



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 2

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Introduction

In this Chapter We Will Study:

- The details of the visit of the wise men from the East
- Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by the events in this chapter

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- Unlike St. Luke, St. Matthew does not record events related to the day of Jesus' Birth
- He wants us to see Jesus as KING
- But he does describe the visit of the wise men who followed the star to find the infant child and to worship Him
- Bethlehem translated to English means: "House of bread." Jesus Christ would go on to be called: "The Bread of life", John 6:35
- Bethlehem of Judea is a city that was mentioned in Judges 17:7, and must be distinguished from another of the same name in the tribe of Zebulun, Joshua 19:15

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- Herod the king was the son of Antipater, an Edomite, made king by the Romans
- The word rendered wise men is more correctly Magi, a term which designates an order of priests and philosophers which belonged originally to Persia and Media, and who were extensively distributed over the region of the Euphrates
- Those described in the book of Daniel as wise men, astrologers and magicians, belonged to this order
- Although it is commonly taught that the Wise men were three in number, there is no Biblical documentation for that assumption

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- Having discovered an unusual luminous appearance or meteor in the heavens, supposing these persons to have been Jews, and knowing the prophecies relative to the redemption of Israel, they probably considered this to be the star mentioned by Balaam, Numbers 24:17
- The wise men misapprehended the mission of Christ, and expected him to be a secular king

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- The trouble of Herod is easily accounted for
- Viewing this as a danger to his own throne
- This news seemed to portend a legitimate king, a rival for the throne, around whom the Jewish nation would rally
- There were many in Jerusalem to whom the coming of the Messiah would be a matter of joy; but all of Herod's friends would doubtless be alarmed at His coming
- By the chief priests here are meant not only the high priest and his deputy, but also the heads or chiefs of the 24 classes into which David had divided the sacerdotal families, 1 Chronicles 23:6; 24; 2 Chronicles 8:14; Ezra 8:24

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- The scribes were the successors of Ezra, the official copyists of the Scripture, who naturally became its expounders, and were the theologians of the time of Christ
- The priests, as the head of the Jewish religion, and the scribes, as the chief expounders of the Scriptures, were the proper persons to answer Herod's question
- Where Christ should be born; This demand concedes:
 - (1) That the Jews expected a Messiah
 - (2) That the Scriptures had foretold His coming
 - (3) That the very place of His birth had been pointed out

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- The Sanhedrin answered without hesitation
- They made it very clear that they knew all about the prophecy of where the Messiah would be born
- This prophecy is found in Micah 5:2
- In that prophecy both the place of His birth and the character of the Messiah are so clearly set forth that there was no room to doubt

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- A ruler is one of the characters of the Messiah, who is the king of His people, John 18:37
- The word "rule" here means to rule as a shepherd does his flock, in faithfulness and tenderness John 10:11; Isaiah 40:10-11; Isaiah 9:7
- Herod took pains to learn the precise time when the star appeared

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- He did this because he naturally concluded that the star appeared just at the time of His birth, and he wished to know precisely how old the child was
- What a hypocrite! He only wished to find out the child that he might murder Him; but see how that God who searches the heart prevents the designs of wicked men from being accomplished!

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- They probably departed immediately after their interview with Herod
- “The star... went before them” This language implies a miraculous appearance
- Such a view is no less probable than that a pillar of fire should have guided Israel
- Its reappearance caused them great rejoicing, because it showed them that their quest was not in vain
- The people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a present in their hands

Wise Men from the East (2:1-12)



- They offered Him incense as their God and represents His priesthood; gold as their king; and myrrh represents suffering
- Frankincense is an expensive fragrant gum distilled from a tree in India and Arabia
- Myrrh is an aromatic gum produced from a thorn-bush that grew in Arabia and Ethiopia
- Here we see Divine intervention by God
- God did not want the three Wise men to report to Herod the location of Jesus
- The three Wise men were good men and they obeyed God straightway

The Flight into Egypt (2:13-15)



- Once again, we see God intervening
- The scripture that was spoken of by the Prophet (Hosea) is now fulfilled by God arrainging to have Jesus taken out of Egypt, Hosea 11:1
- Egypt has a very intimate connection with Bible history
- It was the nearest of Roman provinces independent of Herod
- There were many Jews there who had a temple and synagogues
- It was convenient for a return at the proper time
- Joseph showed his prompt obedience to the command as there should always be, to the divine commands
- Herod died somewhere between two and four years after the birth of Christ

