



Matthew 2:1-23

THE DAYS AFTER CHRIST WAS BORN

We often place a lot of emphasis in the gospels of Matthew and Luke on the events leading up to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It is quite interesting, moreover, to observe what happened in those days after the birth of Jesus.

There is good evidence that Jesus was born in 5 B.C. in the town of Bethlehem while Herod was still living (Matthew 2:1-6). The death of Herod the Great occurred in 4 B.C., a short time after an eclipse of the moon. The modern calendar of dating B.C. and A.D. was developed by Dionysius Exiguus. His calculations are off by about four years. So Christ was not born at 0 years, but about B.C. 4 or 5.

From the context of Matthew chapter two and secular history, Jesus was born in the closing months of Herod the Great's reign and He returned from Egypt soon after Herod's death (vv. 19-23). It is probably impossible to be more specific as to the time of Jesus' birth. The important thing is it is well documented in history. His birth took place at a specific time and place during the reign of Herod the Great in Judea.

Joseph and Mary were both of Davidic descent, whose native city was Bethlehem (1 Sam. 17:12). The prophet Micah had foretold the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). It was in Bethlehem, David's city that the Jews expected David's greater Son to be born; it was there that they expected God's Anointed One to come into the world.

The little town of Bethlehem was located six miles south of Jerusalem in a fertile area of Judah. It was also called Ephrathah or Ephrath. Bethlehem means House of Bread. The town sat on a 2500 foot ridge. It was here in a cave near the village that Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150) said Jesus was born.

The exact place in Bethlehem where Jesus was born cannot be known, but we do know He was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Many people had come from various parts of the densely populated land to enroll for taxation. Mary and Joseph turned into a Caravanserai or kind of oriental inn to spend the night. There was no room in the compartments, now crowded to capacity, so they were obliged to look for a place of protection in the open courtyard.

In the open court Mary brought forth her son and cradled Him in a manger.

Angels announced to some shepherds the arrival of the Messiah. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for

has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased (Luke 2:10-14, NASB 1995).

These angels were celebrating the birth of the Son of God. Jesus the Messiah was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, a Jewish virgin. There is no other way to explain His life.

Jesus was Mary's "first born" meaning she had other children born to her and Joseph. The Gospels tell us Jesus had four younger half-brothers and at least two half-sisters. The virgin birth does not obligate us to accept the teaching regarding an immaculate conception or a perpetual virginity of Mary. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things? (Matthew 13:55-56).

DEDICATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (Luke 2:21-38)

The circumcision of Jesus

He was circumcised eight days later according to the law of the Covenant (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). This made Him a member of the covenant nation Israel. He was named and he became a "son of the law" (Gal. 4:4). "And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord" (Luke 2:21-22, NASB 1995).

The purification of the parents

Luke takes us back to the Mosaic Law and the purification of the parents and redemption of the first born son that took place forty-one days after the birth (Lev. 12:6). Every first-born Jewish male had to be consecrated for special service for the priesthood according to Exodus 13:2. However, after God set apart the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe, the first born son in the other tribes were redeemed from this obligation by the payment of five shekels which amounted to about five dollars U.S. (Num. 8). This purification actually consisted of two offerings. The offering for Levitical defilement attached to the beginning of life, and the burnt offering for restoration of communion with God. Before Mary could participate in the ceremony of the redemption of her son she had to complete the purification ceremony and be ceremonially clean.

Perfect fulfilment of the Law

Mary presented Jesus to God (Lk. 2:22). With the payment of the five shekels the child was presented to the priest in recognition of God's ownership. The priest pronounced two blessings, one in thanksgiving for the law of redemption and for the gift of the first born son.

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The important thing is that the parents of Jesus observed all of the requirements of the Law. Jesus came not to destroy the Law but fulfill the Law and its commandments.

