

# “Matthew”

## Fall Series 1

### Lesson 3

## “Matthew 2:1-23”

**Objective:** To understand the message that Matthew meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context, in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis upon application.

**Materials:** I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Matthew, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, various modern translations, and any other sources relevant to the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding, help us make application to our current situation.

#### Procedures

1. We will begin by examining the text from the Greek text.
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural, and social settings, in order to understand the message Matthew intended and that God still intends for us.
3. From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the words of Matthew, for the early disciples, then to our modern contextual framework as disciples of Jesus.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes and thoughts in order to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

# Lesson

As we come to chapter 2 in Matthew's Gospel we are introduced to King Herod, who was the Roman, Client king of Judea. Herod was born in late 70s B.C. into an autocratic Idumean family that had converted to Judaism a half-century earlier, during the reign of John Hyrcanus I. Initially, Herod had supported Mark Antony in the Roman internal power struggle, and he had a lot of interaction with Cleopatra. After the defeat of Mark Antony at Actium in 31 B.C. Herod expressed great loyalty to Octavian (to become known as Caesar Augustus). Herod was very politically astute and made great strides to support the winning side. He even blocked gladiators from joining Mark Antony who was at the time in conflict with Octavian. Octavian would later come to view Herod's initial support of Mark Antony as merely loyalty to Rome as, at the time, Mark Antony was the appropriate authority of the Roman empire. Throughout his reign Herod's ties with Rome remained the backbone of his policy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L.I. Levine, "Herod the Great," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 161-169.

Another aspect of the regime of Herod the Great was that he appointed the person who held the role of High Priest at Jerusalem. He manipulated the High Priesthood for his own purposes.<sup>2</sup> Herod was very mercenary in his pursuit of power and his exercise of control. At one point, he even opened the tomb of David and stole some 3,000 talents of silver.<sup>3</sup> Herod was very unpopular as a ruler for a number of reasons: 1. The fact that he was not from Jewish lineage. 2. That he replaced the Hasmonean dynasty. 3. That he was not in the lineage of David. 4. That he pursued a policy of hellenization. 5. Among the pagans, Herod was considered to be Jewish and this was not popular among them. Herod also lived under constant threat from the intrigues of his own family members. All of this made him extremely paranoid and he was constantly executing members of his own family.<sup>4</sup>

It is into this mix of chaotic internal Jewish politics and the *Pax Romana* that Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem (“House of Bread”), in the territory of Judea. Bethlehem was

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<sup>2</sup> L.I. Levine, “Herod the Great,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 161-169.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 16:179-182.

<sup>4</sup> L.I. Levine, “Herod the Great,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 161-169.

famous for being the birthplace of the greatest king to rule Israel, David. It was also known as a place where the people were traditionally loyal to *YHWH*. Matthew will contrast the character and goals of Herod against the backdrop of the workings of God as he introduces us to the birth of Jesus. We will see a contrast between Herod and between the foreigners who come to honor and worship Jesus as the newborn king of the Jews. Their joy stands in stark contrast to the fear and feeling of unease directed toward the news of the coming king. All of this is intended to help us comprehend that the stage has been set for the conflict of two ways of seeing the world and for two ways of understanding how to use power and influence.

In the very first sentence of this chapter we are told that “magi” (μάγοι - *magoi*) came from the east (ἀνατολῶν - *anatolon*) to Jerusalem. One of the first things that Matthew seeks to do in his apologetic is to establish the fact that Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem and not in Nazareth. Bethlehem is the place where the Messiah must be born, according to prophesy; in the Davidic town of his birth. A central concern in this infancy story is the

combined quotation of Micah 5:2<sup>5</sup> and 2 Samuel 5:2.<sup>6</sup> These verses identify the birthplace of the Messiah to be Bethlehem in the territory of Judah. The surrounding narrative will make it clear that this was indeed the birthplace of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Thus Jesus' birth fulfills this prophesy regarding the birth of the Messiah.

