



Worship the King

JESUS THE SAVIOR IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP.

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Much of life is driven by value. We want to know, “Is it worth it?” Advertising will speak of activities that are worth the time and of possessions that retain their worth. We speak of a person being “worthy” of a certain honor. An athlete plays for “all he’s worth,” meaning to the full extent of his ability. Our challenge is to identify and pursue that which is most worthy.



What are some things that you can buy or activities that you can do that are “worth it”? How do you think the worth of something is determined?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

MATTHEW 1:1–2:23

One of the subtle differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the audience targeted by each writer. Mark most likely wrote his Gospel to Gentiles in Rome. He took great effort to explain Jewish customs and translate Aramaic words. Luke also wrote to share the good news of Jesus with a Gentile world. Matthew, on the other hand, wrote primarily to a Jewish audience. His purpose was to provide irrefutable proofs that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah.

Matthew incorporated numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus. Two of these Old Testament prophecies are found in the context for this week's study. Matthew began his Gospel account by tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who was engaged to Mary. He noted how an angel appeared to Joseph to explain the supernatural birth of Jesus. This was a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 (see Matt. 1:23).

The next Old Testament prophecy fulfilled was the location of Jesus's birth found in Micah 5:2. This quotation concerning Bethlehem occurs in the story of the visit by the wise men who came from the east to see the Christ child (Matt. 2:6).

Following the visit by the wise men, Joseph was warned by an angel of Herod's plan to kill the baby. Taking Mary and the baby, Joseph fled for the land of Egypt, a journey of over four hundred miles. Herod's plot to kill all the male children in Bethlehem two years old and under was his solution to keep his throne from being stolen by this newborn "King of the Jews." Matthew quoted a third Old Testament passage, Jeremiah 31:15, which prophesied about the death of the children of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:18).

After Herod's death in 4 BC, Joseph brought his family back from Egypt and settled in Nazareth, the hometown of Mary and Joseph.



Read Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; and Jeremiah 31:15 in your Bible, then locate these quotations in Matthew 1–2. Why did Matthew quote Old Testament prophecies so many times in his Gospel?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

SEEKING THE KING (MATT. 2:1-3)

¹ **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,**
² **saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”** ³ **When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.**

VERSE 1

The New Testament contains two stories from Jesus’s birth. Luke wrote about the birth of Jesus and events surrounding His birth. Matthew recorded an incident that happened within the first two years of Jesus’s birth. Scholars have placed the birth of Jesus around 6 BC. This is based on the death of King Herod in 4 BC.

The visit of the *wise men from the east* took place sometime between 6-4 BC. In Matthew 2:16, we read that Herod ordered the execution of male children two years old and younger to safeguard his claim on the throne. This indicates that Jesus was approaching two years of age at the time of this visit.

Who were the *wise men from the east*? The Greek word is *magi*, and is a root for our English word “magic.” However, these men were not magicians nor sorcerers. They were astronomers and astrologers who played prominent political and religious roles in eastern countries, most notably Persia. They also were interpreters of dreams. The book of Daniel speaks of wise men (Dan. 5:11), and Daniel himself was the “chief” wise man in Babylon.

While tradition gives these men the title of “kings,” and even gives them names, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, this is speculative. Their names are unknown as well as the number of wise men. The number three has been assumed because of the number of gifts given to the Christ child. In reality, all we know is that a group of wise men came from the east to Jerusalem.

The region of Persia once was under the rule of the Babylonians. Recall that the Jewish people were exiled to this area after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BC. It might be that through contact with Daniel and other Jewish people living in Babylon that a messianic expectation arose in the area. These wise men might have been influenced by Jewish prophetic writings concerning

the Messiah, especially the writings of Daniel. These men could very well have been God-fearers. Based on their studies and observation of signs in the sky, they made their way to Jerusalem, the chief city of the Jewish people and the seat of the Roman government in Judea.

VERSE 2

The wise men were alerted to the Messiah's birth by seeing a ***star at its rising***. This sighting of a new star was interpreted as the herald of the birth of someone significant in the region where the star appeared.

