

Research: Coming of the Magi by following the star of Bethlehem

Matt 2:1, 2, 9-11

This story is original to Matthew. No other Gospel has this record of the three wise men coming to see Jesus. Matthew wrote this Gospel to show the Jews that every event in the New Testament was a fulfillment of what was written in the Old Testament, a fulfillment of prophecy.

1NOW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

“**Wise:** *magos* in Greek which means a name given by the Babylonians (Chaldeans), Medes, Persian, and others, to the wise men, teachers, priests, astrologers, interpreters of dreams, etc.; the oriental wise men (astrologers) who, having discovered by the rising of a remarkable star that the Messiah had just born.

“*In the days of Herod the king* — Viz., Herod the Great, the son of Antipater, born at Ascalon, about 70 years before Christ. According to some, he was a native Jew; according to others, an Idumean by the father’s side, and by the mother’s an Arabian. The most probable opinion is, that he was originally an Idumean; but that his ancestors had, for some ages, been proselytes to the Jewish religion. The Jews being at that time in subjection to the Romans, he was made king of Judea by the Roman senate” (Benson Commentary).

“The death of Herod took place in the year of Rome A.U.C. 750, just before the Passover. This year coincided with what in our common chronology would be B.C. 4—so that we have to recognise the fact that our common reckoning is erroneous, and to fix B.C. 5 or 4 as the date of the Nativity” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

2Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

“*We have seen his star* — Which points him out, and is the token of his nativity. These wise men, learned in astronomy, and curious in marking the rising and setting and other phenomena of the heavenly bodies, observed at this time a star which they had never seen before, and were amazed at it as at a new, portentous appearance which did certainly forebode something of great consequence to the world, and the Jews in particular, over whose country it seemed to hang” (Benson Commentary).

“To worship him - This does not mean that they had come to pay him religious homage, or to adore him They regarded him as the King of the Jews, but there is no evidence that they supposed that he was divine. They came to honor him as a Prince, or a king, not as God. The original word implies no more than this. It means to prostrate oneself before another; to fall

down and pay homage to another. This was the mode in which homage was paid to earthly kings, and this they wished to pay to the new-born King of the Jews” (Barnes’ Notes).

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

“*The Magi go on their errand to Bethlehem.* They do not know the way, but the star guides them. looking up to heaven as they set out on their journey, they once more behold their heavenly guide” (Expositor’s Greek Testament).

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy

“**And lo, the star, which they saw in the East.** They would, in accordance with Eastern custom, probably travel by night. Observe that the joy they felt at seeing the star implies that it had not continued visible. They had fully used all means; now they receive fresh Divine guidance. **In the East Went before them.** Continuously; "taking them by the hand and drawing them on". Not to show them the way to Bethlehem, for the road was easy, but to assure them of guidance to the Babe, over whose temporary home it stayed” (Pulpit Commentary).

11 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, and frankincense, and myrrh.

“**Opened their treasures.**—The word points to caskets, or chests, which they had brought with them.

“**Gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.**—These were natural enough as the traditional gifts of homage to a ruler” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“The house - The place where he was born, or the place where they lived at that time.

“Fell down - This was the usual way of showing respect or homage among the Jews,

“Worshipped him - Did him homage as King of the Jews.

“They presented unto him gifts - These were presented to him as King of the Jews, because they supposed he was to be a distinguished prince and conqueror. It was customary in the East to show respect for persons of distinction by making presents or offerings of this kind.

“Frankincense - 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. It is found in the East Indies, but chiefly in Arabia; and hence it has been supposed probable that the wise men came from Arabia.

Myrrh - 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.

“The offerings here referred to were made because they were the most valuable which the country of the Magi or wise men produced. They were tokens of respect and homage which they paid to the new-born King of the Jews. They evinced their high regard for him, and their belief that he was to be an illustrious prince; and the fact that their deed is recorded with approbation shows us that we should offer our most valuable possessions, our all, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Wise men came from far to do him homage, and bowed down, and presented their best gifts and offerings. It is right that we give to him also our hearts, our property, our all” (Barnes’ Notes).