There are in fact several strands of scriptural fulfillment woven into Matthew's account. One of these comes in the form of the visit by foreign dignitaries.<sup>8</sup> Matthew's mention of the presentation of gold, frankincense, and myrrh echoes the royal gift given to Solomon.<sup>9</sup> "*Magi*" is a word that has been found to have primarily four meanings. It can refer to: 1. A member of the Persian priestly caste. 2. The possessor and user of a supernatural form of knowledge and ability. 3. It can be the designation for a "magician." 4. It can also be used for someone who is a deceiver or a seducer. In the context of Matthew's Gospel

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<sup>5</sup> **As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are the least significant of Judah's forces, one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you. His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.** CEB.

<sup>6</sup> **In the past, when Saul ruled over us, you were the one who led Israel out to war and back. What's more, the LORD told you, You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be Israel's leader.** CEB.

<sup>7</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 10:1-10. The visit of the Queen of Sheba to the son of David.

<sup>9</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 61-62.

this term means ““possessor of special (secret) wisdom” especially concerning the meaning of the course of the stars and its interconnection with world events.”<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that today many would not see this type of thing as anything other than superstition or perhaps even as a negative thing. In the ancient world, such knowledge was commonly associated with “wisdom” and a discerning of the workings of God. It was highly prized and respected. The reasoning was that God created all things and as you learned to see the handwriting of God, His fingerprints on the created world you could discern His workings and His will. He, after all, was the creator of all things. He had written across the face of the heavens with stars, galaxies and all the celestial wonders.<sup>11</sup>

Some have seen Matthew here as giving a “veiled polemic against occultism and magic in the magi’s worship of the newborn king.” At best, this is an undertone of the passage, since Matthew gives no hint that this is in his mind. Instead, what Matthew has in mind, as a primary focus, is that Gentiles, those that were

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<sup>10</sup> G. Delling, “μάγος, μαγεία, μαγεύω,” in Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol IV (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 356-359.

<sup>11</sup> I.e. Psalm 19.

considered to be alien to God's purposes, demonstrate an openness to the purposes of God and are indeed subject to Him as creator of all things and of all people. He communicates with them. This is despite the fact that they explore the purposes of God through the instrumentality of their own craft rather than through the Scriptures given to Israel. These *Magi* expressed an eager receptivity toward the newborn king. This is a continuing foretaste of a theme that Matthew will emphasize throughout his Gospel; the focus is on reaching out to the Gentiles, by God. It is certainly the case that they had some contact with Jews in order to have knowledge of a messianic king. The fact that the designation "from the east" is perhaps intended to be deliberately vague and mysterious as are the ways of God is a part of the methodology and message of Matthew.<sup>12</sup> God is majestic, mysterious and does unanticipated things in unexpected ways.

The usage, by Matthew, of these Magi is intriguing and perhaps telling. Wherever possible Matthew seems to go to great lengths to indicate the universal and expansive mission of Christ. The coming of Jesus was not to be seen as some small provincial

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<sup>12</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 33 (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1993) pp. 26-27. cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* 19.

happening, but instead would have repercussions that would reverberate across the whole of humanity, and beyond, it was of cosmic proportions. In verse 2, we are told that these *magi*, these foreigners, came to worship the king of the Jews. The star is an indication of divine intervention in history that is being brought about in the birth of this child. The fact that a star is the sign of His birth is also an indication of the incredible nature of what is unfolding in His birth. His birth is of such great cosmic importance that it is being announced to the whole of creation by writing it across the face of heaven itself.

The “Magi” came to honor (*προσκυνῆσαι - proskinesai*) Him. The word used here is the same word that is most often translated as “to worship.” For a Jewish audience it is most likely that the combination of words used in this verse would imply, to them, “worship.” This would track with the usage of the Greek Old Testament (The Septuagint). Matthew freely uses this terminology of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> By using the word in this way, before the resurrection, Matthew blurs the line more than Mark and Luke do in their Gospel accounts with regard to the divine nature of

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17.



Jesus.<sup>14</sup> Those normally looked down upon by the Jews and thought of as unclean and unworthy are called by a star placed by God in the heavens to come and worship the Messiah. Despite their status, God reaches out to them and seeks relationship with them. God desires that all people would come to repentance and He overturns all accepted conventions and protocols to reach out. Worship, for the Jews, was only to be directed toward God. Matthew appears to be making the bold statement here that Jesus is God and therefore worship of Him is appropriate.