Massacre of the Innocents (2:16-18)



- He had directed the wise men to report to him after their visit to Bethlehem
- Their return to their own country without complying with his wishes seemed to Herod a mockery of his authority, and excited his rage
- Mainly because his scheme was broke, which was by them to come at the knowledge and sight of the young child, and privately dispatch him: and now he might fear, which increased his wrath, that the child would escape his hands, and in time be set up for king, to the prejudice of him and his family; wherefore, to prevent this, if possible, he placed an order to slew all the children that were in Bethlehem

Massacre of the Innocents (2:16-18)



- By the slaughter of the infants at Bethlehem was literally accomplished what had been predicted by Jeremy the prophet, in Jeremiah 31:15
- It was first spoken with reference to the desolation of Israel by Nebuchadnezzar
- The survivors of the Israelites were gathered by their conquerors as captives at Ramah
- There the voice of lamentation was heard from the mothers grieving of their offspring
- The prophet describes Rachel, the mother of two great tribes, as weeping and refusing to be comforted

Massacre of the Innocents (2:16-18)



- It was still more appropriate to the bereaved mothers of Bethlehem
- Within half a mile of that city was the tomb of Rachel, and hence the language of the prophet is again applied to the inconsolable mothers of Bethlehem, as though the Rachel that slept in the tomb were a mourner over her slain offspring

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- Herod left three sons, and the kingdom was at his death divided between them
- To Archelaus was given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria; to Philip, Batanea and Trachonitis; to Antipas, Galilee and Perea
- Each of these was also called Herod, and these are the individuals who are so frequently referred to in the New Testament during the ministry of the Savior and the labors of the apostles
- This event was the signal for the return to Judea

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- Notice that St. Joseph is not required to return to Bethlehem or to Judea, but simply to the land of Israel
- As they is plural, there must have been the death of more than one of those who sought the death of the Lord
- St. Joseph obeyed as promptly as before, waiting obediently upon the Divine will

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- Archelaus was cruel similar to his father
- At this time the land of Palestine was divided into three parts:
Galilee, on the north; Samaria, in the middle; and Judea, on the south
- Galilee was under the government of Herod Antipas, who was comparatively a mild prince, and in his dominions St. Joseph might find safety
- Nazareth was an obscure village, nestled in the hills about five hundred feet above the plain of Esdraelon, on the side of Galilee

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- It is not named in the Old Testament, was probably a small town in the time of Christ
- The character of the people of Nazareth was such that they were proverbially despised and contemned, John 1:46; John 7:52
- To come from Nazareth, therefore, or to be a Nazarene, was the same as to be despised, or to be esteemed of low birth; to be a root out of dry ground, having no form or glamour, a prophecy of one who was despised and rejected, Isaiah 53:3

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- Verse 23 is the fourth fulfillment formula statement in Matthew's Gospel
- This passage has puzzled Biblical scholars since there is no clear text in the Old Testament which states the Messiah would be called a Nazarene
- However, unlike the other quotes, which refer to what is spoken by "the prophet," this passage does not refer to a single prophet but to "what had been spoken through the prophets," plural; and therefore, Matthew may not be referring to a single text but to a larger theme in the prophetic texts

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- He may also be making a word-play on the Hebrew word *netzer*, which means "branch" and may be the root word for Nazareth in Hebrew, which is Nazara/Nasrat
- *Netzer*, "branch" is a Messianic title, most notably in the prophetic passage in Isaiah 11:1
- St. Jerome says that the word *Nazarene*, from the Hebrew *Nezer*, signifies *separated*, and distinguished from others by virtue and sanctity: and so some that were particularly consecrated, and devoted to the service of God, were called *Nazareans*, as Joseph, Deuteronomy 33:16, Samson, Judges 16:17

The Home in Nazareth (2:19-23)



- Thus a Nazarene signifies one that is *holy*; and all the prophets, says St. Jerome, foretold that Christ should be holy



Conclusion

- What Old Testament prophecy caused Herod to be “troubled”?
- How did the priests and scribes determine the location of Christ’s birth?
- Where was Jesus born?
- What does Bethlehem mean? Why is this name apropos?
- Who are the Wise men?



Conclusion

- What gifts did they give to Jesus?
- What are the symbolic meanings of their gifts?
- Why don't the wise men go back to tell Herod where Jesus is?
- How did the flight into Egypt fulfill TWO prophecies?
- Where did the family settle? What prophecy did that fulfill?