

Matthew 2:1-12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 12 They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child.

And when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them, until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Today is the Feast of Epiphany, so we will be taking a break from studying John's Gospel to look at Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 12 and the visit of the kings.

[1 : 47] This is a celebration of Jesus' revelation of his glory to the Gentiles. And themes of kingship are prominent throughout the chapter. Stars in heaven, the magi coming from the east, Herod the king in Jerusalem.

We can ask questions about what the star was. Many different suggestions have been presented. Maybe it's a comet. Maybe it's a planetary conjunction. Maybe it's a supernova or an ova.

And others have suggested that it's the Shekinah glory. That Shekinah glory reading is perhaps one with particular interest. As we see the magi led through the wilderness, they are led by some divine light to the location where God's presence is found.

And then that light rests upon the location of Christ. Maybe this is a reference to the Shekinah glory that eventually settled on the tabernacle and the temple.

They're led through the wilderness like Israel was led through the wilderness. There's an inverted exodus here. Whereas you have magi from the east, Gentiles, being led through the wilderness, you have a court and a king that are trying to kill baby boys later on.

[3 : 03] This is a pharaoh-like situation. But yet Herod is the king of the Jews. Here we have a contrast and an inversion. The magi are magicians.

The magicians were the opponents of Moses and Aaron. But now they are the ones that are coming to meet the newborn king. Magi and Daniel might be an association.

These are the court magicians that came under Daniel's rule and guidance. And so perhaps through Daniel and his influence, came to an understanding of the truth of the God of Israel.

And maybe had through that an understanding of the sign that the heavenly light that they saw represented. The magi might also make us think of the queen of Sheba.

The queen of Sheba came from afar to see Solomon's glory and to bring tribute and gifts to him. And there's a greater than Solomon here. One to whom the kings of the east come to hear his wisdom, to bring him gifts and tribute.

[4 : 05] In the Old Testament we see the king represented as one who will receive these gifts from foreign visitors. In the book of Psalms we have, May he have dominion from sea to sea and from river to the ends of the earth.

May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute. May the kings of Sheba and Sheba bring gifts.

May all kings fall down before him. All nations serve him. In Psalm 72. In Isaiah chapter 60. Arise, shine, for your light has come.

And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you.

And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around and see. They all gather together. They come to you. Your son shall come from afar and your daughter shall be carried on the hip.

[5 : 08] Then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill and exult. Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you. The wealth of the nation shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you.

The young camels of Midian and Ephah. All those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense. And shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you.

The rams of Nebiath shall minister to you. They shall come up with acceptance on my altar. And I will beautify my beautiful house. So here we see the riches of the nations coming to the newborn Christ.

He is the one who will be the true king of the Jews. The one who will displace Herod and all other false leaders. And we are reminded here in the prophecy of Micah and the reference back to 2 Samuel chapter 5 verse 2.

That he is the true David. The one who will shepherd Israel. The one who will rise up from Bethlehem. And he will lead his people. The gifts of the Magi present Jesus as the king.

[6 : 10] But also Jesus as the true bridegroom. He is given gifts that mark out who he is. That declare his true identity. Some questions to think about.

In 1 Kings chapter 14 we read of the character of Hadad the Edomite. How might he shed light upon the contrast and the conflict between Herod and Jesus?

Another question. What light might the story of Balaam and Balak in the book of Numbers shed upon this particular passage? What light might the story of Balaam and Balak in the book of Numbers shed upon this particular passage?