



THE VISITATION OF THE MAGI

Dr. Brendon Witte

MATTHEW 2:1-4

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, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

Who is Herod the Great?



- He was born in 72 BC.
- His grandfather on his father's side was an Idumean (i.e., Edomite) convert to Judaism. His mother was a Nabataean princess, the daughter of King Aretas.
- He was made the governor of Galilee by his father, then was made Ethnarch (i.e., vassal King) of Israel by the Romans in 37 BC.
- He died in April of 4 BC.

WHO ARE THE MAGI?

Who they are not:

1. They are not three kings. This idea appears as early as the second century, in the writings of Tertullian, and seems to have developed as a reflection on verses in the Psalms and in Isaiah that describe kings bringing gifts to God (cf. Psalms 68:29, 31; 72:10-11; Isaiah 49:7; 60:1-6).
2. There were likely more than three. Just because they gave Jesus three gifts — gold, frankincense, and myrrh — does not mean that there were only three wise men.

WHO ARE THE MAGI?

Who they are not:

3. They are likely not Babylonian. Babylon in the First Century BC was in Parthian territory. It would have been dangerous for magi, under the employment of a Parthian king, to enter Israel unannounced. Additionally, it is unlikely Herod would have given Parthians an audience, since they were responsible for the assassination of his brother.



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

EGYPT

Jerusalem

Damascus

Amman

Petra

Nabatea

RED SEA

Hegra

WHO ARE THE MAGI?

The Magi were Nabataeans:

1. The Nabataeans were well known for their astronomy and astrology.
2. They funded the creation of their capital, Petra, using funds from the sale of frankincense and myrrh, both made from the gum of a tree that only grows on the Arabian peninsula.
3. Herod was a Nabataean on his mother's side, and he spent some of his childhood living in their country.
4. Caesar Augustus was contemplating making Herod the King of the Nabataeans, and would have if Herod had not died when he did.

MATTHEW 2:1-4

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, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

MATTHEW 2:5-6

They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.””

MATTHEW 2:7-9

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way.

MATTHEW 2:9-12

And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

TAKE-AWAY POINTS

Praise the Lord who
is in control of all
things, then and
today.

Let us join the wise
men in “rejoicing
exceedingly with great
joy” at the birth of
our King!