

Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**Matthew 2:1-12 | Meet the Magi**  
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**WELCOME:**

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 2
- Bibles in back—our gift to you.

**REVIEW:**

We started our study of Matthew's Gospel four weeks ago.

From a big picture standpoint, the Gospel of Matthew is a bridge book—meaning that it's a critical link between the Old Testament and the New.

As we have learned, Matthew immediately introduces us to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of OT prophecy.

And to prove that Jesus is the Messianic King, Matt provides Jesus' genealogical line/ancestry, proving that Jesus does indeed come from the lineage of King David.

That's called Davidic Covenant.

Additionally, Matthew also shows us that Jesus is connected to Abraham with the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant is about mankind's redemption that will come through Abraham's descendants.

And as we read every name in Matthew chapter one, about Jesus' ancestry—

We learned that each name was like Adobe in the code to a huge combination lock.

With each name, God revealed the truth about the identity of His Son.

So Matthew, starts off his amazing Gospel with the Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

And then <sup>he</sup> Matt taught us the Genesis of Jesus Christ—

Meaning how God's Son was physically born.

Matthew taught us that Mary had to be a virgin.

There is no other way for Jesus to be born as <sup>Cool</sup> ~~the Son of Man~~.

So Matthew enlightened us as to how and why the genealogical line must be broken from a human father for Jesus to be the Messianic King.

We also learned the importance of why the Holy Spirit *overshadowed* Mary.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit made it clear to us that God doesn't wink at sin.

Why? Like we do.

Because we, as humans, can't save ourselves from our sin or God's wrath on sin.

It's impossible.

When I walk into a bookstore, I always have to laugh as I pass by the "self-help" section to get the "religious" section—there're usually pretty close together.

I laugh because we got ourselves into this mess, and we can't get ourselves out.

It's one thing to teach yourself how to balance your checkbook, but there is no such thing as self-help for salvation.

We need Someone from outside to step in and save us from our sin.

And that's why Matthew goes to great pains to show us that Jesus did not come from a human father—He came from above.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "*you must be born again.*" (John 3:7)

Sin is why we must be born again.

Just as Jesus was physically born from above—we, too, must be spiritually born from above.

Well, that's a review and the big picture from Matthew's Gospel so far.

## INTRODUCTION:

As we take a closer look, <sup>we know</sup> Mary gave birth to God's son.

Joseph named Him Jesus, just as he was instructed.

And now God, in human physical form, is among mankind.

John's Gospel says, "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" (John 1:14)

Think about that, God's Word—the Bible—became a person.

So how does the world respond to God dwelling among us?

What about religious people who have The Word memorized?

What is the first thing people do when they find out that the Messianic King of all kings has arrived?









*to save their souls from eternal ~~torment~~ torment in a very real place called hell?*

*How does the response to this good news?*

Let's find out. 

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.\**

**SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:1-12 CSB**

-  **Matthew 2:1**—After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,
-  **Matthew 2:2**— saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."
-  **Matthew 2:3**— When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.
-  **Matthew 2:4**— So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.
-  **Matthew 2:5**— "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet:
-  **Matthew 2:6**— And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."
-  **Matthew 2:7**— Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared.
-  **Matthew 2:8**— He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."

**Matthew 2:9**— After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was.

**Matthew 2:10**— When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy.

**Matthew 2:11**— Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

**Matthew 2:12**— And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

### **PRAY:**

*I will speak of your decrees before kings  
and not be ashamed. (Psalm 119:46)*

### **EXEGESIS:**

**Matthew 2:1**—After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,

We have a lot of <sup>information</sup> facts beginning in verse one.

Let's start with Bethlehem— it is a tiny village about five miles outside of Jerusalem.

It means “house of bread.” *Beth* is “house,” *lehem* is “bread.”

It's so small, we would't call it a city.

Some theologians say the population of Bethlehem was around 400-500 people.

At that time

However minute this village was, it sure did have a lot going on in the OT.

It is where Jacob buried his wife, Rachel (Gen 35:19).

Bethlehem is also where Ruth and Naomi met Boaz (Ruth 1:22–2:6).

It was also the town where king David was born and raised. (Luke 2:4; 11)

So by the time Jesus was born, everybody recognized that Bethlehem was “the city of David” (Luke 2:4, 11).

**+** **Matthew 2:1**—... in the days of King Herod,

Matthew first gives us the location (Bethlehem), and now provides a timeframe.