Perhaps this should challenge us as people called to be disciples of Jesus to consider how and to whom we reach out. God reaches these people where they are and calls them to Himself. It was the “safe” people, the people that claimed to be the chosen of God, who sought the life of Jesus and slaughtered many children in their efforts to maintain the status quo and ultimately these same people would be instrumental in the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the religious people who actually acted as the enemies of God more than those who were considered sinners and estranged from God.

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<sup>14</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, International Critical Commentary series, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 236-237.

In 2:3, we are told that Herod was “troubled,” “disturbed,” by the news of the star and the visit of the magi. Not only was he troubled, but everyone in Jerusalem was also troubled along with him. What should have been a moment of rejoicing and jubilant celebration caused a very different response in the very heart of Jewish territory in the halls of power and at the center of the cultic worship focus. I wonder, how we, as God’s people today, will respond to the new challenges and the unusual circumstances that we will face? Will we give our best response, or will we be troubled and disturbed? Herod gathers the best advisers that he can find, the chief priests and legal experts, and asks them where the “Messiah” was to be born. His plan was to oppose God, to oppose God’s Messiah. He believed that he knew what was best for the world and for his domain. He was so sure of this that he set himself up in opposition to God Himself. He questioned God’s intentions because they threatened his vision of what was best and what was right. I wonder, do we ever do the same? If we look at the temptation of Eve all the way back in Genesis 2 we see this same type of questioning of God and His motives.

At 2:6, these experts refer to Micah 5:2,<sup>15</sup> a passage of Scripture recorded hundreds of years before Herod's day that indicates the birthplace of God's Messiah. That really should have been a hint that this was something from God. Who else could do such a thing? At 2:7-8 we find Herod continuing to seek to do battle with God in the way that he battled with men, through scheming, intrigue, and violence. He gets the magi to help him, or so he thinks. At 2:9 we find the magi continuing on their mission to find the child. Notice their response to what is God is doing at 2:10 **"When they saw the star, they were filled with joy."**<sup>16</sup> Such a different response comes from the Magi than the response that came from Herod and the people of Jerusalem. At 2:11 they entered the "house" (οἰκίαν - *oikian*) and saw the child with Mary and they fell down and "worshipped" (προσεκύνησαν - *prosekunesan*) him. Notice that the child is in a house at this point, not in the stable as is often the case in the images that we have locked into our mind. It has likely been up to 2 years since the

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<sup>15</sup> **2 But from you, Bethlehem in Ephrathah, small as you are among Judah's clans, from you will come a king for me over Israel, one whose origins are far back in the past, in ancient times.** REB.

<sup>16</sup> CEB.


child was born (cf. 2:16). They present their gifts to Jesus at this point: Kingly, costly gifts.

At 2:12, we have this remarkable passage of Scripture that indicates that God warned these Gentile magi in a dream not to return to Herod. God communicated with them, gentiles, sinners, and they listened, responding in obedience. We are told that they did not return to Herod and that they chose another route by which to return to their own country, place, or land. What a remarkable thing God does here in communicating with those considered to be outsiders, sinners, and unholy. Perhaps it is the case that we should let God decide these things instead of trying to help Him out. God does not need our protection, nor does He call for us to provide it for Him. Instead He calls for our trust and our obedience. The two (trust and obedience) are in some sense inseparable from one another.

At 2:13 we find God sending another warning, this time through a “messenger of God” (an *angel*) to Joseph in a dream. How often do you pay attention to your dreams? The dream message sent to Joseph was very specific and one of the most terrifying that could likely come to a parent: his child was in

mortal danger. At 2:14, we see the great faith and obedience of Joseph expressed in actions, not just in words. He “got up” (*ἐγερθεῖς* - *egertheis*), I assume from his bed and packed up the child and his mother, in the darkness, and went to Egypt. It is not like he got the train, or a flight, but he responded immediately and decisively to the warning of God and did what was needed to protect the child. What a moment: One might ask why did the child need to be protected if He was the Son of God? The answer is that God made His child vulnerable to danger. This is going to be a central part of the message of Jesus Christ. God does not take the safe route, what many would consider to be the wise, or even expedient route, He instead takes a path that will leave Him vulnerable and at risk. God is a risk-taker.

