

“R U Wise?”

Matthew 2

Scripture Ref: Mic 5:2; Hos 11:1; Jer 31:15; John 1:46

1. **Last week we walked through the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, from the angel appearing to Mary, her conceiving the Holy child**
 - a. **Joseph, at first not knowing what to do, until an angel appeared to him and said “Its OK Joe, no need to freak out, this is a ‘God thing’!”**
2. **We pick up the account with the arrival of a group of “magi” from Persia...**
 - a. **Have to warn you – today I might take down a few “traditions”**

Wise Men Seek Him

2:1 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 have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3. **First Matthew tells us that Jesus birth was during the reign of Herod “the king” – which helps to validate the timeframe of His birth**
 - a. **Herod “the great” was appointed governor of Galilee at the age of 25, around 48 BC**
 - b. **Through several twisted turns of subterfuge, luck, and being at the right place at the right time – he was given authority over all Judea as “King of the Jews” around 40 BC**
4. **Interesting man - Herod was an Edomite, or known as “Idumaeen” by the Romans,**
 - a. **Which means he was descended from Esau (Abraham’s son by the bond-woman Hagar), yet he considered himself a Jew**
 - b. **The Jews rejected this assertion – they hated him, but tempered their great hatred of him with admiration for his building projects, such as the magnificent improvements made to the second temple.**
 - c. **If you go to Israel today, some of his works are still standing**
5. **He was a paranoia and cruel man who murdered members of the Sanhedrin, his wife, his mother in-law, and three of his sons**
6. **At this time he is near the end of his life – horrible physical symptoms, going out of his mind...**
 - a. **“Power corrupts – absolute power corrupts absolutely.”**
7. **(First tradition to go down) During his reign, around 4-5BC, a group of wise men or “magi” come into Jerusalem.**

- a. Tradition says that there were “three wise men” (see in pictures and lawn ornaments), probably due to the “three gifts” described in verse 11
 - b. Church traditions even tell us their names - supposedly Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar. You can see their supposed skulls in a cathedral in Cologne, Germany.
 - i. Even have their own song – “We three kings of Orient are...”
 - c. But in reality we don’t know how many there were, there may have travelled in a large group as all of Jerusalem was troubled by their appearance.
8. Link to Daniel? Interesting – it is thought that Daniel, who was an official of the Persian government, founded an order of *Magi* (wise men),
- a. And that Daniel – being a prophet, instructed this order to watch for the Messiah through the coming generations
9. The wise men come first to Jerusalem, assuming that of course - the leaders of the Jews would be aware of and excited about the birth of their Messiah.
- a. The wise men are about to find that this isn’t the case at all!

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"
(Micah 5:2)

10. I find it a bit odd that these outsiders know when the Messiah would be born – and the “chief priests and scribes” were ignorant.

11. “Troubled” – all shook up – WHY?

- a. Herod was near the end of his life, and hearing this phrase “king of the Jews” would have set him off
- b. Religious leaders – either embarrassed, or their pride was wounded, or maybe they thought that “if they didn’t find it – it cant be true”
- c. (some people are like that – you tell them something and they say “no way – that’s dumb”, then 10 minutes later they get this “revelation” – exactly what you just told them!)

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go

and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

12. So they tell Herod and all the religious leaders about the birth of the King – and Herod is like “Oh Good, when you find Him, come tell me – I want to worship Him too?”

- a. Like the boa constrictor who said to the little rabbit “come on in my cage, I wanna give you a little hug...”**

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

13. (Second tradition to go down) – they wise men did not come to the manger... (so the cards you see of three men coming into a cave and bringing gifts – NOT!)

- a. First it would have been logistically impossible – it would have taken months to get from the “east” to Jerusalem... Mary and Joseph would NOT have still been in the manger!**
- b. Second we see “they came into the house”**

14. Gift: Gold & Frankincense – valuable stuff

- a. Gifts were not wrapped in gift paper – these were men! We never wrap!**
- b. Myrrh: for embalming – like giving someone a jar of formaldehyde for their birthday!**
- c. Somehow there is a recognition - this a King who was born to die.**

15. They “fell down and worshipped Him” – wise men still worship Him!

Into Egypt

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." (**Hos 11:1**)

Massacre in Bethlehem

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

18

"A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more." Jer 31:15

16. If Saddam Hussien was the butcher of Bagdad, Herod was the butcher of Bethlehem

- a. This is man who is obsessed with not only keeping power, but even controlling who got it after he died
- b. Several times Herod killed off sons who were in line for his throne because he thought that had become a little too anxious for him to pass on!
- c. Not only was it bad to be an enemy of Herod, but his family didn't sleep too well either.

17. When Herod realizes that the wise men were not coming back, he is not happy.

- a. So he comes up with a plan – he figures if the child was born in Bethlehem, he goes back in time to when they had first seen the star, and he figures “I'll just kill all the boys 2 and under, and just to be sure, I'll include the surrounding districts”
- b. What kind of man does this?

18. The Death of Herod - Josephus tells us that in his last years, God's judgment came upon him

- a. His account states that a loathsome disease descended on Herod – he could not stop eating – he had burning fever, ulcerated intestines, foul discharges, convulsions, an overwhelming stench
- b. And when Herod knew that his death was approaching, he had the most distinguished leaders of Israel summoned, and then locked up in the Hippodrome
- c. He ordered that as soon as he died, they should all be killed –
- d. he knew well no one would mourn his own death, so he was determined that there would be mourning when he died.

Joseph Settles in Nazareth

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life

are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

19. Nazareth then – 1600 – 2000 residents, now approx 65K

- a. John 1:46 *"can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* – the town had a poor reputation
- b. And that is where the King lived in obscurity for the next 20 years, until His baptism and the start of His ministry.

COMPARISON #1

20. Herod vs Jesus

- a. Herod – completely self serving...
- b. Jesus – Came to serve
- c. Herod – built a great kingdom on earth
- d. Jesus – His kingdom is in heaven, eternal
- e. Herod – harbinger of death
- f. Jesus – Giver of Life

COMPARISON #2 – can we see ourselves?

21. Herod – Came against Jesus – some that rebel against everything that Jesus stands for.

22. Scribes – ambivalent towards Jesus - knew the scriptures, knew the prophecies

- a. Yet they wouldn't even take a five mile trip to check out what the Magi were telling them
- b. Some will hear – "oh that's nice", then go back to whatever it was they were doing before.

23. Or are we like the wise men who worshipped Jesus?

- a. These guys were not even Jews... but they saw the value in studying the scriptures
- b. They read the prophecies – and they believed
- c. And then acted on their belief... they took a road-trip across the desert to find this King
- d. And when they found Him – they worshipped Him.

24. The wise men understood something – there is a deeper meaning to this life.

- a. Life is more than just eating, drinking, having fun**
- b. There is a God in heaven, and He wants you to know that He knows who YOU are – and He is crazy about you.**
- c. Someone once said “I always wanted to be someone, I just didn’t know who”**
- d. Another said “I feel like I am fighting against something, I just don’t know what”**
- e. Let me tell you something – God knows you are, and who you are going to be.**
- f. He knows your fight – and He wants to take it from you – and deliver you from it.**

25. God has offered the greatest gift – Eternal life – through His son, Jesus Christ – who was born to die

- a. He is standing at the door**
- b. Is He living inside you? Have you prepared room in your heart?**
- c. Would you like for Him to forgive you of your sins?**

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