

Fools and Wise Men, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 2:1–3

Code: 2183

INTRODUCTION

The biblical story of the visit of the Wise Men at the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is recorded for us in Matthew 2. In our last lesson, we saw how ironic it was that the vast majority of Jewish people, who should have been looking for their Messiah, were unaware of the birth of Christ; whereas these Gentiles, who were not God's people at that time, did seek to acknowledge this King. Not only was Christ a King by virtue of His lineage from David, but also by virtue of the fact that there were those in the world who were official king-makers who recognized Him as such. In his first chapter, Matthew has shown us Jesus deserving royal honor. In his second chapter, he has shown us Jesus receiving honor as He is being recognized as "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16b) in some sense by these Persian king-makers. This event was a reinforcement of the kingliness of Christ and His right to reign.

As we examine the text in this lesson, I want you to see five acts in this incredible drama that is played out in chapter 2, each identified with a different word: arrival, agitation, acting, adoration, and avoidance. First of all, we come to...

I. THE ARRIVAL (vv. 1-2)

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, the king, behold, there came [Magi] from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him."

A. The Historical Setting Of The Society (v. 1)

You'll remember that magi is really an untranslatable word that has reference to a certain hereditary priestly tribe of people who apparently came from the Medes. Having through the years risen to a place of great prominence in the kingdoms of Babylon, Media, and Persia, they served as advisors to the rulers, and so the term became synonymous in many ways with being a wise man. Now, some time after the birth of Jesus, some God-fearing Magi arrived in Jerusalem.

Now there are two things we want to note in the very beginning in verse 1. The first is...

1. THE PLACE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH (v. 1a)

"...in Bethlehem of Judea..."
a. Its Location Bethlehem is a quiet little town, approximately five or six miles south of Jerusalem. It was once called "Ephrathah," and was so designated by the Old Testament prophet Micah. The name Bethlehem actually means "house of bread" (Heb. beth = "house"; lehem = "bread"). It was a fitting name for the place where the very Bread of Life was born (cf. Jn. 6:48). Sitting in a fertile countryside about twenty-five hundred feet high in altitude, this little village was very productive. It is saddled on a ridge between two higher summits, which makes it look as though it is set in an amphitheater. And because its buildings are for the most part constructed out of the gray limestone on which the town rests, it appears as if the buildings simply rise up out of the ground.
b. Its History Now the little town of Bethlehem has had a long and very interesting history. If you go all the way back to the book of Genesis, you will find that in Bethlehem Jacob buried Rachel, setting a marker by her grave (Gen. 35:19-20). We find also that when Ruth married Boaz, she lived in the town of Bethlehem (Ru. 4:11), from where she could see her homeland, Moab, across the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. But above all, the town of Bethlehem

was the home and city of the great king of Israel by the name of David. It is ever and always the city of David, as 1 Samuel indicates (16:1; 17:12; 20:6). In 2 Samuel 23:14-15, when David was a hunted fugitive, he longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem, his hometown. Though in later days Rehoboam fortified the town, it uniquely stands out as the city of David. And it was really there in that little village that the people of God had long expected their Messiah to be born, in accordance with the prophecy of Micah 5:2. They waited for David's greater Son, the Messiah, to come out of David's city. But when the time of His birth did arrive, few were even aware of it.c. Its SignificanceNow maybe Bethlehem's insignificance is fitting, so that whenever anybody thinks of Bethlehem, they only think of one thing--the birth of Jesus Christ. And that may be the reason God picked a very obscure place, yet one that was close enough to Jerusalem so that it could command the attention of the entire population when the King was born. This would have been true, had they been as sensitive to God as He would have wished.