The concept that they "followed the star" is not completely accurate to Matthew's text. The appearance of the star signaled to them a monumental event had occurred. They proceeded to Judea because of prophecies they had studied. After they learned of the prophecy of Bethlehem, the star reappeared and then lead them to Bethlehem and the house where the Christ child was.

The wise men asked, ***Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*** This speaks volumes. They were searching for the legitimate claimant to the throne by virtue of birth. That certainly wasn't Herod. Herod was a usurper to the throne. He was Idumean and came to power through Roman appointment. He was a convert to Judaism out of convenience, not out of conviction.

King of the Jews was a phrase only used by non-Jews in Matthew's narrative. It is found again in 27:11,29,37, each time from those who were not Jews. Jewish people would refer to this coming king with the language of "Son of David," "King of Israel," or "Messiah."



DID YOU KNOW?

Herod the Great ruled at the time of Jesus's birth. Other Herods mentioned in the New Testament include: Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who killed John the Baptist and questioned Jesus at His trial (Matt. 14:1-11; Luke 23:6-12); Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, who executed James the apostle and put Peter in prison (Acts 12:1-5); and Herod Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I, before whom Paul was tried (Acts 25:23-26:32).

VERSE 3

Herod ruled from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC. While he is known for many building projects, including an extensive renovation of the Jerusalem temple, he is better known for his insane fear of losing his throne. He exhibited constant paranoia that someone was going to steal it. To satisfy this fear, Herod had his wife, three sons, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law killed because he thought they were trying to take over his throne. It is reported that as he approached death, he had leading citizens of Jerusalem imprisoned with the instruction that, upon his death, they were to be killed. His reasoning was no one would weep when he died, but at least when these prominent Jews died, there would be weeping on the day of his death.

News from the wise men of a new claimant to the throne sent Herod into a deep panic, as well as ***all Jerusalem with him***. No doubt those who lived and worked around Herod were disturbed because of the anticipation of his murderous anger.



In what ways is Jesus a King?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (See Luke 1:35; Hebrews 1:1-3.)

FINDING THE KING (MATT. 2:4-8)

⁴ **So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.**

⁵ **“In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: ⁶ And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” ⁷ Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”**

VERSE 4

Herod was the Roman appointed king of the Jews and a convert to Judaism. Yet, he had no clue of Jewish prophecy concerning the Messiah. Such was his limited knowledge of Scripture. The **chief priests and scribes** were called in. The *chief priests* would have included the high priest and the leading priests in charge of the twenty-four divisions of priests who ministered in the temple.

Originally, the *scribes* were those who painstakingly copied by hand the Old Testament Scriptures. Eventually, they evolved into a group who also studied and interpreted the Old Testament writings. They primarily were Pharisees and were considered authorities on the law of Moses.

VERSES 5-6

The religious leaders reported that the Messiah would be born in **Bethlehem of •Judea**. The small town of Bethlehem lay five miles south of Jerusalem. It was located on the main road going from Jerusalem down to Egypt and was the ancestral home of King David. To verify this report, the religious leaders cited the announcement of the prophet Micah.

In his prophecy, Micah set up a contrast between the capture of Judah's king by the Babylonians (Mic. 5:1) and the birth of God's coming Messiah in Micah 5:2. Clearly this One who would be born in Bethlehem was the Messiah because the verse goes on to speak of His eternal nature: "His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times" (Mic. 5:2b).

The theme of the entire Bible is Jesus!

Jesus was always God's plan of salvation. We can know this is true because of the many Old Testament prophecies He fulfilled. After His resurrection, Jesus explained to His disciples how all of the Old Testament pointed to Him, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27). The theme of the entire Bible is Jesus!

Matthew added a phrase to the words of Micah—**by no means**. This addition pointed to the fact that Bethlehem would no longer be an insignificant village because the birth of this child would bring

the town great honor. In placing this phrase in the quotation from Micah, Matthew was following a familiar pattern from the Jewish targums of adding subtle commentary to Scripture. The targums were translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic that contained commentary about the text. Matthew's readers would have been familiar with such a practice.