I wonder what message we should glean from such risk-taking on the part of God? Of course some might respond that God, as the all-powerful creator of the universe knows all, can do all, and so there is actually no risk. This is perhaps one of those discussions akin to how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Some do not care and some feel that they absolutely know the answer, but what if God chooses not to know the answer and



to slip into the reality of all humans, which is vulnerability? What if God chooses to make Himself vulnerable, to experience an unpredicted situation where the outcome and the variables are uncertain. I believe that this is a part of what is happening in the incarnation of Christ: A part of God experiencing the things we experience each day of our life.<sup>17</sup>

At 2:15 Matthew informs us that Jesus and His family stayed in Egypt until Herod died. Then we have Matthew connecting another prophecy, this time one from Hosea 11:1.<sup>18</sup> Surely here we have a connection with the exodus and with the imagery of the abolition of that slavery by God. I believe that each of these connections is intended to draw upon these rich symbolic images in order to create in the readers more than an intellectual response or a tacit acknowledgement: instead these images are intended to create an emotional/spiritual response, or acknowledgment acted out in obedience. God created all of us, every part that makes us human, not just our mind. God seeks to heal all of us and not just a part of us. So often today we think we

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<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 4:14-15 **Also, let's hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God's Son; 15 because we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.** CEB.


<sup>18</sup> **When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.** CEB.

are being practical or perhaps scientific by focusing upon the quantifiable parameters before us, but how do you quantify God? The choice of facts chosen by Matthew challenges us to a deeper response than just a response related to the facts. God seeks to penetrate to the soul, to remedy the heart of the sickness, to remedy the source of sin, which comes from the depths of our souls.

Sin bores deep into our souls and slowly, gradually, like the boiling of a frog kills us without generating a response. We have become desensitized to the dangers that sin brings to us. We fail to see the danger we are encountering, because it has gradually crept in and surrounded us, leaving us unaware. Notice the response of Herod at 2:16: **“When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the male children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.”**<sup>19</sup> The word translated here as “fooled” (*ἐνεπαίχθη - enepaixthe*) carries the idea of to “mock,” or to “make sport of.” Herod takes this quite

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<sup>19</sup> CEB.



personally. I think it indicates his focus is upon himself. Life is about him and he is what is important and how dare anyone fail to follow through on a request that he made to them? He is also afraid. He lives in constant fear.

He responds by ordering soldiers, men of war, to slaughter babies. His heart is hardened and corrupted. In his anger, fear, and frustration he vents his fury on the innocent. Matthew makes sure to connect this event to the visit of the magi. What should have been seen by all humanity as an indication of the power and greatness of God becomes a moment of callous and destructive behavior to bring death and pain to others. Death and pain are instruments of evil, they are easy to wield and powerful in the hands of those who seek to enforce their will and their understanding of things upon others. Notice the disparity between the response of God who sends His son, meek, gentle, and helpless into the world, needing the protection of others and Herod's response of sending soldiers to carry forward his agenda through force and destruction.



This moment of pain is also connected by Matthew to the prophesy of God.<sup>20</sup> It is as if God knew this moment would come and yet still the horror of this evil moment did not dissuade God from sending His Son. We are informed once more in 2:19 of the death of Herod. The contrast here could not be greater, between the author, and the sustainer of life and the pretender, the taker of life. Herod ordered the taking of life as if it was his prerogative to have the power over life and death at the least whim, or fit of his anger. He is impatient and impulsive, God is patient and deliberate. One is a pretender, and really has only quite limited power, while the other (God) is the real thing, the genuine article and actually has unlimited power. One uses this power to compel and force people to do what he wants the other uses power to demonstrate love and choice. One seeks to compel, the other seeks to persuade. The contrast is sharp and distinct.

God, at 2:19, sends another angel to Jospheh and in a dream reveals that “those,” more than one person, of those who were seeking the life of the child are dead. Maybe Matthew means to implicate the soldiers who were actual instruments of death to the

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<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 31:15 - **The LORD proclaims: A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and wailing. It's Rachel crying for her children; she refuses to be consoled, because her children are no more.** CEB.

children or maybe he leaves it open so we can imagine who else would want the child dead. Anyway, the bringers of death are now dead and Joseph is instructed to take the child back to the “land of Israel.” The fact is, this strange plural simply begs for an explanation. France indicates that he believes it is supplied from Exodus 4:19.<sup>21</sup> This section is filled with Moses language, allusions to the exodus account.<sup>22</sup> Matthew 2:19 corresponds with Exodus 4:19-20, while 2:21 corresponds with Exodus 4:20.<sup>23</sup> Matthew is deliberately and carefully connecting these two events.<sup>24</sup> As God reached out and acted on behalf of His enslaved and powerless people in the time of Moses, once again God reaches out and instigates the redemption of His people, this time through His Son Jesus, the Messiah.

