

Matthew 2 • Wise men, a madman and a Nazarene

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We're going to begin with the first 6 verses or so. It says, *“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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*⁶ “‘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.’” (ESV)*

Stop there if you would, just for a moment. Let's talk about these verses because there's some important things to bring out. You'll notice that Matthew begins by saying that Jesus was *“born in Bethlehem (in or) of Judea.”*

First of all concerning Bethlehem, it was not a large town, it was actually quite small, more like a village, located only about 6 miles from Jerusalem. And in the olden days, Bethlehem was known as Ephrath or Ephratah. And it is an important town for many reasons, not the least of which it is the ancestral home of none other than king David. About a thousand years earlier when he was born there.

Also, you'll notice that Matthew is careful to say, this is *“Bethlehem of Judea.”* Did you catch that? You say, well, why is that so important? Well, it's because there was another Bethlehem. There was actually another town named Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun.

And it's important that Matthew would pinpoint the fact that this is Bethlehem of Judea because it was David's ancestral home and because the Messiah was to be born in David's ancestral town, because this is what was prophesied. And that's why he makes note of that passage from the Book of Micah, where it

speaks specifically of the fact that from Bethlehem, God would raise up a ruler to shepherd the people of Israel. (Micah 5:2) And that is important.

Now, you guys also know when we talk about, when it speaks of Bethlehem of Judea, that's the Greek form of Judah. And Judah was one of the sons of Jacob, and one of the tribal allotments that was made there in the south part of the kingdom of Israel was given to Judah. Now, we refer to it as Judea because we're reading a translation of the Greek text, and that's why the difference there.

You can see that what Matthew is doing and what he will continue to do through this account, is he is compiling all of the prophetic evidence that is going to be necessary to prove the fact that Jesus is the Messiah that is long awaited and prophesied by God in the Old Testament.

And this, in fact, Matthew gives more Old Testament references than any other Gospel writer. And that's because that's his point. That's what he's doing. Using those Old Testament passages to compile proof after proof, after proof, that Jesus is in fact the One that was intended.

You'll also notice in verse 1, Matthew says, "*wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.*" The two words "*wise men*" in your Bible are a translation of one single Greek word. It is, magos. It's where we get our word, magi. Actually, several words come from it. Because Actually, magos in the Greek could apply to several different individuals or people who focused on something. It could refer to an astronomer. It could refer to a simple magician. It could refer to an interpreter of dreams and several other things, frankly. It became fairly widely used.

In this case, we can see that it refers specifically to people who were the watchers of the stars. These are men who believed that the great events of mankind would be foretold in the stars. And that's what they mention as it relates to following a star and coming to Israel in search of this one who is born to be a king and will have a global impact.

Now, it's possible that these magi were aware of a passage that is in the Old Testament that even refers to stars and Messiah at the same time. And it's a prophecy that was given by an individual named Balaam. You guys remember Balaam in the Bible? He was a dork. Well, you wasn't really a godly man, for one thing. He was a man who was a seer for sale.

When Israel was coming into the promised land, they made a lot of waves with some of the local communities of people. And one of them decided to hire

Balaam to put a curse on the people of Israel. And so Balaam eventually went along with this king, his name was Balak, and they went up to the top of a mountain so they could oversee the people of Israel. All of them sprawled across the land. And he said, now that we're up here and you can see them all, curse them.

Well, what happened is the Spirit of the Lord came upon Balaam, and he began to prophesy, and he gave some of the most incredible prophecies, frankly, about the coming of Messiah. It's recorded for us in the Book of Numbers. Let me put this up on the screen for you. It says here, and this is Balaam talking through the inspiration of the Spirit. He says,

Numbers 24:17 (ESV)

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: (and that means, He's not yet come) *a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...*

As you know, a scepter was something held by a king. And this is a prophetic statement that Balaam, of all people, is making about the coming of Messiah, and he connects it to the a star coming out of Jacob. And isn't it interesting that they were in fact following a star on their way there.