Herod born 70 BC, Died 4 BC → ruled for 37 years

Herod or Herod the Great, as we know him— obviously is a humble man.

How can you not be overflowing with humility with a name like that?

Not only was Herod known as Great, but in 40 BC, at the age of 30, he convinced Mark Antony, Ceasar Augusts and the Roman senate to give him the title, “The king of the Jews.”

Filled w/ irony

Herod wan't even a Jew.

But, he was wealthy, a powerful politician, and an excellent administrator.

Herod He was also a ladies' man... married nine, possibility ten times—making Elizabeth Taylor jealous.

-15 children

Herod did some amazing things as king.

When Israel fell on hard times financially

~~During the days of financial hardships~~, Herod gave back some tax money so people could provide for their families.

There was a great famine in 25 B.C.

To help with this crisis, Herod melted down gold plates in <sup>his</sup> the palace to buy food for the poor.

On top of these charitable things, Herod was an incredible architect.

He built theaters and race tracks to entertain the people.

In 19 B.C. he began the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

But among those good qualities, Herod had a few problems.

1. Herod really liked Herod the Great—the king of the Jews. (He liked himself some Herod)—Big fan.
2. The Jews hated him.

Herod was intoxicated with power and yet intimidated by anyone who had just a hint more than himself.

Herod was also a bit neurotic when it came to protecting his power.

That's an understatement. Examps:

He had his favorite wife murdered.

He also murdered two of his brothers because he suspected everyone of treason.

He had his wife's brother, the acting High Priest, drowned.

Herod had some of his staff take the High Priest to go swimming.

It was a day at the beach so the High Priest thought, until the play turned into the fight of his life— as Herod's cronies drowned the poor guy.

Then, Herod paid for a funeral where he pretended to cry and weep.

Five days before Herod's death—~~about a year after Jesus was born~~—Herod had a third son executed.

On Herod's deathbed, he rounded up some of the VIPs of Jerusalem, had them arrested, and gave orders that when he died, they were to kill these VIP's.

Why? Because he knew that the city would not weep—He knew they would rejoice. *in his death*

And Herod wanted people to cry on the day that he died.

It's never a good life lived— when nobody shows up at your funeral—tragic.

**Matthew 2:1**—*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,*

**Wise men/Magi:** ~~We are not exactly sure who these men are.~~

Unfortunately, we have more theology <sup>that</sup> ~~then~~ comes from Christmas cards than our Bible when it comes to these men.

So let's slow down and learn about the Magi today.

We don't know how many there are.

We don't know their names or exactly where they're from.

Despite the famous Christmas carol that identifies the Magi <sup>says</sup> with the "orient," that's not necessarily true. *Ave from the*



BTW, after today's sermon, you may want to set up your nativity set for Christmas a little differently for next year.

The only thing we know about these Magi is what is said in verse one.

+ **Matthew 2:1**—wise men | from the east | arrived in Jerusalem,

That's it! That's all we know from NT Scripture.

But, does the OT say anything about Magi?

Yes, the book of Daniel says a lot about these men.

So let's look in our rear view mirror

Let me set this up.

King Nebuchadnezzar rules the Babylonian empire.

He goes to war with Israel and conquers them and takes a whole lot of Jews back to Babylon with their stuff.

But all is not lost for Israel - God is still present.

+ **Daniel 1:17**— God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

Mish-dy-el

+ **Daniel 1:20**— In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom.

That's a big verse

The magicians and mediums refer to a group of people known as the Magi.

People have claimed that we get English words *magic* and *magician*, from *Magi*.

That's not necessarily true either because at best it's a distortion and corruption of who the Magi truly were.

You can't translate Magi in English.

So Who Are these men? distinct  
History books tells us that the Magi were a pagan group of religious people from the east who are associated with the Medes.

The Medes are closely related to the Persians.

Maybe you've heard of the Medo-Persian empire with King Cyrus.

We also know that Magi practiced astronomy and astrology—and this is where the confusion of the words, "Magi/magic/magician" comes in. <sup>probably</sup>

All that to say this... these Magi that we read about in Daniel were still in Babylon during Jesus birth. <sup>living</sup>

In addition,  
The Magi are not just sorcerers and magicians.

They are government officials.

Think of these men as a pagan version of the Tribe of Levi.

The tribe of Levi administered to and guarded the tabernacle and Temple.

