

The Gospel of Matthew

Signs



Vs. 1 – The story picks up some time after the birth of Jesus – up to two years after the fact. There are no shepherds, no stable or manger scene from the earlier part of the story that **Luke** tells of in **his** gospel. Instead, this writer sets up his part of the story by locating us in time – “...*during the time of King Herod*”. There was a line of “Herods” starting with Herod the Great.



Herod the Great, was perhaps the greatest builder that the Jews had ever seen. But his great public works buildings, including additions to the temple were completely wrapped up in his own gigantic ego. He was trying to build a city that was worthy of himself! Otherwise he was a brutal, paranoid psychopath who felt entitled to his kingly throne - so much so that he had one of his wives and two, possibly three, of his sons executed for suspicion of plotting against him. He wanted to be a popular king but he was not, due to his lineage which included Moabite blood (Esau). He was definitely an outsider among the Jews in Jerusalem. When he erected a large Roman eagle at the entrance to the temple, a couple of priests induced a group of about 40 students to tear it down. They were all executed!

There seems to be agreement from historians that this is the Herod that is being spoken of at the beginning of Matthew 2 when the Magi from the east stop in to inquire if Herod has any insight into this celestial phenomenon.

Later in the chapter, after it says Herod died, the one to succeed him upon the throne was “Archelaus”, Herod’s son.

Herod Archelaus took over the majority of the throne of Palestine after his father died. After Herod the Great died, Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, split the kingdom into four realms, with Herod **Archelaus** getting the lions share and his brothers and (even a sister) getting smaller realms. Archelaus ruled 9 years, from BC – AD 6. He took up where his father has left off. He killed all the males of the previous kingly dynasty so that there was no possibility of an insurrection. Later, a mob of thousands were congregated at the temple in Jerusalem to protest his policies and brutality. After they killed his emissaries, he sent in the army and around 3000 were massacred that day!



Due to this king's paranoia, Joseph was warned in a dream to stay far from Jerusalem, so they settled in the north at Nazareth, about 65 miles from Jerusalem, which was a rather long distance in those days, because it had to be walked or ridden atop a beast of burden.

We don't know how many. Three gifts are specifically named so it is assumed there are 3 magi who each gave one gift. Possibly from modern day Iran or Iraq. Maybe further but doubtful.

It is likely that these men practice a religion called Zoroastrianism. Ahura Mazda their god, shared many similarities with Yahweh. He was the an all-good "father" of Asha, or **wisdom, truth, justice, and order**. He opposed Druj, or, falsehood and deceit). There was no evil in Ahura Mazda. He is revealed through 6 divine sparks or, Amesha Spenta, the "divine sparks" that appear in the Gathic *Yasna* 47.1 are:

- 1~"[Good] Purpose"
- 2~"[Best] Truth/Righteousness"
- 3~"[Desirable] Dominion"
- 4 ~"[Holy] Devotion"
- 5~"Wholeness"
- 6~"Immortality"



Astrology was a part of Zoroastrianism, not officially, but was part of the culture of Persia and was practiced by those that had a head for the calculations it required. There is no explanation for how they could see a moving star, or comet, or some unexplainable (supernatural?) light, and conclude that it was indicating the time and location of birth of the Promised One! How could they even know about the Promised One unless they had studied Judaism?! It just defies a logical explanation that they were so sure of this that they went through extensive (and expensive) preparations for a long and dangerous journey to personally see this great event!



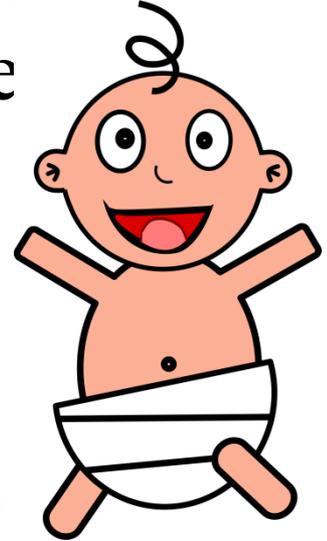
They almost certainly traveled in a caravan with many servants, soldiers, and herdsman as befitting men of their stature – enough manpower to protect themselves from bands of bandits. I believe this was an *expedition*!

Vs. 2 – “*Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?*” Don’t you think this is a strange and ill-advised question to ask a sitting king who was completely paranoid that everyone wanted to take his throne away! If God had purposefully revealed this part of His plan to them, why didn’t He reveal that they should also avoid the king, who by this time would have been Herod Archelaus, son of Herod the Great and *more than* his equal in suspicion and brutality against his perceived enemies.



Vs 2b - *“We ... have come to worship Him”*

They knew this child was somehow divine. No one would worship a child, or even travel a great distance to pay homage to one to whom the crown was promised – especially a king to a kingdom that was a conquered vassal of the greater kingdom of Rome! It just wouldn't be that big of a deal! These men, however knew this wasn't just the average run-of-the-mill birth of a future king of an unimpressive and small nation. This was something entirely different, and they possessed absolute certainty of this fact.



Vs. 3 – “*When Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*”

I think that the Jews were disturbed for a different reason than Herod Archelaus. The Jews had been hoping for and trying to advance this moment. They didn't like Herod and they did not like Roman dominance. They were looking intently for their God-promised Deliverer who would free them and lead them into world conquest! However, they dared not celebrate yet! But it sent the Jews into a high alert and cautious hope!



Herod, for his part, was filled with dread! Think of the arrogance of a man who knew of the coming Messiah as the focus of God's plan, yet would stop at nothing to oppose this great purpose of Almighty God.

Vs. 4-8 – Herod went to the theologians, and indeed they confirmed that it was true, and it wouldn't be far away – Bethlehem was barely five miles south of Jerusalem. Still, interestingly enough, Herod did not pursue the magi toward Bethlehem. He was going to play it cool, let the magi do the work locating and identifying the Christ, come back and report to him, and then he would have his assassins swoop in and snuff out the little guy's life! It would be easy!



It just seems strange that Herod didn't at least have his men follow and spy on the magi. It was an uncharacteristically casual approach to this possible challenge to his throne. But God was also at work, channeling Herod's inclinations.

Vs. 9 - “...*the star went ahead of them, until it stopped...*”



This was no ordinary star. I cannot help but go back to the days of salvation history when the Spirit of God led Israel through the wilderness to their next stop - in a cloud by day and fire by night. This “star” seems to be something on par with that. Also, it appears that only the wise men were seeing this star since Herod had to inquire of them (and not his own astronomers) when the star had first appeared. It led them to the dwelling where Joseph and Mary and their toddler, Jesus, were staying. “***They were overjoyed***” – the magi knew this was their journey’s end!

Vs. 11 – “*On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother, and they bowed down and worshipped Him.*”

God revealed Himself and his plan to these men, proving once again that God has compassion upon the nations, choosing to reveal Himself in many different ways. It answers the age old question – “*but how could God condemn those who have never heard?*”



He is a compassionate God. To those that respond to the light He has given, He will give more light, until the seeker arrives and finds Him!

***Ethiopian eunuch / Cornelius the centurion**

These were powerful and wealthy men. Perhaps even rulers in their own lands. They humbled themselves, bowed down and worshipped.

Contrast that with Herod Archelaus who had no intention of worshipping. plotting to oppose and thwart God –

and he was well versed in Judaism. He knew the universal implications of the crime he planning! How many turn away from God! They see the signs, and rather than being draw to the light, they retreat from it and protect themselves, knowing full well the consequences, but hoping against hope that God doesn't really mean what He says.