Blessings of Simon and Anna

Imagine the sense of fulfillment in the hearts of Simon and Anna when they laid eyes on Jesus and held Him in their arms (Lk. 2:25-35). They were prepared by a devout life of prayer and meditation to be the recipients of the most glorious message of the revelation of God to mankind. They reverently expected the coming of the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit had revealed to this aged man that he would not die until he should see the Lord's Anointed. He came into the Court of the Gentiles under the influence of the Holy Spirit just as Mary and Joseph entered to present Jesus to the priest. He took the child into his arms and blessed God, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

The Messianic hope had arrived in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. He was "the consolation of Israel."

There was also a prophetic message to Mary in the blessing. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed — and a sword will pierce even your own soul — to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Simeon had immersed himself in the great Messianic prophecies and types and this gave him spiritual insight into the suffering Redeemer.

There would be no escaping the fact that this child would be a stumbling block to many who were seeking a political Messiah-King (Matt. 21:44; 1 Cor. 1:23; Isa. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:16f; Rom. 9:33; Acts 4:11; Rom. 11:25). He would also be the magnet of the ages and the "rise of many in Israel" (Rom. 6:4, 9; Eph. 2:6). Though her heart would be "amazed at the things which were being said about Him" she would also experience the Thracian javelin in her own soul (v. 35; cf. John 19:25).

Another Old Testament saint waiting the redemption of Israel was Anna. She was probably standing near by listening to the words of Simon and she burst out with repeated thanksgiving to God. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). God has a nucleus of prepared saints waiting for the Messiah.

WISE MEN WORSHIP CHRIST (Matthew 2:1-23)

After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were probably staying for some time in Bethlehem. After the presentation of Jesus in the Temple the writer Matthew gives us "one of the strongest proofs of His Messiahship. It is the coming of Gentiles and the "premonitions of this greatest event of world history."

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem . . . (Matthew 2:1). Wise men from Persia or Babylon saw His special star and went to the beautiful country that had been home to King David, who was born in Bethlehem.

Wise men came looking for the King in Bethlehem (2:2)

"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" (Matthew 2:2).

"Wise men" came to worship Jesus from the East, probably Persia (Iran), Arabian or Babylon who were skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science. They studied astrology, religion and were interpreters of dreams. It is probably best to translate *magoi* as "wise men" in the good sense of learned astrologers. Even though it was a sign that led them to Jerusalem, it was the Scriptures that guided them to Bethlehem. They conjectured that "His star" indicated that He had just been born or would be shortly.

There is no reason for assigning these Magi certain names, or to say that there were three. And, no, their bones were not found in the fourth century in the Cathedral of Cologne. To say there were three wise men is an inference from the three gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Tacitus, Suetonius, and Josephus bear testimony that a messianic hope existed at the time in the East. Tacitus had written of a firm persuasion in the Orient that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire universal empire. "

"Where is he who has been born King of the Jews" (v. 2). Almost at the same time as Jesus was born we find Augustus, the Roman Emperor, being hailed as the "Savior of the World." When Jesus was born, there was an eagerness of expectation. Men were waiting for God. It was to a waiting world that Christ came. The Magi who saw the star were seeking the light of the World.

"His star" (vv. 7, 9-10)

The Magi saw the star at its rising and then seemed not to have seen it again for some time until it again appeared and kept on going in front of them, until it stood over where the child was. Probably by this time Joseph and Mary were living in a house in Bethlehem.

The star, seen in its rising reappears and went ahead of them. "The luminous wonder was actually moving from north to south, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem! What a strange way for a star to behave," says William Hendriksen. R. C. H. Lenski writes, "The star moved as a guide, the star arrived, the star stood. It is all perfectly plain, absolutely miraculous, unlike any star that ever was." This star actually went ahead of the wise men until it stood still over the place where the child was. The star pointed out the very house.