Joseph does as he is instructed by God and yet at the same time he still uses the judgment and the revelation that God had given him and seeks to protect the child. God expects us to use good judgement and to recognize His voice. Joseph goes to Galilee

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<sup>21</sup> **The LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt because everyone there who wanted to kill you has died.”** CEB.

<sup>22</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> **So Moses took his wife and his children, put them on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. Moses also carried the shepherd’s rod from God in his hand.** CEB.

<sup>24</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 271.

which was ruled by Herod Antipas and in this we find reflected the greater tranquility that existed in Galilee as opposed to the territory ruled by his brother Archelaus which was more unsettled and therefore more dangerous for the child.<sup>25</sup> At verse 23, we come to the end of Matthew's birth narrative with the information being provided that Joseph settled in Nazareth and once again we are told that this was in some way what was spoken through the prophets. Here the formula is different, and that, along with the fact that Nazareth was only established as a village in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. means that this is not in fact a reference to a Scripture referring to the village of Nazareth in the same way as the other prophecies that we have seen.<sup>26</sup>

This problem, of the reference to Nazareth, being connected with the Messiah, has been well-known all the way back into antiquity and as you might imagine numerous solutions have been offered in order to explain what Matthew means to say here.

Sunday morning Bible class is not a place or a time that is desirable to delve into the copious, intricate and complex details

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<sup>25</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, in the Anchor Bible Reference Library, Updated Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 206-207.


<sup>26</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 91-95.

of the technical issues with regard to Matthew 2:23. You may ask where and when then? R.T. France does a really good job of going through enough of the details to help you understand what is likely the case here. I will simply cut to the chase without explaining all of the intricate details here. You can read and research more on your own if you are truly interested. The most plausible explanation for what is occurring in this context is that Matthew is referring to the obscurity of the origin of the Messiah. A hint of this can be seen in the response of Nathanael to Philip when he informed him that they had found the one who Moses wrote about. Therefore the reference to be called a “Nazorean” would refer to the fact that the origins of the Messiah would be mysterious and obscure. Basically, the idea is then that the Messiah appeared seemingly from nowhere and as a result would meet with incomprehension and rejection.<sup>27</sup> He came from a nowhere place, a place of relative unimportance.

This is exactly what happened. There is no straightforward solution to this exegetical problem in Matthew. To be direct, we simply do not really know exactly what Matthew intends to

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<sup>27</sup> John 1:45-46 **Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph’s son, from Nazareth.” 1:46 Nathanael responded, “Can anything from Nazareth be good?” Philip said, “Come and see.”** CEB.



communicate here. However, whatever it is it must relate to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God, rejected by men, and yet He still fulfills the will of God and the mission for which God sent Him to earth. The goal of Matthew is to convey this message to his audience so that they can begin to comprehend what God has done for them and so that they can begin the process of transforming their thinking, their lives, their hopes, and their dreams in order to be in alignment with the calling and the will of God. Change is hard and some things act as catalysts for change; the birth of Christ into our world was a moment that brought great change and information that helps us, as humans, to begin to understand the nature of God and the calling that God sends to our hearts to be like Him. Jesus is a living message from God.

The birth of Jesus challenges us to see God differently, to see life differently. It challenges us to live in a way that reflects the nature of God, rather than the way that the world says is wise and prudent. This story challenges us to take risks, to risk being rejected, hated, misunderstood or even killed in our following of God and His will. We are challenged by this birth narrative to not always take the safest path. We are called to be followers of God

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and His image-bearing Son Jesus Christ. We are called to live,  
think, and give of ourselves like Jesus.

# Synopsis

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In this chapter Matthew will contrast the varying responses indicated by the magi on the one hand and Herod, the king of the Roman province of Judea on the other hand. Herod focuses upon serving Rome and in exercising political savvy and power, while the magi are concerned about honoring/worshipping the king of the Jews because of seeing a sign from God regarding His birth. This contrast will point to the universal nature of God's plans for humanity. God intends to redeem all of humanity and not just Jews. In this account the unlikely heroic figures are those who unexpectedly focus upon God and His agenda rather than upon self, power, and the agenda of the world.

