

Week 3: Spiritual Learning Journal

Read Matthew 2 below from a more literal translation, laid out in a narrative format.

Visit of Magi from the East

- Narrator In the time of **King Herod**, after Jesus was born in **Bethlehem of Judea**, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,² asking,
- Magi "Where is the child who *has been born king of the Jews*? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage."
- Narrator ³ When **King Herod** heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him,
- Chief Priest/ Scribes "In **Bethlehem of Judea**; for so it has been written by the prophet:
⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people, Israel.'" [citation]
- Narrator ⁷ Then **Herod** secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,
- Herod** "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."
- Narrator ⁹ When they had heard **the king**, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.
- #### Escape to Egypt
- Narrator ¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
- Angel of Lord "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for **Herod** is about to search for the child, to destroy him."
- Narrator ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and 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 have called my son." [citation]

Massacre of the Infants

Narrator ¹⁶ When **Herod** saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around **Bethlehem** who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled because they are no more." [citation]

Return from Egypt

¹⁹ When **Herod** died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

Angel of Lord ²⁰ "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead."

Narrator ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.
²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.
And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee.
²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth,
so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,

"He will be called a Nazorean." [citation???

Additional Background Information

1. **The Magi.** Religious Studies Professor Kristen Swenson summarizes the mystery associated with the magi. Who were they? Why these gifts?

Article from *Time* magazine:

"Well, from where exactly in the Orient (which means simply "East") were they, anyway? Matthew's word Magi is a vague clue since it can mean astronomers, wise men, or magicians, and was applied to people from all over. The gifts they bore—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—hint at Arabia since unrelated Bible stories describe camel trains of similar tribute emanating from Sheba and Midian, both on that peninsula. Their interest in stars suggests Babylon, famous for its astrologers. The happiest guess of all turned out to be the one made in the 4th century by the decorators of the Church of the Nativity in Palestine, whose golden entry mosaic featured the Magi dressed as Persians, also renowned stargazers. When actual Persians came marauding in 614, it was the only place of worship they didn't torch..."

Why gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

Then, like now, gold represented wealth and power. Frankincense was a type of incense and perfume. Myrrh has been used as a perfume in ancient Egypt, in embalming processes, and which Christians have interpreted as foreshadowing Jesus's death. In Mark 15:23, Jesus is

offered wine with myrrh before his crucifixion, as a painkiller. Myrrh would also be used in oil used for anointing kings.

2. **Bethlehem, the city of David.**

Bethlehem is closely associated with the Davidic monarchy. In the book of Ruth, Elimelek and Naomi were from Bethlehem, and Naomi returned to Bethlehem from Moab with her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth, who married her kinsman-redeemer Boaz. Ruth and Boaz were the ancestors of King David (Ruth 4:17-22). The prophet Samuel anointed David as King of Israel in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:1-13). The prophet Micah prophesied that God was going to raise up a new Davidic king from the city of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

3. **The Symbolism of Egypt.**

We have discussed the preference of many Jews for living in Alexandria Egypt. Read the short article on Egypt in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/egypt/> How might those living in the 1st c. understand the imagery of the role Egypt plays in Jesus' life and the purposes of God for bringing Him out of Egypt again? Egypt was a place of wisdom and luxury. In reality it represents everything that goes against God. It was a place to flee to and come out of. Jesus had to choose to follow His Father or follow the world. everyone must make that choice for themselves.

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain what seems to be Matthew's play on the title "king of the Jews" found in chapter 2 from what you learned from this week's lesson. I find this funny. The wise men come to king Herod and ask where can we find "the king of the Jews?" That was the nickname herod was called by the Romans. In other words Herod you are not the King, Jesus is!
2. Choose two other background issues that help clarify Matthew's message. What did you learn that you had never seen before? In what way has your understanding of this chapter been stretched or deepened by knowing more about these two issues? I never put together that Egypt was a place of refuge and a place to flee from. I never put the story of Abraham, Joseph and Jesus together in that regard. I see that God uses the natural to teach about the spiritual. Egypt was a place of wisdom, but only God has real wisdom. Real refuge is found in God alone. Flee from evil, run to God. It is always tempting to stay where life is easy Egypt.