And by the way, let me just add, I don't mean to ruin anybody's favorite Christmas songs, but the wise men were not kings. So, We Three Kings, is out of the playlist. Actually there's a lot of Christmas songs that really have content that isn't very biblical. I'm sorry. These guys were not kings. There were way more than three. It doesn't tell us, but there were probably several. And they didn't show up the night of the birth of Jesus. They came several months later. Typical bureaucrats. Late. But anyway, this is the way things went, and I'm sorry, the song doesn't really fit.

But finally, you're going to notice that Matthew dates this whole statement here in these first verses by saying that Jesus was born “*in the days of Herod the king.*” And he's referring here to Herod the great, and this is the first Herod that took the throne. He's referred to Herod the great because frankly, he did a lot of great things in terms of, his building. He built the, he rebuilt the temple. He, after the Babylonians destroyed it many years earlier, he rebuilt a lot of things and he was really a brilliant administrator. There's only one problem. He was a crazy man. I mean, he was literally a madman. He killed two of his sons just

because they got under his skin. He killed his wife. And as you're going to see, he's going to do much worse.

Verse 7 and following says, *“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.””*

He had no intentions of worshiping this child. Herod was already devising his plan to destroy Jesus. At that time, he was simply wanting to compile the needed information to pinpoint the whereabouts of the baby so that he could get rid of him.

And it says in verse 9, *“After listening to the king, they went on their way. 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.”*

Now what you've just read in your Bible is a supernatural miracle because first of all, stars don't come to rest. They keep moving. And the reason, well, they don't keep moving. I mean, I don't know if they're moving. I'm not an astronomer, but I know that the globe we're on is moving. And so if you were to take a camera and set it on a tripod, and have it record for several hours, you would see the stars moving. I'm sure you've seen those pictures. They will move across the sky. It's really us that's moving for the most part, but they don't come to rest over a particular area to pinpoint it and go, yeah, right there.

This is a supernatural work of God, and I believe that's why it says what it says in verse 10. If you look with me in your Bible, it says, *“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”*

Now, remember, these are astronomers. They're used to stargazing. They watch stars all the time, but this is the first time they've ever seen this happen. They've never seen a star come to rest over a particular area, and they are beside themselves with joy because they know they're witnessing a supernatural phenomenon, and it's just crazy.

And by the way, I've read tons of commentators try to describe how this could have worked, and they try to do it naturally, and all of their explanations are just insane. I mean, they're just, none of them are convincing because you can't, it's really tough to explain supernatural events other than saying it was a supernatural event.

Verse 11, keep reading here with me. *“And going into the house, (notice that they're not in a barn anymore, they've moved into a house, that's good to know) they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, (and then it names them, and of course we're used to this) gold and frankincense and myrrh.”*

And by the way, these were fairly lavish gifts because they believed this Child to be of royalty. They believed that this Child was going to be a King, and so therefore they brought the gifts that were appropriate for a king.

The first one, of course, is gold, and gold speaks of royalty. If you read the Old Testament, when Solomon, the son of David, came into power in Jerusalem, you'll remember that he made gold so common that the people lost count of how much there was. In fact, it was so common, the Bible tells us that silver became almost worthless because there was so much gold, right?

So gold is connected to and symbolizes, if you will royalty. And then you've got frankincense. And that was essentially an ointment that was perfumed. And it was something that perfumed the halls of the wealthy and the royal. And I've heard that it suggests a sinless life. It suggests a divine life. I'm not sure if that's true, but they brought this other thing, which is really interesting.

They brought myrrh and myrrh is a bitter herb. And you think to yourself, why would they do that? Why bring something that symbolized bitterness? Well, it seems to connect itself to the fact that it was bitter that Jesus would go on to endure our sins on the cross. And He tasted the bitterness of our penalty on the cross, and so that particular gift was appropriate.

