

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-6 The Magi

Since we are human, we have only limited knowledge about the future. God, however, knows all about our lives—past, present, and future. If a time comes that we need to know what lies ahead of us, God has promised to give us all the wisdom and direction we need. In this lesson you will see that Joseph needed to know how to respond to a danger he didn't know existed. God chose to give him a dream to provide the special actions he and his family should take, in order to avoid that danger. God even provided, through strangers, the means to follow God's instructions.

More than a year after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a group of Magi—Gentile astrologers—came from an eastern land to Jerusalem. These wise men went to the palace of the local ruler and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this, he was greatly disturbed about another king being born in his kingdom. When he called together all the chief priests and teachers of the Jewish law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet Micah has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for from you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel’” (Matt 2:3-6).

Then Herod talked to the Magi secretly and found out the exact time the royal star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and find the child. As soon as you do, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

If you were one of the Magi, would you have questioned the sincerity of Herod about wanting to know the location of a future ruler of Israel?

After they had left the king, the wise men went on their way. The star they had seen went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. It was a journey of only 10 kilometers to Bethlehem. When they saw the star, the Magi were overjoyed. As they came into the house and saw the child with Mary, they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they presented him with gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh. God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their country by another route.

When the Magi had gone, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt. Now Herod became furious when he realized the Magi had not returned to him. He gave orders to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were under two years of age. He wanted to prevent

any recently born Jewish boy from growing up to be a king. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stayed in Egypt until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet Hosea: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11:1).

We see that Matthew, led by the Spirit, quotes verses from the Old Testament to show that Jesus is the Messiah. In the Hosea prophecy, God was calling the nation of Israel his son, which he called out of Egypt during the Exodus. Here Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies the prophecy to Jesus. Jesus is God’s unique Son, because he will accomplish the redemption of all who will believe.

After Herod died, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, “Take your family and return to Israel, for those who wanted to take the child’s life are dead.” So Joseph took Jesus and Mary back to Israel. But when he heard that the son of Herod the Great was now reigning in Judea, the southern part of Israel, he was afraid to go there. This son was known for recently ordering the killing of 3,000 Jews at the temple in Jerusalem. Being warned in this dream, Joseph moved to Galilee in northern Israel, back to the town called Nazareth. This is the town where he and Mary had lived before Jesus was born. It was considered an insignificant, even hated, town by the Jews. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. Thus Matthew links this move with the word ‘Nazarene.’ Nazareth would be the town where Jesus grew up. It sounds like the Hebrew word for ‘branch,’ *neser*, which is what Isaiah called the Messiah in Isaiah 11:1.

Jesus was considered insignificant and despised, simply because he came from Nazareth and not Jerusalem. Most religious leaders were trained in Jerusalem. This was the statement made by Nathanael before he met Jesus, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Matthew’s Gospel was directed toward unbelieving Jews, so he took every opportunity to point out the Old Testament prophecies that were being fulfilled in the story of Jesus. He wanted Jews to believe that Jesus was indeed their promised Messiah.

Consider this question, “What does it tell us about Joseph, when we see that he obeyed God-given dreams for making major family decisions?”

This story is **important** because it demonstrates to us how God both protected and provided for Jesus and his family. It shows God’s protection from the evil plans of Herod who wanted to kill the new king. It also lets us know how God provided Joseph and Mary the means to flee to Egypt through the expensive gifts of the Magi.

The **main truth** of this story is that God had the events surrounding Jesus’ birth decided long before they happened. He arranged circumstances and gave directions to deliver him from danger.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. Who came to Jerusalem by following a star to seek the new king of the Jews?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, “The Magi, who saw his star when it rose, came to worship him,” you are correct.
2. What did Herod secretly ask the Magi to do for him?

- A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that Herod said, "Go and find the child. As soon as you do, tell me, so that I too may go and worship him," you are correct.
3. Whom did God send to warn the family of Jesus to flee to Egypt?
- A. [Pause.] If you said, "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to repeat this story until you can tell it from memory. Tell the story to someone who has never heard it before. Then ask, "Why do you think God chose Nazareth as the place for his son to be raised, a town which was despised by others?" Consider in your discussion that God's Word says that "God chose the lowly and despised things to nullify the things highly regarded by people, so that no one can boast before Him." (1Cor 1:28).