



Chapter 2: The Visit of the Wise Men

Bethlehem – the Birthplace of Jesus (2:1, 5, 6)

The Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered people to register at the town from which their family came. Joseph was descended from King David, who came from Bethlehem, so Joseph and Mary had to journey from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem to register. When they reached Bethlehem there was no room for them to stay and so the Son of God was born in very humble circumstances. The record of the birth of Jesus is only found in Matthew and Luke, although the other Gospels also tell us that he is the Son of God. Luke's Gospel records the visit of the shepherds who were local men and therefore Jewish. Matthew writes about the wise men who were Gentiles and came from far away. The Lord God wanted both Jews and Gentiles to witness the arrival of His Son.

The Wise Men (2:1-12)

Matthew chapter 2 describes the visit of these wise men (called 'Magi' in some Bible versions) to the infant Jesus. Matthew does not tell us who the wise men were, or exactly where they came from, but he shows us that people were expecting the Christ, the saviour and king promised by God. It was natural to expect the new king to be born in Jerusalem, the capital city, which is near Bethlehem, and so the wise men went first to Herod's palace in that city. Notice that they described Jesus as *"he who has been born King of the Jews"*.

The wise men followed a star which led them to Jesus. We are given no details about it; some think that it is unlikely that it was a natural star, planet or comet because these distant heavenly bodies would not shine over just one building. Because the wise men had been looking at the skies for signs of the King of the Jews, perhaps God provided an unusually bright light in the sky just as He did with the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:13). It is possible that only the wise men were allowed to see the light (see 2 Kings 6:17).

THE GIFTS BROUGHT BY THE WISE MEN

These remind us of the three aspects of the work of the Lord Jesus.

- Gold – is linked with kingship; Jesus would be a king.
- Frankincense – is linked with the priesthood; Jesus would ascend to heaven to be a High Priest for his followers.
- Myrrh – used when preparing a body for burial; it pointed forward to the death of Jesus.

Herod

King Herod (sometimes called Herod the Great), whom the wise men visited, came from a family that had become wealthy and powerful by serving the Romans, who controlled Israel at this time. He was a jealous and suspicious man who even killed some of his own family because he thought they had been disloyal to him.

When Herod heard from the wise men about the birth of Jesus he tried to have the child killed because he thought Jesus would be a rival and threaten his power. He had no intention of worshipping Jesus. However God protected Joseph, Mary and the child who all escaped to Egypt where they were safe from the wicked king.

Sadly Jesus' own people did not recognise him as their king and crucified him; but the Lord Jesus will be king over the Jews, and indeed king of the whole world, when he returns to the earth.