What's interesting about all of these gifts is that there is a prophetic statement that's made in the Book of Isaiah that repeats some of them and I want to show you this on the screen. It's from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 60, verse 6. It says,

Isaiah 60:6 (ESV)

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

Now you look at that and you think, that's really interesting. And by the way, they're coming to present these to a king. And so you think to yourself, well, that's an interesting prophecy, but they left one off. They left off myrrh. So obviously this isn't an accurate prophecy of them bringing the gifts of the wise men to the Christ child.

Well, it wasn't meant to be. It's not a prophecy of the wise men bringing gifts to the Christ child. It's a prophecy about the people, the kings of the earth, bringing gifts to Messiah when He rules and reigns during the Millennial Kingdom. That's what this prophecy is about. That's the context of the passage.

So why'd they leave off myrrh? Because the bitterness of suffering is done. That has been accomplished on the cross, and it's over. It is finished. And now they just simply bring the gifts that speak of the glory and majesty of a king.

Verse 12, we continue reading. *“And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”* And that's not the only dream going on here where the Lord is speaking.

“¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, 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.’ ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”

Well, the first thing you see here is God protecting His Son. And that's the important thing to see. But there's also a statement here that we have to deal with. And that is this statement by Matthew that, and by the way, he's quoting a passage from Hosea. And he's saying in essence that this applies to Jesus. *“Out of Egypt I called my son.”*

Well, this is the first of a few times that Matthew is going to take an Old Testament passage or prophetic statement that refers to something else, and he's going to apply it to Jesus. Because you see this passage again that appears in Hosea. Let me put this up on the screen. It's from Hosea chapter 11 verse 1. It says,

Hosea 11:1 (ESV)

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Now, this is an after the fact statement made about the nation of Israel that God brought it out of slavery in Egypt under Moses. All right. But Matthew is applying it to Jesus through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He's taking a passage that we might otherwise read and go, well, it doesn't have anything to do with Jesus. And yet he says it does. He says, in fact, this is the ultimate fulfillment of this particular passage.

The reason I point this out is because this is not the first time or the last time that Matthew is going to do this. In fact, we're going to see another one coming up here in just a moment.

Verse 16 says, *“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.”*

Wow. You read this passage, we've read it so many times. We read it, probably every Christmas. We read it whenever we happen to read through the Book of Matthew and we see it and we go, yeah, Herod killed all the baby boys. Not just in Bethlehem, but in the region. Okay. This was, there was a lot more than just that lived in Bethlehem. I mean, this is pure evil, but Herod wasn't the one who drew a sword and went and killed those baby boys. The soldiers did it. And that makes me think about the soldiers and what they had to do.

I mean, can you imagine being a soldier in Herod's army and being given a command to go into the land around, in and around Bethlehem and slaughter any male child, two years old and under. Can you imagine? Can you imagine what those guys went through dealing with that? But then again, this is the guy who murdered his own two sons and his wife.

Matthew goes on here in verse 17. And this is where we come back to one of those interesting passages again with the double fulfillment. It says, *“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:*

*¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.””*

Once again, you see here, words given originally to Jeremiah related to another event. This prophecy, or this statement, frankly, was made by Jeremiah, who witnessed himself personally, the downfall of Jerusalem. When all of the, well, when the Babylonian army swept into the city, conquered it, destroyed the city, killed many people, and took the rest of them captive to the Persian kingdom.

Jeremiah witnessed it and he was given this Word that there's a voice, a cry that could be heard in Ramah. And then he mentions, notice, *"Rachel weeping for her children."* Rachel, of course, was the wife of Jacob, the son of Isaac, and she had long since died but he is referring to her because she was considered the symbolic mother of the nation of Israel.

And, again, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew takes this statement made by Jeremiah and says, this is fulfilled through the death of these baby boys in and around Bethlehem. And Jeremiah's words apply to that event as well.

Verse 19. *"But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, 'Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.' ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there,..."*

And the reason he was afraid to go there is because Archelaus was a murderer like his father, he was a very violent man. In fact first of all, you need to know that before Herod died, he divided basically his kingdom to his three remaining sons. And Archelaus was the man who was given Judea as well as a couple other regions. And again, like I said, Archelaus was a violent man, a murderer following in his father's footsteps, which was not a great thing.

