

IV. What's King Herod's story?

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, vs. 3

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they (Magi) returned to their country by another route. vs. 12

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." vs. 7

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, vs. 12

Herod was a vassal king of Rome an Edomite, non-Jewish by birth, who was called by Rome the "King of the Jews". His reign over Judea, home to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, lasted from 37 B.C.-4 B.C. He was a prolific builder/administrator but also very jealous of his throne, having some of his own family members killed as well as his infamous "slaughter of the innocents" that Matthew records.

In this narrative Matthew paints Herod as the evil, conniving leader. He's surprised by the Magi's appearance, he consults his religious leaders for an answer and then lies about his true intent with the child king and save for a dream that warns the Magi, Herod would have sent soldiers to kill Jesus earlier.



Matthew 2:1-12

The Magi, a Star, Gifts and a Jealous King

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Word of God

I. What's with the star?

"We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." vs. 2

Whether it was a naturally occurring astrological phenomena (like the Christmas Star appearing this year on December 21st; Jupiter and Saturn aligning for the first time since 844ad) or a supernatural event of God no one can say for sure.

How does a star light a single dwelling?

...and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. vs. 9

If the first sighting was an astrological sign then clearly a star couldn't come down over a house. So it would be consistent to think the first sighting was supernatural as was the ability of this star to light over a single dwelling. Some have speculated the star was God's own Shekinah glory. (Shekinah Glory is a visible manifestation of God on earth, whose presence is portrayed through a natural occurrence.)

II. Who are the Magi?

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem. vs. 1

There are differing views of Magi over the centuries, but what we do know they were considered wise astrological experts and for centuries gave their approval to every Persian King of the Parthian Empire. (In scripture they first show up in the Book of Daniel during the Babylonian Empire)

How did the Magi even know about the Jewish Messiah?

"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? vs. 2

Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Daniel 2:48

This is speculative as scripture does not say. However we do know that Daniel was appointed the chief of the Magi while in Babylon. We also know that Daniel was given a prophecy in the 6 century B.C. by the angel Gabriel in the 9th chapter of Daniel that pinpointed when the Messiah would come. So it's probable that Daniel had set the timeline into their minds and through the centuries the Magi had been looking for an astrological sign to announce the Messiah's coming. Because from Matthew's telling it's clear they knew about the Jewish Messiah.

"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? vs. 2

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. vs. 11

III. What's the significance of their three gifts?

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. vs. 11

The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were kingly gifts, which is probably one of the reasons why it came to be believed that the Magi's were kings. Gold was a symbol of Kingship. Frankincense was a perfumed incense that was a symbol of Deity. Myrrh was an anointing or embalming oil, a symbol of honored death. But it could simply just be three gifts that were fit to be given to a King without any specialized meanings.