2. THE TIME OF CHRIST'S BIRTH (v. 1b)

"...in the days of Herod, the king..."a. The Evidence of Christ's Birth dateThere is no doubt that some time had passed between the actual birth of Christ in chapter 1 and the arrival of the Wise Men in chapter 2. There would seem to be several months between Christ's birth and the death of Herod, which we know to have occurred sometime around the end of March or the beginning of April during a lunar eclipse in 4 B.C. This would make the birth of Jesus probably four to six months earlier. You may also note that verse 11a of Matthew 2 says, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child...." When the Wise Men found Him, Christ was no longer in the manger, but in a house. It is likely that Joseph and Mary had already been to the Temple to complete her forty-day period of purification with a sacrifice (which a Jewish lady who had given birth was required to offer), because had the Wise Men already arrived and presented their gifts, Joseph and Mary would have been able to purchase a greater sacrifice than the pair of turtledoves they gave, which is an indication of their relative poverty. So the Christ-child had grown at least a little bit by the time the Wise Men arrived.b. The Examination of Herod's Background1) His PositionAs for the king who was ruling at the time of Christ, much could be said. Let me just give you enough history so you'll get the picture. Herod was half Jew and half Idumaeon, being a partial descendant of the Edomites who lived southeast of Israel. He had made himself available to the Romans, who controlled the land of Judea. And as the son of Antipater, the procurator (governor) of Jerusalem and Judea, Herod had played up so much to the Romans that they appointed him as the tetrarch of Galilee in 47 B.C. It was a lesser position in significance, but nonetheless it was a position of honor among the Romans. Seven years later in 40 B.C. when the eastern Parthian Empire attacked Palestine, civil war broke out and Herod took a quick boat to Rome. Convincing the Senate that he was pro-Roman and that he was from that part of the world and therefore knew how to handle situations over there, the Romans made him the king of the Jews, giving him an army to bring Palestine under control. After three years, Herod was finally able to gain the authority that had been promised and truly became the king of the Jews, a title that he maintained until he died.2) His PanicDo you understand now why the question that the Magi asked in verse 2 ("Where is He that is born King of the Jews?") was enough to panic Herod? Herod had sought his position like a political plum, having traveled all the way to Rome to play his game before the Roman Senate and gain the military support necessary to make his newly acquired position a reality. So, when all of a sudden a thousand Persian troops accompanied some Persian king-makers into town who were asking, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?"--Herod became afraid. A little of the shock of this whole scene is indicated in verse 1: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, the king, behold, there came [Magi]...." It's not just, "There came Magi," but rather, "Can you believe this? There came Magi!" (or if you're Herod, "Yikes! Here come the Magi!"). It was completely unexpected and shocking for Magi to come from the east, asking where the King of the Jews had been born.c. The Expectancy of the People's BeliefsNow frankly, it shouldn't have been so shocking. If those Jewish

people had carefully analyzed the Old Testament, they no doubt would have had good indication that the time was right for the coming of the Messiah. Historians record for us that at that time, there was a strange expectation in the world for a coming king. The people in the east had it, which partly explains why the Magi came. People in many places were anticipating the arrival of a king, something even the Roman historians acknowledged:1) Suetonius wrote, "There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world." Writing during the second century A.D. about such things as Vespasian's conquering of Israel in A.D. 70, Suetonius looked back and said that the first century was a day when there was an expectation for men coming from Judea to rule the world. Consequently, people's eyes were focused upon that place.2) Tacitus, the famous Roman historian, tells of the same belief that "there was a firm persuasion...that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judaea were to acquire a universal empire."3) Josephus, in Wars of the Jews, said that the Jews had a belief that "about that time one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth."At a slightly later time, we find Tiridates, king of Armenia, visiting Nero at Rome with his Wise Men along with him, according to Suetonius. We find Magi in Athens sacrificing to the memory of Plato. At the same time Jesus was born, we find Augustus, the Roman Emperor, being hailed as the savior of the world. And we find the Roman poet Virgil writing about the golden age which had just dawned. The Romans were looking for a golden age--the east was coming to the west with their wise men, and there was a tremendous feeling that from someplace was going to come a great savior of the world, a great leader and ruler. I don't know where all that anticipation came from, but it's interesting that it all came at the same time. The time was ready. Maybe it was that they recognized the time was ripe for an unprecedented event, something Paul later wrote about to the Galatians: "But, when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). There was a sense in which time was full, and some people could feel it.