Matthew also picked up wording from 2 Samuel 5:2, ***who will shepherd my people Israel***. This phrase spoke of a familiar Old Testament concept and indicated the kind of ruler Jesus would be—tenderhearted and kind. This phrase also linked Jesus to David's throne as the Shepherd of God's people.

VERSES 7-8

In light of this revelation of the birthplace of this expected King, Herod hatched a terrible and murderous plot. To execute his plan, he quietly enlisted the help of the wise men, who unknowingly became his spies. Herod's desire to know ***the exact time the star appeared*** was to ascertain the approximate age of the child. This would prove useful when he issued a death warrant for every male child two years and under living in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

Herod continued his wicked chicanery with a false pretense of devotion. He certainly had no intentions of joining the wise men in worshiping the Christ child.



How can you help people come to know Jesus as their King?

WORSHIPING THE KING (MATT. 2:9-12)

⁹ After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

VERSE 9

The wise men didn't realize Herod's evil plan. Later, they were warned of Herod's wickedness in a dream and did not return to Jerusalem as he had directed.

This is the first mention of *the star* actually moving. Any conjectures as to the identity of *the star*, such as a comet or conjunction of planets, are of little value. Nothing can be known for certain. Whatever the wise men saw was interpreted by them as a divine guidance.

VERSE 10

The wise men *were overwhelmed with joy*. The Greek text piles up superlatives here—"they gladly rejoiced exceedingly with abundant joy and delight." All the weeks and months of anticipation were complete; they had reached their goal. The joy they experienced, no doubt, was brought about by the fact that the star pinpointed the very house in which Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child were living.

VERSE 11

The phrase *entering the house* indicates that some time had passed since the manger scene portrayed in Luke 2. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were now staying in a house. Any portrayal of the wise men and the shepherds worshiping together on the night Jesus was born is a nice, sentimental portrayal but not accurate to the biblical account.

Once the wise men entered the house, they immediately knelt before the child and *worshiped him*. The word *worshiped* means to fall down or prostrate oneself before the one honored. This move showed that the wise men were true seekers after God. God had spoken to them through the star, and they responded to His call by worshiping the Messiah.



Why is Jesus worthy of your worship?

As a part of their worship, they *opened their treasures* and presented luxurious gifts to the child. *Gold, frankincense, and myrrh* were gifts typically given to royalty. *Gold* was a precious metal of great value in the ancient world as it is today.

Frankincense and *myrrh* were costly fragrant perfumes or spices used in worship and adoration. It is possible that Joseph and Mary sold these gifts to finance their trip to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15).



BIBLE SKILL: Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary to help understand a passage.

Use a concordance to find references in Scripture to “myrrh” and “frankincense.” (See Gen. 37:25; Ex. 30:23,34-37; Esth. 2:12; Ps. 45:8; John 19:39.) Read about “myrrh” and “frankincense” in a Bible dictionary. Make a list of the various ways these spices were used in biblical times.

VERSE 12


Dreams play an important role in Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus. In Matthew 1:20-25, Joseph received assurance from God in a dream concerning Mary’s pregnancy. In Matthew 2:13, Joseph was warned in a dream to flee with his family to Egypt. In verse 12, the wise men were ***warned in a dream not to go back to Herod.*** While they did not perceive Herod’s wicked scheme, God knew and warned them to avoid Herod. Once again, the wise men were obedient to God’s leading. God had led them to leave their home and travel to Bethlehem to see the Christ child. Now He led them back to their home along a different route.




What gifts can you offer to Jesus as an act of worship?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We can recognize Jesus as the one, true King.
- + We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.
- + We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship.

 **This is a time of year when it is easy to focus on anything but Jesus. There is one thing worthy of our attention: Jesus. How can your group help each other to keep your focus on Him during this season?**

 **Make a list of things in your life that have value or worth. Hopefully you will list your faith in Jesus Christ. What order would you rank each item as to its value today and for the future?**

 **Memorize Matthew 2:11.**

Prayer Needs