

Day One – Recap of Matthew 1:18-25

After having studied the rest of Matthew 1 this week, I think we can all see why Luke's description of Jesus' birth is given so much more attention. Matthew's account doesn't really provide much background or elaboration with details. It wouldn't really be much of a Christmas story if we had to rely on Matthew's "tax collector-esque" telling, or at least it would only last about thirty seconds. As we will discover throughout the rest of the book, this is actually pretty typical and Matthew is not usually too concerned with details or commentary like a Luke or John might be. He's kind of like the Joe Friday of Gospel writers.

As we continue to read through Matthew we will find a kind of formula for several of the early stories. Matthew develops the story and then explains with something like, "This happened in order to fulfill...". This shouldn't really surprise us, especially when we recall that Matthew is Jewish, writing to a primarily Jewish audience, and is building a case for why Jesus is the New Israel. It's important to him that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament.

I wonder how often we actually think about the situation facing Mary and Joseph. We hear it so often during the Christmas season that I think it becomes sort of old-hat, not to mention that we're all scared to death of giving Mary any credit and looking too Roman Catholic. Well we do need to be careful about giving too much credit when the credit due is to God, but I nevertheless think that these two people do deserve a great deal of admiration. They were both in a really precarious situation but trusted God and did what He told them to do. What more could you ask?

Day Two – Read 2:1-23

Divide this passage into two parts and title each.

Read the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2.

How old do you think Jesus was when the magi came to worship Him, saying "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"

What did you learn from these two accounts of Jesus' birth that gives you an idea of His age when the magi came to worship?

Day Three – Read 2:1-12

Do some research concerning the magi (wise men). From where had they come? Why did they come to Jerusalem? How many were there? How did they come to know of the King of the Jews?

The sharp contrast between these well-motivated foreigners and the unscrupulous jealousy of *Herod*, the official *King of the Jews (and all Jerusalem with him)*, foreshadows the response which official Judaism will make to Jesus, and the future welcome of Gentile believers into the true people of God.

In the whole episode Matthew finds rich material for meditation on the fulfilment of Scripture. The formal quotation of Mi. 5:2 shows how Jesus' birthplace indicates his status as the coming *ruler*, and the *star* probably echoes Balaam's prophecy of a 'star ... out of Jacob' (Nu. 24:17). The coming of foreign dignitaries from the east to Jerusalem reminds us of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, the son of David, bringing gifts of gold and spices (1 Ki. 10:1–13), and of the prophecies of similar visits in the future in Ps. 72:10–11, 15 and Is. 60:1–6 (v 6 'gold and incense').

Notes. **1** *King Herod* ('the Great') died in 4 bc. This episode did not necessarily take place immediately after Jesus' birth, but within two years of it (16), so that Jesus' birth was probably not later than around 6 bc. **2** Many natural explanations of the *star* have been offered, including a comet (Halley's appeared in 12 bc), a nova or supernova (there was a prominent one in 5/4 bc according to Chinese records), or a planetary conjunction (that of Saturn and Jupiter in 7 bc would have suggested to Babylonian astrologers the idea of a king in 'the Westland', as they called Palestine). One or more of these may have contributed to the quest of the Magi, but v 9 suggests something out of the ordinary. **6** The quotation adapts the text of Mi. 5:2, partly by weaving in words from 2 Sa. 5:2, on which Micah's prophecy was based. **12** God communicates by *a dream* to another familiar in their culture. The only other such dream-¹

Gentile in 27:19. Like the star, it is a means of communication which would have been familiar in their culture. The only other such dream-revelations Matthew records are given to Joseph (1:20; 2:13, 19, 22).²

How do you explain the fact that these foreigners knew of the birth of the King of the Jews but the people in Jerusalem did not? Does this seem strange to you?

Why was Herod and all Jerusalem troubled about this news?

Who did know where the Christ was to be born?

Are people (including the leadership) in the church today equally apathetic to truths concerning the kingdom of God? Explain.

Day Four – Read 2:1-12

Did Herod really want to worship the child?

Why is it significant that Matthew records the fact that Gentiles came to worship the Jewish Messiah?

What is significant about each gift that the wise men offered to Him?

Why did the wise men go back home a different way?

What did Herod do, and why?

What did the chief priests and scribes do?

Who is wise, and who is the fool in this day when it comes to their response to Jesus Christ the Lord?

Day Five – Read 2:13-23

2:13–23 Childhood travels. The rest of ch. 2 focuses on the geographical movements of the infant Messiah, from his birthplace in Bethlehem to Egypt, then back to Judea and on to Galilee, where he is established in the village which was to give him his title, Jesus of Nazareth. This section is remarkable both for its frequent formula-quotations (15, 17–18, 23) and for the recurrent dreams by which Joseph was guided from place to place (13, 19, 22). Both these features suggest that Matthew's primary concern was to show that these changes of location were not haphazard but were directed by God and had been foreshadowed in Scripture (notice that each of the formal quotations in ch. 2 contains a place-name: Bethlehem, Egypt, Ramah, Nazareth). Clearly geography matters!

Why is this? A clue may be found in the reaction of Jews to the suggestion that the Messiah might be from Galilee (Jn. 7:41, 52), or still worse, from Nazareth (Jn. 1:46). Everyone knew that the Messiah was to come from the Judean village of Bethlehem, so how could Jesus *of Nazareth* be taken seriously? To this objection Mt. 2 provides the answer. Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem, as Scripture required, but by a series of divinely guided and scripturally justified movements found his way eventually to Galilee, so that the Messiah could after all be *called a Nazarene*.

Notes. **13** *Egypt* was a traditional place of asylum for Jews in political danger. **15** Ho. 11:1 speaks of the exodus of God's son Israel *out of Egypt*. Matthew uses it here on the basis of his conviction that Jesus was himself the true Israel. **16** In his last few years, *Herod's* paranoid defence of his throne led him to execute many imagined claimants, including even three of his sons and his favourite wife. The elimination of the handful of male infants in the small village of Bethlehem was entirely in character. **18** The tradition of *Rachel's* burial near Bethlehem makes this quotation appropriate; the *children* in Je. 31:15 were the Jews taken into exile (from *Ra-*

mah, another traditional site of Rachel's burial), but the chapter goes on to promise their return. **22** *Archelaus* proved worse than his father and was deposed in ad 6, to be replaced by a Roman prefect. **23** *He will be called a Nazarene* is not a quotation of a specific text (as the formula indicates by a general reference to *the prophets*) but probably sums up the prophetic theme of a humble, despised Messiah (*cf.* Jn. 1:46).

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How do the Old Testament references in these verses help us in our understanding of who Jesus is?

Do you really trust God to work out everything in your life for your good and His glory? Why?

Day Six

If you are looking to go a little bit deeper in your understanding of the text for this week, try one of these resources:

[Craig Keener's commentary at Bible Gateway.com](#) This is short and sweet but may offer a little bit more information than the study guide and sermon.

[J.C. Ryle](#) A Puritan writer who isn't ashamed to write like it, he's nevertheless a brilliant thinker who has a lot to offer.

Sermons Transcripts:

[John MacArthur](#)

[Ligon Duncan](#) – Highly recommended

[Terry Johnson](#)

Audio:

[Mark Dever - Overview](#)

[John Piper](#)

[D.A. Carson](#) – Tough to beat once you get past the French-Canadian accent

[S. Lewis Johnson](#) – Just about anything you would want to know and much more