As soon as he took the throne, he rounded up 3,000 people that he didn't like and slaughtered them. That was just the kind of guy he was. And Joseph knew that all that kind of stuff, that word gets around. And it tells us here that when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in the place of his father, he was afraid to go there. He was afraid to go because this guy is just as much of a murderer as his father was.

And it says, *"...and being warned (we're at the end of verse 22, and being warned) in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee."*

Now for those of you who need a refresher on your geography, I'm going to put up a map here that's going to show you with a big fat red arrow there where Galilee is up there in the north. You can see it there. Below that, you see the region of Samaria, and then below that, you see Judea. And then to the right across the Jordan, you see Perea, and the Decapolis area.



You know what's interesting about this map? All but maybe half of the area that is shown there as part of the Decapolis, the rest of it was all originally Israel. When David and Solomon ruled and reigned, that was all Israel. Every bit of it. Well, now it's been reduced in size.

And you guys remember that Israel suffered a split. You remember that? It happened under the rule and reign of Solomon's son, David's grandson, a man by the name of Rehoboam. And under king Rehoboam, the nation was literally split in two. And Israel became essentially, two kingdoms, right?

Now the area on the map there that's in the blue that you see marked as Samaria, that was what they called after the split, the Northern Kingdom. But you know what name it had? It was called Israel. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel. The Southern Kingdom was called Judah, named after the largest of the tribes that took up that area, the tribe of Judah.

And when Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire, and they were conquered before Judah was, they began to just simply call that region, instead of calling it Israel anymore, they called it Samaria. And the reason they called it Samaria is because that after the split of the two kingdoms, the capital city of Israel, was Samaria. And the whole region took on that name. The capital city of the southern kingdom was Jerusalem and remained that. Judah always had its capital as Jerusalem.

Now you have this split kingdom, and by the time of Jesus, the nation of Israel really only truly occupies the area of Judea, which is, of course, again, the Greek name for Judea. And the Jews are scattered throughout other areas, but that is primarily what is now known as the nation of Israel. Although it's called Judea. There you go, a little bit of a history lesson.

Verse 23, look with me in your Bible. *“And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, (up there in Galilee) so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.”*

Now, if you look in your Old Testament or you get out your concordance and you say, well, I want to find out where it says in the Old Testament that He'll be called a Nazarene. You're not going to find it. It's not in there. And a lot of people really get bothered by the fact that's not in there and yet Matthew says that this is fulfillment of what was, of what the prophets might have said about Him, that He would be called a Nazarene.

But I'm not bothered at all by this and I'll tell you why. I don't think Matthew was speaking literally. I believe he was speaking figuratively. Because to see, to call somebody a Nazarene meant something. It was a dig, it was a derogatory statement to refer to somebody as a Nazarene.

Some of you might remember back when we were going through our study of the Book of Acts here on Sunday morning when Paul got to Corinth, I was telling you a little bit about the city of Corinth and how it was such an incredibly immoral and place of depravity. You remember that? And I shared with you that If you really wanted to insult someone, or if someone was already living a life of immorality and depravity, you would call them a Corinthian. Whether they, maybe they'd never ever been to the city of Corinth, never stepped foot there.

And yet they would call them a Corinthian to say, you are an immoral person. In other words, there was a symbolism that went along with the title or the name Corinthian. All right, why am I telling you this?

Well, because I believe that is exactly what is going on here when Matthew records that He would be called a Nazarene. And this was something that for the Jews was a derogatory statement. The Jews didn't think much of people from Nazareth. They thought they were uneducated, immoral people, for the most part.

You guys remember there's a conversation that goes on, it's recorded in the Book of John, where this is illustrated. Let me put it up on the screen. It's from John chapter 1. It says,

John 1:45-46 (ESV)

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (look at Nathanael's response) Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

See, that's the way the Jews felt about the Nazarenes. That nothing good is going to come out of there. That's not where you get your quality folk, right? It just doesn't happen, and that was the general attitude toward that.

