

## Overview

Some of our long held beliefs about the Christmas story are based on tradition and not necessarily Biblical fact. We know from the book of Matthew that Magi from the east came to visit Jesus in Bethlehem. If they came from Babylon then it was over a 900 mile trip to see Jesus. Because of the three gifts presented (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) it has become Western tradition to believe there were just three Magi. The Eastern tradition believes there were up to twelve. Either way, this group of men would have been traveling with a contingency of attendants and guards. They were more than likely court advisors who were educated in astrology and science.

Jesus would have been around the age of two by the time the Magi reached Bethlehem. They first stopped in Jerusalem to ask where exactly the new king would be born. The Magi would have heard about this Jewish King from the period the Jews were in exile. The Jews brought with them their Old Testament writings. The Magi could have been referring to Numbers 24:17 which reads: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob."

These Magi were willing to travel such a great distance to worship this new King, but the religious leaders in Jerusalem were not willing to travel the 6 miles to Bethlehem. It states a couple of times in Matthew 2:1-12 the Magi came to worship. The trip would have taken considerable time (months), planning and money. They were sacrificing their personal comfort and to a degree their safety by traveling outside their country. They did all of this, because they wanted to worship. The religious leaders in Jerusalem were able to tell Herod exactly where the Messiah was to be born, but we have no record of them going and seeing Jesus. Those who knew the scriptures the best were the least willing to go and worship.

## Bible Study: Matthew 2:1-12

1. How do you define worship? What qualifies as worship? What forms can it take?
2. Herod was a false king empowered by Rome. Jesus was the true King empowered by God. He didn't have a palace, guards, or even a room to be born in and yet He was the long awaited King. Why do you think God chose such a humble beginning for Jesus' birth?
3. "Herod and the religious leadership in Jerusalem were blinded to God's plan of redemption because of the lust for their own plans and purposes."<sup>1</sup> In what ways can your own plans and desires distract you from following God's greater will?
4. In what ways can all the busyness of life and the Christmas season divert your attention from worship of Jesus?

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkins, M. J. (2004). *Matthew* (p. 104). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

5. Discuss as a group what it would look like for someone to be serving Jesus, but not worshipping Him.
6. In what ways do you worship Jesus?
7. What steps can you take to maintain a spirit of worship this Christmas season?