There are various scholarly opinions as to the character of the star. The great astronomer Kepler observed in 1603 A.D. an unusual conjunction of stars, and found by diligent search that in 747 A.U.C. or 7B.C. there was a similar conjunction three times, of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces. In 6 B.C. Mars joined the conjunction. Kepler therefore placed the birth of Jesus in 6 B.C. The Chinese astronomical tables testify to the appearance of an evanescent star, probably a comet, in February 750 A.U.C. This trustworthy tale of the Chinese would agree with the date approximately of the birth of Jesus.

The wise men were overjoyed when they saw the star one again and they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (v. 10). "They shouted joyfully" (NET). The star kept going before them until it came to the place where the baby was and then it stood still. This is the same star that had brought them to the land of Judea, and now they were reassured by the evidence that the star was still leading them.

His star stands for a divine arrangement, an extraordinary and special movement in the stellar spaces designed to lead these men to the Christ child. It could possibly be the Shekinah glory of old (cf. Num. 24:17). The star was going before them and coming stood above the place where the child lay. "

Walvoord and Zuck write, "Could it be that 'the star' which the Magi saw and which led them to a specific house was the Shekinah glory of God? That same glory had led the children of Israel through the wilderness

house was the Shekinah glory of God? That same glory had led the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years as a pillar of fire and cloud. Perhaps this was what they saw in the East, and for want of a better term they called it a 'star.' All other efforts to explain this star are inadequate (such as a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars; a supernova; a comet; etc.)" *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

The whole supernatural atmosphere of the birth of Christ would favor the opinion that the star was miraculous because of the prophecy foretelling the coming of the Messiah. The star provided supernatural guidance to the house of Joseph in Bethlehem.

Worship of a pure heart

We have "come to worship Him" (v. 2). When they saw Him, they cast themselves to the ground and worshiped Him. They literally, "and having fallen they prostrated themselves before them." They had journeyed far and were now lost in wonder, love and praise. Do you come in this room with the expectation of being overwhelmed with the presence of God? Did you come this morning expecting to worship Him? In this Child they see God, and worship Him! In this little One God has become incarnate.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th'Incarnate Deity (Charles Wesley)

Noble gifts for the King

"After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

Gold is the gift for a king. We must always meet Jesus in complete submission to Him.

Frankincense is the gift of a priest who opens the way to God for men. Jesus opened the way to God.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus was born in order to die for our sins.

WARNINGS FROM GOD (2:12-15)

The providence of God intervened to protect the Messiah, and an angel in a dream warned the Magi not to return to Herod in Jerusalem, but depart to their own country. It may well be that Joseph and Mary left at the same time for Egypt. Herod, the Idumean King, had so much blood on his hands that he would spare no effort to destroy the Messiah. Herod was not a Jew, his father was an Idumean and his mother an Arabian. He was not a descendent of King David. He had Edomite blood in his veins. The enmity between Satan and the seed of the woman was fiercely at work (Gen. 3:15).

God warned the wise men of Herod's intents (2:12).

"And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way."

Herod came to power because the Romans rewarded him for his help in the civil wars in Palestine. he ruled from B.C. 47 to B. C. 4, first as governor in B.C. 47 and then in B.C. 40 he received the title of king. He was

from B.C. 47 to B. C. 4, first as governor in B.C. 47 and then in B.C. 40 he received the title of king. He was a powerful and efficient ruler and in time would be called Herod the Great because of his great building achievements, including the remodeling of the Temple in Jerusalem, a peace keeper and his generosity to the Jewish people in time of a fierce famine in B.C. 25.

On the other hand, history tells us old Herod was a paranoid, "murderous old man," who killed anyone he thought would threaten his kingdom. He murdered his wife Mariamne and her mother Alexandria, his eldest son Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus all because of his wildly insanely suspicions. Knowing the family, however, his suspicions were probably justifiable! The Roman Emperor, Augustus said, "It is safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son."

What would Herod do at the thought of a legitimate Jewish descendent of King David? The city had a right to be troubled at the mad man. A genuine descendent of the royal line of David would definitely bring and end to his reign.