You see, when Matthew wrote, “*he will be called a Nazarene*,” he's referring to how the people felt about Nazarenes. In other words, what the statement is saying is, He will be rejected, and that is a fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah 53. Let me show you. It says,

Isaiah 53:3 (ESV)

He was despised and rejected by men...

He was despised and rejected by men...

Essentially, what Matthew is telling us is that by referring to Him as a Nazarene, some people were going to reject Him, but not everybody.

We also know that He would be called by another name, also given to us in the Book of Isaiah. Let me show you this. Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14.

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Where in the Bible do you find people calling Jesus Immanuel? You don't. Why? Because it's not a literal statement. It's speaking of the symbolism that is behind the meaning of the name. What does Immanuel mean? It means, God is with us.

And so what Isaiah is prophesying, is that some people are going to say about Jesus, God is with us. They're going to literally hear Him. They're going to see what He does and they're going to say, God is here in the person of this individual. It doesn't mean they're going to go around calling Him Immanuel. It is the symbolism connected to the name.

Same thing with a Nazarene. He will be known as a Nazarene. In other words, some people are going to reject Him. Although some people are going to recognize God is with us.

And so you essentially have here, in these two names for Messiah, a picture of the two responses, essentially, that Jesus would evoke from the people. Some

would say, God is with us, and some will say, He's just a Nazarene, and you know what that means.

And that's the same dynamic that you and I face living in this fallen world. Some people listen to us talking about Jesus, and about the Bible, and heaven and so forth, and then they look at us and they say, God is with you. And others, they call us, I don't know, whatever the modern version of Nazarene is.

I mean, today Nazarene isn't a derogatory term, it's a denomination. And you call somebody a Nazarene today, they're going to go, I don't go to that church or something like that. But whatever they call you, some will reject you and some will accept you.

It's the same with Jesus, but, whatever words they use, whatever they say about you that is negative, or derogatory, or insulting. We remember the words of our Lord and Savior recorded for us in Matthew 5. Up on the screen says this,

Matthew 5:11-12 (ESV)

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (in fact, He says) Rejoice and be glad, (when that happens) for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

So we're told in the Word to prepare for the rejection, for rejection by the world. They rejected Jesus, many people did. And those that would have rejected Jesus back then, are going to reject you. And those who will stop and listen and say I want to hear more, they're going to say the same to you. But either way we represent our Lord and what a privilege that is, amen? Let's stand together We'll close in prayer

If you need prayer this morning because you're carrying a burden about something going on in your life, bring it up front here. We'll have our prayer team here after we're done and they would be happy to pray with you and just lift those needs to the throne of grace. You want to walk out of here with your load lightened. Make sure that you do. Don't, if you come to church and you walk out the door more burdened than when you came in, you might need to find another church. Bottom line.

Because, first of all, the Word ought to lift your spirits. And second of all, you have this invitation from the Lord to bring your burdens to Him and offload them at His feet. And He'll take them and they're not going to bother Him. They're not going to, they're not going to hurt Him. They'll hurt you if you keep trying to carry them, but they won't hurt Him. Like I've told you many times, He already carried the weight of the sin of the world on His shoulders. Your problems aren't going to be a problem to Him.

Father, thank You so much. Thank You for just the opportunity to come together with the body of Christ. It's such a delight to be with brothers and sisters, to worship together, to pray together, to fellowship together, to open our hearts, Lord, to all that You have for us.

And we thank You for Your Word that is so fulfilling in our hearts. Just brings conviction, brings strength, brings encouragement, and understanding. And we're thankful for that Father.

We pray that as we go through this week, that You would strengthen our hearts to walk with You, to serve You, to live for You. And whatever response we get from the world, we're just going to take it in stride knowing that they treated our Savior the same way.

So give us the strength, Lord God, just to carry on, to press on, to be the salt and the light that you've called us to be in a dark world that is looking for answers and coming up empty.

May we present to them the answer, Jesus Christ, for it is in that name we pray.

And all God's people said together, amen.

God bless you.

Have a good rest of your Sunday.