So just as the tribe of Levi are a priestly line, the Magi also come from a priestly line and functioned in the same way—but with pagan rituals. <sup>ASIMILAR</sup>

These men are powerful, smart, politicians.

And they rose up through the ranks of the Babylonian government.

We first see this with King Nebuchadnezzar. in Daniel chapter one

Pause, now we're going to take a serious detour to Daniel chapter 2.

So stay with me, because at the end of this detour, this passage from Matthew is going to make a whole lot more sense. *As to who these men are: why they came.*

**Daniel 2:1**—In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams that troubled him, and sleep deserted him.

**Daniel 2:2**—So the king gave orders to summon the magicians, mediums, sorcerers, and Chaldeans; to tell the king his dreams. When they came and stood before the king, *→ write Magi in your Bible.*

**Daniel 2:3**—he said to them, "I have had a dream and am anxious to understand it."

**Daniel 2:4**—The Chaldeans spoke to the king: "May the king live forever. Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

**Daniel 2:5**—The king replied to the Chaldeans, "My word is final: If you don't tell me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb, and your houses will be made a garbage dump.

**Daniel 2:6**—But if you make the dream and its interpretation known to me, you'll receive gifts, a reward, and great honor from me. So make the dream and its interpretation known to me."

**Daniel 2:7**—They answered a second time, "May the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will make known the interpretation."

**Daniel 2:8**—The king replied, "I know for certain you are trying to gain some time, because you see that my word is final.

**Daniel 2:9**—If you don't tell me the dream, there is one decree for you. You have conspired to tell me something false or fraudulent until the

situation changes. So tell me the dream and I will know you can give me its interpretation."

- snarky

+ **Daniel 2:10**—The Chaldeans answered the king, "No one on earth can make known what the king requests. Consequently, no king, however great and powerful, has ever asked anything like this of any magician, medium, or Chaldean. → write Magi in your Bible

+ **Daniel 2:11**—What the king is asking is so difficult that no one can make it known to him except the gods, whose dwelling is not with mortals."

+ **Daniel 2:12**—Because of this, the king became violently angry and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

↳ Magi

+ **Daniel 2:13**—The decree was issued that the wise men were to be executed, and they searched for Daniel and his friends, to execute them.

Magi

+ **Daniel 2:14**—Then Daniel responded with tact and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to execute the wise men of Babylon.

Magi

+ **Daniel 2:15**—He asked Arioch, the king's officer, "Why is the decree from the king so harsh?" Then Arioch explained the situation to Daniel.

+ **Daniel 2:16**—So Daniel went and asked the king to give him some time, so that he could give the king the interpretation.

+ **Daniel 2:17**—Then Daniel went to his house and told his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah about the matter,

Man-shy-el

Those are Jewish names. Babylonian names are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,

+ **Daniel 2:18**—urging them to ask the God of the heavens for mercy concerning this mystery, so Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of Babylon's wise men. *May*

*they are praying for their lives.*

So Daniel and his friends have a prayer meeting. God answered their prayer in verse 19..

+ **Daniel 2:19**—The mystery was then revealed to Daniel in a vision at night, and Daniel praised the God of the heavens

+ **Daniel 2:20**—and declared:  
May the name of God  
be praised forever and ever,  
for wisdom and power belong to him.

+ **Daniel 2:21**—He changes the times and seasons;  
he removes kings and establishes kings.  
He gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to those  
who have understanding.

+ **Daniel 2:22**—He reveals the deep and hidden things;  
he knows what is in the darkness,  
and light dwells with him.

+ **Daniel 2:23**—I offer thanks and praise to you,  
God of my ancestors,  
because you have given me *> wisdom is a gift from God.*  
wisdom and power.  
And now you have let me know  
what we asked of you,  
for you have let us know  
the king's mystery.

+ **Daniel 2:24**—Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had assigned to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He came and said to him, "Don't destroy the wise men of Babylon! Bring me before the king, and I will give him the interpretation." — Magi

+ **Daniel 2:25**—Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king and said to him, "I have found a man among the Judean exiles who can let the king know the interpretation."

+ **Daniel 2:26**—The king said in reply to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to tell me the dream I had and its interpretation?"

+ **Daniel 2:27**—Daniel answered the king, "No wise man, medium, magician, or diviner is able to make known to the king the mystery he asked about.

Those are all synonyms for the Magi.