Jerusalem was in an uproar. They feared this mad man on the throne.

God warned Joseph (2:13-15).

"Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him. So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: Out of Egypt I called My Son' (Matthew 2:13-15).

Egypt was the nearest place of safety for Jesus. Herod is going to make a search for the baby in order to kill Him. Flight was imperative to save His life. The distance traveled was about 75 miles. There were more than a million highly respected and influential Jewish people living in Egypt at this time.

History tells us Herod died shortly before Passover in 4 B.C.

The Savior is saved (2:19-21). A divine command would come to Joseph in Egypt, and in obedience he returned to Israel.

This is also a terrible illustration of what men will do to get rid of Jesus Christ (2:16-18). We hear the sobbing and wailing of the broken-hearted mothers in Bethlehem. "Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi" (Matthew 2:16).

From the size of Bethlehem at the time we estimate that Herod killed about 20 children. It is likely Josephus made no mention of this event because there was not a large number of a child involved. The smaller number simply did not make the headlines.

Selfish humanism has not changed over the centuries. If Christ gets in the way, if sinful men see Christ as someone who is liable to interfere with their ambitions, or rebuke their ways, their desire is to eliminate Christ. This is what is behind the efforts to remove Christ from Christmas, and anything else about Him in the "socially correct" and "politically correct," tolerate anything but Christianity culture in the United States.

Under the providence of God Joseph was directed to go to Nazareth to live. Herod's son Archelaus (v. 22)

Under the providence of God Joseph was directed to go to Nazareth to live. Herod's son Archelaus (v. 22) was Herod's worst son, and was not reigning in Judea. He possessed all of the vices and weaknesses of his father and none of his redeeming qualities. When Archelaus ascended to the throne of his father he slew 3000 Jews in the Temple at the Passover and later killed a large number of Samaritans. In 6 A.D. his territory was turned over to Roman Procurators.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The passage before us is rich in spiritual principles and applications. The Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus, was revealed to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles, i.e., His mother and Joseph, his stepfather, and then to the foreign *magoi*. He was revealed to the humble, ignorant, and the learned, the poor and the rich. He was revealed to "wise men" by a method suited to their interests and understanding. They sought Him out and worshipped Him.

What will you do with Jesus?

Some men react to Jesus the way Herod did, while others will respond as wise men.

Will you respond with hatred and hostility?

Herod was afraid the child would interfere with his life, his place, his power, his influence, and his pride. It is a reaction of hatred and hostility. Christ will not let them have their way, so they kill Him with words, attitudes, behaviors.

Do you envy the rich and famous? Greatness and riches are a perilous possession for the soul. A little more money or fame may be your ruin.

Will you respond with indifference?

Others respond with indifference. Christ means nothing to them. Herod appealed to the chief priests and scribes to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born (v. 4). They gave him a ready answer, but they never went to Bethlehem to worship Him! How tragic that the very persons who live nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them most.

The failure of the Jewish people to believe was not due to ignorance. They knew precisely from the Scriptures where the King of the Jews would be born, but it was the Gentiles who worshipped Him first. Although they could say immediately where the Messiah would be born, they did nothing about the report the wise men gave. No one seemed to get excited about the birth of the King of the Jews except some a few Jewish shepherds and some Gentile star gazers.

Will you bow and worship Him?

Wise men still worship Him and desire to lay at the feet of Jesus the noblest of all gifts -- themselves. When you come to realize the love of God in Jesus, you should be lost in wonder, love and praise. Philippians 2:8-11 reads: "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

The wise men set their hearts on Him that was born King of the Jews and never rested until they saw Him and worshipped.

This is encouraging for us Gentiles. The king of the Jews desires to be our king also!

It is possible for a person to come, hear the Word of God, come deeply under conviction and leave without surrendering to Christ.

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Index to this Series on the [Christmas Sermons](#) and bible studies.

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