

Matthew 2:1-12

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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Verse 1 - "In the time of King Herod" This King Herod died in 4 BC.

- "wise men from the East" They were astrologers, probably not kings.

Verse 2 - "observed his star at its rising" probably refers to a comet. "At its rising" could also be translated as "at the place of the rising of the sun, i.e., the east." Celestial events such as this were understood to be omens of the future. That this comet is understood to be a sign of the birth of a "child who has been born King of the Jews" is particularly frightening to Herod since **HE** is King of the Jews and this unknown child is a threat to him and his heirs.

Verse 3 - "(King Herod) was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him" That is, this news is not just about a change of who will be King. "All Jerusalem," that is, all the elites in Jerusalem, are also frightened because of the social turmoil that such a change in the status quo would bring. The occupying Roman armies would expect that **THEY** would be the ones to install any new King, and would not likely accept without a war this new baby King.

Verse 4 - "calling together" Herod has no capacity to interpret this himself. Instead, he must call together (at great expense) the religious leaders of his time - priests and scribes - to tell him what this means.

Verse 6 - Is a reference to Micah 5:2

Verse 7 - "secretly" Honourable business is always done openly. Therefore, the wise men (and we, the readers) would know immediately that Herod's statements were deceitful.

Verse 8 - "stopped over the place" Assuming there really was a comet, and we can understand this story in reasonably natural terms, it might be better to read this as "confirmed the place" or "set over the place." It is an anachronism to read this as a "magical" or "supernatural" event. At the time of Matthew, such events would have been understood to happen in purely "normal" and "natural" ways, because God was fully present - naturally and normally - in all events. And so special events or signs were just that: special but natural and **NOT** supernatural.

Verse 11 - "on entering the house" Note that Matthew has made no mention of Nazareth or of the need for a trip to Bethlehem. Without Luke, we would probably understand that Jesus was born at home in Joseph's house where they lived in Bethlehem.

- "gold, frankincense and myrrh" are all expensive gifts "fit for a King."

A few things to note:

1. In Matthew - who emphasizes how Jesus is a fulfillment of the Scriptures - it is gentiles (i.e., non-Jews) from the East who are the first to worship Jesus at his birth. Matthew does not show this as fulfilling any scripture.
2. It is difficult to place how soon after Jesus' birth that the wise men arrive. The following verses which tell of Herod killing all boys two years and younger suggests that they did not arrive close to the actual birth day. Tradition has placed their arrival 12 days after the birth.
3. Today, the arrival of the wise men is celebrated on January 6. This day is called "Epiphany" because it is a celebration that Jesus was born "for all," and that on this day, a few of those "all" responded to Jesus' birth and worshiped him. Their leaving of their

homes to seek Jesus is a precursor of Peter, James and the other disciples leaving their homes to follow Jesus.