+ **Daniel 2:28**—But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has let King Nebuchadnezzar know what will happen in the last days

Pause...  
So as we see here these wise men/Magi are so powerful that King Nebuchadnezzar knows them on a first name basis.

These men are advisors to the Kings in the East.

And that's where they got the name the Wise Men.

King Nebuchadnezzar is so impressed with Daniel, the king promotes him within the Babylonian kingdom.

Look at this...

**Daniel 4:9**— "Beltshazzar, head of the magicians, because I know that you have the spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery puzzles you..."

Look at what just happened.

King Nebuchadnezzar makes Daniel the chief Magi!

Now this is one historic and epic story in the history of the Babylonian Empire.

Even in Daniel's old age, people know him.

Fast forwarding to the "handwriting on the wall" incident with a new Babylonian king named Belshazzar. — He's freaking out.

**Daniel 5:11**— There is a man in your kingdom who has a spirit of the holy gods in him. In the days of your predecessor he was found to have insight, intelligence, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, mediums, Chaldeans, and diviners. = the Magi

So let's tie some of this together.

Daniel is one of King Nebuchadnezzar's right hand men.

Daniel is a Jew. He's also the leader of the Magi.

→ A pagan group of men who come from a priestly line - who are elite politicians

(And some people don't think God has a sense of humor.)

But watch this...because this is where it gets really fun.

Historians tell us that a Persian could only become king under two circumstances:

- 1) He mastered the scientific and religious discipline of the Magi.
- 2) He had to be approved of and crowned by the Magi.

**KEYPOINT:**

*Magi are king makers.*

I don't know about you, but that my friends, is some kind of crazy power.

Think about it, who has more authority—the king or the one who crowns the king?

BTW, if you know your church history, that issue <sup>of power</sup> divides the church...but that's another sermon for another day.

Now with that kind of royal power, imagine the influence that Daniel has on the Babylonian people.

The Babylonian Gentiles had to be heavily influenced by the Jews because of Daniel.

Not only that, Daniel and his three <sup>friends</sup> ~~buddies~~ are not the only Jews in Babylon.

There are hundreds of thousands of Jews ~~in Babylon~~. <sup>living there</sup>

Even after the Babylonian Exile, many, if not most Jews stayed in Babylon—

Not everyone left to go back home to Jerusalem when they could. (Ezra 1)

Some Jews would have been too old to go back home.

If you think it's tough to get your parents to the grocery store right down the street, try traveling 900 miles on foot with them.

The same is probably true for families with children.

How would you like to walk 900 miles back home with a toddler...or a teenager?

Some people were also sick or disabled.



Other Jews probably refused to go because they liked Babylon.

Many of them were born in Babylon, and they knew nothing else—they were comfortable where they were.

So all that to say, there are a lot of Jews living in Babylon.

**QUESTION:** Is it fair to say that the Babylonians also learned about the One True Living God, YHWH?

Is it fair to say that the Babylonians would be familiar with the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Messiah, also known as the King of the Jews.

Of course!

It's here in Babylon where there is God intersection between these wise men and verse one..

Magi in the OT,  
= Matthew's Gospel

So let's read our original text again.

**Matthew 2:1**—After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,

Does that change your view on verse one? And look what they ask...

**Matthew 2:1**—saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"

These are powerful politicians, who just happened to be king makers from the Medo-Persian Empire asking, about the King of the Jews.

And they're not talking about Herod The Great.

How do you think that's going to go over?

question is gonna fly w/ Herod? Who is the self proclaimed King of the Jews?

You'll have to come back next week.

**PREACH:**

It's a fascinating story so far, isn't it?

Let's pause and think about what took place.

Is your God big enough to ordain a Hebrew slave to rise up the ranks and rule a pagan group of king-makers called the Magi for the sole purpose of sending Gentile's to worship a baby named Jesus that just happens to be in a no-name town outside of Jerusalem?

Is your God that big?

Is your God that big to be doing something similar today?

Is it possible that your God is also ordaining world events to get the Church's attention today?

Is your God big enough to allow a pandemic to take place to shake His church to its very core.

Is He separating the wheat from the chaff and self proclaimed Christians from Disciples?

Is your God big enough to write history?

Next week, we're going to see how the city of Jerusalem was not ready for the question that these pagan Gentiles are asking. *King Makers Are Asking.*

We're also going to learn what that star truly is. Lastly we're going to see the heart of man revealed when people learn of Jesus' birth.

**PRAY:**

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