



## Group Discussion Guide

*For group meetings from September 6 afternoon through September 13 morning*

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

This account of the magi's visit to young Jesus is unique to Matthew. These "wise men" arrived in Jerusalem after the birth of Jesus, and apparently had lost track of the star they had been following on their quest to find the new king of the Jews. The Greek word used to identify these men is magi, and this term was first used in reference to wise men in the Persian empire. This is likely where these men traveled from. Because they followed a star as their guide, it can be concluded that these magi specialized in astrology. Their question regarding the king of the Jews caused King Herod great concern. Herod was Idumean, which means he was from a land located south of Judea. He was loyal to Rome and his main goal was to keep his power, keep the peace and build a legacy for himself by constructing great buildings. Herod was not known as a man of faith and seemed to have little interest in the ways of God. He had to assemble the chief priests and scribes to find out where the Messiah was to be born according to prophecy.

Once he learned of Jesus's birth, Herod desired to know where the child was as well. He claimed he desired to worship the new king, but of course his only goal was to kill him and thus eliminate this new threat to his position of power.

The magi set out for Bethlehem and again saw the star that had guided them before they arrived at Jerusalem. This star's location was specific enough to lead the magi to the house where Jesus lived with his parents. The reaction of these men to the appearance of the star offers a glimpse into their quest for the new king. Their joy indicates they believed this king to be a significant person in history, and well worth the trip from Persia to Judea. Upon seeing young Jesus, these men "fell down and worshiped him," (v. 11). They were prepared with gifts appropriate for a king, and they gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. This note from a commentary sheds some light on these gifts:

They are gifts fit for a king, as is also myrrh (Ps. 45:8; Song 3:6), and they remind the reader of the homage of the Queen of Sheba to the son of David, with her gifts of spices and gold (1 Kgs 10:2). The use of myrrh in the crucifixion (Mark 15:23) and burial (John 19:39) of Jesus has led to the tradition that it symbolizes his suffering, but in the Old Testament it is rather a symbol of joy and festivity (see references above, and Prov. 7:17; Song 5:5).

*R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 89.*

God used a dream to warn the magi not to return to Herod to share the location of the new king, and so they instead returned to their homeland using a route that would not take them back through Jerusalem.

### **Matthew 2:13-18**

God ensured that Joseph would avoid the destruction that Herod would bring to Bethlehem. He used an angel to give Joseph a message through a dream and told him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt because Herod was planning to search for Jesus and kill him. Joseph obeyed and took his family to Egypt until Herod had died. Matthew indicated this was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Hosea 11:1.

### **Matthew 2:19-23**

Herod carried out his violent, evil plan. After realizing the magi were not coming back to Jerusalem, the king sent men to Bethlehem to kill all the male children two years old and younger. This order was based on the information the magi had shared regarding when they had first seen the star. Herod's actions fulfilled the prophecy given by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:15. This excerpt can serve to shed some light on the connection between the events in Bethlehem and the words of Jeremiah:

This statement (Jer. 31:15) referred initially to the weeping of the nation as a result of the death of children at the time of the Babylonian Captivity (586 b.c.). But the parallel to the situation at this time was obvious, for again children were being slaughtered at the hands of non-Jews. Also, Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem and Rachel was considered by many to be the mother of the nation. That is why she was seen weeping over these children's deaths.

*Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 23.*

Joseph again received word from an angelic messenger through a dream, telling him that Herod was dead and it was time for the family to return to Israel. When Joseph learned that Herod's son had taken his place, he chose not to go near Jerusalem or Bethlehem. Another warning through a dream led him to Nazareth, and this was a fulfillment of yet another prophecy regarding the Messiah, though this was attributed to multiple "prophets" rather than one specific messenger. This note helps in understanding this general fulfillment:

Thus it has been suggested that Matthew saw in the obscurity of Nazareth the fulfillment of Old Testament indications of a humble and rejected Messiah; for Jesus to be known by the derogatory epithet Nazōraios (cf. John 1:46) was not compatible with the expected royal dignity of the Messiah, and thus fulfilled such passages as Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 11:4–14.

*R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 94.*

## Discussion Questions

1. Consider for a moment the magi (“wise men”) described in Matthew 2. What are some things we learn about them in this chapter? How do they inspire you as you seek Christ?
2. The chief priests and scribes knew the prophecy from Micah about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem. And yet, they did not recognize Jesus when he came. Why do you think they missed his coming?
3. When the wise men found Jesus, they bowed down and worshiped him. They also were prepared with fine gifts and gave them to the Savior. How do these actions speak to your heart regarding how you worship Jesus and give to him?
4. Herod committed an unthinkable atrocity against the families of Bethlehem when he murdered all the male children two years old and younger. How do you view acts of evil such as this in light of what you know about this world, about God and His plan of redemption?
5. Three times in Matthew 2, the author indicates an event fulfilled prophecy. What do these fulfillments teach you about the power of God and the connections revealed in Scripture?
6. In this chapter God used angels and dreams to send messages to those who were faithful to him. How does He speak to us today? What changes might you need to make in your life to ensure you are listening for His voice?