

December 20, 2020

“Called to Be Worship”
Lesson 3 of Unit

Matthew 2:1-2, 7-15

Intro

Matthew and Luke’s gospels give details of Jesus’ birth, sometimes the same story with different details, sometimes elements unique to their own stories.

They both have genealogies tracing Jesus’ human heritage, and they both mention angels telling Joseph and Mary details about the coming Son. Only Luke offers details leading up to Christ’s birth, such as going to Bethlehem for the census and the child being born in a stable and laid in a manger. They both describe visits to see this child: Luke talks about the shepherds, while Matthew describes the visit by the three magi.

These different visits give us an early view into two aspects of Jesus’ later concerns. Luke’s focus on the shepherds reminds us that Jesus shows care and emphasis on the poor and the outcast. Matthew’s focus on the Magi shows that Jesus’ story will reach people far beyond Israel to people of many races and nations.

Read Matthew 2:1-2

1. Bethlehem (vs. 1) is connected to at least three important events:

- 1) It’s where Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and was buried (Gen. 35:18-19)
- 2) It’s where the book of Ruth is set, where the event of that story take place
- 3) It’s where Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2)

“During the time of Herod” (vs. 1): Herod reigned as king of Judea by Roman authority from about 38 BC to 4 BC.

(Yes, Jesus was born in the BC’s! The times were miscalculated by a 6th Century monk)

2. About the Magi (vs. 1)

They are definitely portrayed as Gentiles (non-Jews)

Magi are considered experts in discerning the will of the gods and divining the future

They do this through observing nature (stars, weather, animal behavior)

They frequently served as counselors to royalty (see Gen. 41:8, Dan. 2:2-11)

Their coming to Jesus’ birth appears to be the first step in God fulfilling the prophecy of

Micah 4:1-5, about citizens of many nations coming to Israel to worship the Messiah

3. Vs. 2:

The Magi refer to Jesus as “king of the Jews”. This title is also used mockingly at Jesus’ trial before Pilate (Matt. 27:11, 29, 37)

The Magi saw the star (which we’re going to be able to see tomorrow!)

God uses the things these men know to communicate with them, despite those practices being forbidden (Deut. 4:19, Deut. 18:9-14)

They came to worship Him

Shows that they knew the child born was royalty

Seems to show that they may have been aware of Biblical prophecies about this King

May have been sent by their king to show worship and pay respects

This is a royal event/visit—they go to Jerusalem, the political/religious center of Judea

Summary of vs. 4-6 (Not part of the verses for this lesson):

Herod is troubled at the Magi's statement of coming to worship this new King. He asks the chief priests and the scribes about where the Christ was to be born, and they tell him in Bethlehem, quoting Micah 5:2.

Read Matthew 2:7-12

4. Vs. 7

Herod "secretly" talks to the Magi about when the star had appeared

He is seeking to know how far back he needs to look to find the "King" and get rid of him

5. vs. 8

He sends the Magi to Bethlehem to look for the child they have come to see

Based on answer from 2:6

The Magi see this as a religious question, Herod sees it from a political perspective

Herod speaks deceitfully about wanting to come worship this child as well

6. vs. 9

The Magi follow the star to find the child

They aren't from this area—they don't know exactly where to go

They need specific guidance to find Jesus

Just like the shepherds—told to find the baby "in a manger"

Star image is similar to the pillars of cloud and fire guiding the Israelites in Ex. 13:21

7. vs. 10

Why were they overjoyed when they saw the star?

1) They know exactly where to go now—confusion resolved

Surprised at no royal birth (a king) present in Herod's house

2) Some speculate that they hadn't seen the star for awhile; now they do!

3) Their journey / goal is almost accomplished

8. vs. 11

What does their bowing to the child say about them and Him?

First, the Magi see Jesus in a house, not the stable

Mary and Joseph are still in Bethlehem, not in Nazareth where they live

Jesus is likely somewhere between days and weeks old when they see Him

Because the family is still in Bethlehem, it's not likely that Jesus is as old as 2

(Herod's decision to kill all the boys 2 and under may indicate a gap in time between when the Magi came and when Herod decided he'd been fooled and needed to take action—See Matt. 2:16)

The worship of the Magi toward Jesus

No one seemed to fully understand Jesus' identity until after the resurrection

It's more likely they "worship" Him in the way they would any king of the time

They bring gifts, they bow to Him

The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh

All three are valuable, rare, and expensive

Speculation: God provides for Joseph's travel needs ahead of time

When God tells Joseph to flee to Egypt, how do they afford the travel expenses? How do they afford the trip back home? God gives them, through the Magi, the capital they will need for the trips there and back.

9. vs. 12

God communicates with the Magi a second time

First, He uses the star

Here, he uses a dream

Go back home a different way

They don't go back and tell Herod who they saw, or where they saw Him

Herod was well-known for eliminating any political opposition (see Acts 5:36-37)

Read Matthew 2:13-15

10. vs. 13

This is the 2nd of four dreams that God uses to direct Joseph's actions

Egypt was a Roman province at this time

Also home to large Jewish community

Joseph would be able to find work there without drawing much attention

Herod's desire to kill the child

Nothing in Matthew suggests Herod thought the Magi were sent by God

More likely thought they were crazy pagans or foreign spies

Spies might try to use a hoax to create unrest in Herod's kingdom

11. vs. 14-15

Shows Joseph obeying the angel's warning; they leave during the night (immediately)

Matthew cites OT prophecies frequently

Matt. 1:23: Angel's announcement of Jesus (Is. 7:14, Micah 5:2)

Matt. 2:15: God's Son to come out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1)

These prophecies cited to show Jesus as Messiah in God's plan of salvation

Application: There's a lot that happens in this lesson that could be labeled "unexpected". It's unexpected that pagan Magi would come from so far away, and that they would come to Herod's palace with congratulations, when there was no baby there. It's unexpected that the Magi would find the King of the Jews in an ordinary house 6 miles away from the palace. It's unexpected that the Messiah would be born into dangerous circumstance and that his parents would have to go to Egypt to keep him safe. It's unexpected that the chief priests, who should know from their Scriptures about the Messiah, wouldn't go to welcome / worship him.

All of these examples should remind us that we need to be aware of and open to the possibility, maybe even the likelihood, or the unexpected happening in our lives. He is able to use people we might not expect to say things we might not expect at times and in ways we might not expect. Which should remind us of what Jesus said in Matt. 13:16: "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear."

Prayer: