew tells his Jewish audience to "behold", these wise men are not Jewish. Except for a few devout people, such as Anna and Zacharias and a few shepherds, the Bible does not record that there was any big deal among the leaders or common people of the Jewish nation concerning the birth of Jesus. The people that proudly boasted of their heritage and understanding of the Scriptures did not see that anything special had happened. Life was going on as usual for them.
 - "From the east", to the Jewish people, would most commonly have meant northern Arabia, Syria, and Mesopotamia. All these were Gentile lands, but from these lands come people for the purpose of worshipping Jesus Christ. Many scholars think that "the east" is referring to the same place Balaam was from, the land of the Moabites, and believe that the Maji's interpretation of the appearing of the star was fulfillment of Balaam's prophesy found in Numbers 24:17 ("I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.").
 - Do you think the wise men saw a star and then started looking for a King, or were they looking for a King and then saw a star? Could it be that these "gentiles" were children of God? Was salvation only for the Jews in O.T. times? Do you find it strange that the Jewish religious leaders, when asked where this Child/ King was born, responded by quoting back to them prophesies from Scriptures, but yet showed no interest in going themselves to see if this King was born (Micah 5:2)?
 - What makes a person "wise" in God's economy? Find Scripture to support your answer.

2. Who was Herod and why was he troubled? Why was “all Jerusalem” troubled also?

Help for Teachers:

- **Herod and his trouble:** This was Herod I, also called Herod the Great. He was of an Edomite father and an Arabian mother. The Edomites descended from Esau and were perpetually in conflict with Israel. Early in Edomite history they became predominately idol worshippers. The Edomites formed a government with kings as their rulers long before Israel began to have kings. When Israel came out of Egypt on their exodus journey, they requested permission to pass through Edom on their way to Canaan. The Edomites, with military threat, rejected their request and Israel was forced to take another way around. King Saul fought against the Edomites and King David brought them under subjugation. After Solomon’s reign, the Edomites regained some freedom from Israel but were then conquered by the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser. During the Maccabean wars, Israel again subjugated the Edomites and forced them to convert to Judaism, though the Edomites persisted in their hatred of the Jews. When Rome came to power and gained control over Israel, Herod I was the son of one of these Edomite forced converts to Judaism that Rome appointed king over Judea, for the purpose of keeping Israel under Roman domination in exchange for significant wealth and authority. Herod the Great’s big fear with the coming of the wise men was their declaration that a King was born. He saw this as a monumental threat to his exalted position with Rome and knew that failure to maintain Roman control over the Jews could even result in his execution. I’m sure this was all extenuated by his knowledge of Scripture because of his childhood background.
- **Jerusalem and its trouble:** Jerusalem was the center of politics and religion, and the politics and religion of the Jews had blended so that the two were under common leadership. Two predominant parties had emerged, with radically different theologies but a common political goal of being in power over the people. We know these as the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They shared power, but as a puppet government under the thumb of Herod I who was under the thumb of Rome. Like many cults, they used religion as leverage to keep the common people under their domination. The Jewish leaders, “Jerusalem”, knew that the Scriptures taught of a coming King. It seems they would have seen in the events the wise men were sharing a lot of what their prophets had foretold. They really didn’t want a Messiah to come and spoil their party. Their heartburn was that should a King arise from among the people, Rome would be challenged and their comfy position under the current system would be threatened. For them, everything was weighed in the balance of how it impacted their control. It

is important to note though, that while this was the situation apparent, God still had people among the Jews that were earnestly looking for the coming of their Savior.

3. What gifts did the wise men bring and what was the significance of each gift?

Help for Teachers:

- **Gold: The Kingship of Jesus.** It's obvious that throughout history gold, due to its rarity and difficulty to collect, has been a standard of wealth and so it was used as a standard of kings. For example, Solomon had vast stores of gold to which he added every year. The Magi were proclaiming Jesus King of kings when they presented to Him their gift of gold.
- **Frankincense: The High Priesthood of Jesus.** The high priest burned incense to create smoke that obscured God, who dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat, from his view when he entered the holy of holies annually on the day of atonement, otherwise he would have died. The incense and the source of the fire had to be exactly according to God's instruction, under penalty of death. The Old Testament law strictly required the office of king and the office of high priest to remain separate powers. But at the birth of Jesus the two powers were merged and brought together in one Man, the Man Jesus Christ! The book of Hebrews goes into detail about this as it presents Jesus as a Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.
- **Myrrh: The Sacrifice of Jesus.** Myrrh is an oil used for preparing a body for burial, an embalming oil. This gift represents the unspeakable sacrifice that Jesus made, when He who knew no sin became sin for us and suffered our penalty so that we could be justified by His death. This gift stands in stark contrast to the other two gifts, just as when Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished". A shout of accomplishment and victory seems, by all human standards, to be so ironic at the moment that He dies.

4. When the wise men did not return and report to Herod, having been warned by God of Herod's evil intent, but left and returned home another way, how did Herod react?

Help for Teachers:

- "Exceedingly wroth", he was out of his mind angry.
- He had all children in the region of Bethlehem killed that were in the age range he expected this "King of the Jews" to be, based on his conversation with the magi.

- His anger likely stemmed from the defiance the wise men had shown him when they disobeyed his directive to report back; his pride was hurt. But to lash out in mass murder of innocent children just in the hope that you get the right one, reveals a mind that is insane with fear. Herod knew two things. First, Rome had put him in power because as an unwilling recipient of Jewish religion and culture, they expected that he would be able to navigate political/ religious issues with the Jews in a way that would prevent a rebellion against Rome's authority. Second, if he failed in this responsibility, which was a likely outcome of Israel rallying behind a prophesied of King, the ensuing rebellion would be the end of his prestigious career at best, and at worst would cost him his life, as Rome wasn't known for being compassionate towards those that didn't perform.

5. How did God protect Jesus?

Help for Teachers:

- The wise men were warned of God in a dream to return another way and not report back to Herod.
- Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to take the Child to Egypt, until instructed otherwise, as Herod would seek to kill the Child.
- If Jesus had come on a mission from Heaven to die for the world, why did God go to such extremes to protect Him from death? This may be a good place to reaffirm the class on the gospel, that Jesus' death was the completion of His plan to justify us, but that the plan also required that He live for us the life we cannot, in perfect fulfilment of all God's requirements, though tempted like we, yet without sin. That in His humanity He took our place in every regard, and in Him the Father was well pleased. Only after that did He do the unfathomable, take our punishment and suffer our penalty... to the death.

6. How many prophecies can you identify that were fulfilled in this chapter? Where are they found in Scripture?

Help for Teachers:

- Likely not an all-inclusive list but...
 - The star out of Jacob- Numbers 24:17
 - The coming and the gifts of the magi- Isaiah 60:3, 6
 - The birthplace of Jesus- Micah 5:2
 - His protection from Herod- Hosea 2:1
 - The slaying of the children by Herod- Jeremiah 31:15

- There are certainly many other prophecies concerning the coming of Christ, but this list is intended to be somewhat specific to the text of Matthew chapter 2