The responses could not be more startlingly different. One is a response of joy and the other of fear and trepidation; one is to worship the other is to kill. There is also the contrast between the way God interacts with people as the true ruler of the universe and the way that Herod, the temporary king, seeks to accomplish his will. One compels and kills in anger and fear, and one lowers Himself and seeks to persuade and express love and concern. One



seeks to follow worldly wisdom while the other possesses all true wisdom.

Matthew lays out these contrasts in the narrative of the story by indicating the way God initiates the solution to the problem of sin and death and the other uses death and commits sin in his efforts to retain power and control. God risks rejection and even danger and death in the sending of Jesus. Herod seeks to mitigate risk and retain control through the use of force and even using the power of death. One lives in fear and the other overcomes fear in love and compassion. Their responses indicate their hearts. God responds in love, compassion, and gentleness. Herod responds in fear, arrogance, and in the death of those who are innocent. God seeks to redeem those that are in truth guilty, while Herod kills the innocent.

We are challenged to see the world as God sees it and to pursue the methodology of God and not as the world does. This section introduces us to these great themes that will continue to be highlighted throughout the Gospel account.



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# Main Points

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- To narrate the historical reality of the birth of Christ.
  - To highlight the greatness of God in reaching not just the people of Judea, but people far away even in the east.
  - To see the contrast in response between true seekers of God (magi, Joseph and Mary) and the pretenders (Herod, and the people of Jerusalem).
  - To see how the people of power in the world seek to enforce their will and how God by contrast gently persuades and loves.
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# Questions

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1. What are some moments that you especially remember as significant in your life? Why do you remember those moments?
2. What message do you think the star of Bethlehem sent to the world with regard to the birth of Jesus?
3. What are some ways that you have seen honor given to another person?
4. Why do you think King Herod and the people of Jerusalem were troubled to hear of the birth of Jesus?
5. What are some of the traits of good government?
6. Why do you think Herod “secretly” called for the magi to find out from them the time when the star appeared?
7. What are some things that fill you with joy?
8. What are some things that steal your joy?
9. What do you think the word “worship” means?
10. What are some ways that you can worship?
11. What are some ways that God communicates to you His will for your life?
12. Why do you think God made Himself vulnerable in the birth of Jesus?
13. What message do you think we are to understand from God becoming vulnerable?
14. Why do you think God did not just kill Herod?

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15. Why do you think God allowed Herod to kill all the children since He knew it was going to happen?
  16. Why do you think Matthew sets the story of great sorrow alongside the story of great joy in Matthew 2?
  17. What kinds of things make you afraid? Why?
  18. Why do you think the birth of Jesus was so obscure?
  19. What is the most important message that you think Matthew intends for us to understand from chapter 2?
  20. What message do you find the most inspiring from chapter 2?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important to know that God sent His Son into the world, vulnerable and as an infant to communicate His love, His nature, and His gentleness. God seeks to gently persuade rather than to compel and even kill His enemies. God seeks the humble of heart irrespective of their bloodlines, traditions, or understandings. What are the greatest contrasts that you see between the way Herod reacts to danger and the way that God reacts to danger in this chapter?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words pouring out to us the nature of His being. He demonstrates for us how much He cares for us and how that caring nature displays gentleness and kindness even in the face of great hostility and evil. God honors those who truly seek to find Him and reaches for them where they are in their journey and continues to guide them into His presence. What are some ways that you think we as the people of God can continue to express the nature of God in the world today?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

The words of this chapter should challenge us in a number of ways to act and react differently to those we encounter each day. God challenges us to see what people can become not what they are at present. He challenges us to see the hope that comes in the midst of humility while hope is destroyed and sacrificed in the midst of arrogance and fear. As you live your life what are some ways that you strive to reflect the nature of God in your life?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us to come to a greater understanding of His nature and then to reflect that in the way we live our lives. We are called to obediently reflect the nature and attitudes of Christ in the way we live and especially in the way we treat others. We are to seek to persuade others through acts of love and kindness rather than compel them through force and authority. What are some ways that you have experienced the love of God in the actions of others?