B. The Historic Seeking Of The Savior (v. 2)

Based upon information they had received from Daniel and other Jews who were now living in their land since the captivity, upon their own sense of faith in the true God who would fulfill His Word, and upon what they saw in the sky, the Magi came to Jerusalem. Though tradition says that there were three, we really don't know how many Magi came to Jerusalem, let alone what their names were. Such conclusions are pure speculation. But we do know that they had a reason for coming, as verse 2 shows. They repeatedly asked the Jews "Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star [Gk. aster] in the east, and are come to worship Him." As they kept asking this question, it must have shocked them a little bit every time they received a response of perplexity from everybody. They must have assumed that these Jews would have known about the birth of their King.

Now this verse may stimulate in your thinking two questions which need to be answered. The first one involves an explanation of...

1. THE GLORIOUS PRESENCE OF HIS STAR

What was the nature of the star? There are some people who believe that it was a genuine star. Some say it was Jupiter, because Jupiter is called the king of the planets, or, in accordance with Kepler's theory, that it was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the sign of the fish. Others say that it was just an erratic comet or lowly-hanging luminous body. Still others go so far as to say it was the star of destiny in the heart of mankind, which is a lot of drivel if ever I heard it. Do you want to know what I think it was? Let's look at Luke 2:8-9 to help answer a question you may have had since you were a little kid.a. The Symbol of God's Spiritual PresenceThe announcement of the birth to the shepherds, who were the first of Israel's believing remnant to recognize the birth, holds the key to the solution: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, an angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were very much afraid." Now what was it that was shining in the sky

which the shepherds saw? It was the glory of the Lord!1) In the Old TestamentIf you go back into the Old Testament and you study the concept of the glory of God, you will find that the glory of God is manifest as light. Over and over again, when God radiated His presence, He transformed it into ineffable light. While leading Israel through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21), and when dwelling over the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:38), the glory of God appeared during the daytime like a cloud of light, and during the night as a pillar of fire. When Moses went up into the mountain and said to God, "...show me Thy glory," God hid him in a rock and God showed him His glory manifest as light. In fact, the light of God's glory was so intense, that his face retained some of its brilliance even after he had come down the mountain to speak to the people (Ex. 33:18-23; 34:29). The glory of God is blazing light.2) In the New TestamentWhen Jesus showed who He was by revealing His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, He pulled back His flesh and the three disciples beheld His glory as bright light (Mt. 17:2). And when Jesus comes the second time out of heaven, He will come in blazing light (Mt. 24:30). Revelation says that God will turn out all the lights of heaven--all the stars will fall, the sun will go pitch black, and the moon will become like blood--and heaven will roll up like a scroll (6:12-14). Then, when it's pitch black, Christ will be revealed as blazing light, and people will cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the face of His glory (6:15-17). God's glory is manifest in the Scripture as light...a light so intense, that He told Moses that no one could look upon His face and live--he'd be consumed in it. It would be like standing ten feet from the sun. And I believe that it was the glory of the Lord that shone that night as it was descending to earth, marking the time when the glory of God came in the form of a man (Jn. 1:14). I believe that the glory of God is what the Wise Men actually saw.b. The Sign of God's SonThe chief Hebrew word in the Old Testament for star is the word kokab. It has a basic meaning which encompasses the idea of "to shine or to blaze forth." Though it can refer to a real star, it is sometimes used to speak of an angel, of men, or anything that has a blazing, shining appearance.1) Numbers 24:17a -- This verse uses the word prophetically in reference to the Messiah: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not near: there shall come a Star [kokab] out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel...." In other words, there will come the blazing forth of a shining One. I believe that the prophecy there of a star speaks of none other than the glory of God incarnate.2) Matthew 24:29-30a -- "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven...." In other words, whenever the Son of Man is about to show up, there will be a sign pointing to Him.Do you know what a sign is for? It serves to point you to something that you want to see. Likewise, the Son of Man has a sign, which is identified at the end of verse 30: "...they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Here is His kokab, His blazing forth. And although the Hebrew word is not used in the New Testament, the Greek word conveys the same idea. I believe that this sign of the Son of Man is nothing other than the Shekinah of God Himself--God revealing Himself in the ineffable light of His glory.3) Revelation 1:16 -- The Son of God shines as if He were the sun "in its strength." Somehow connected to Jesus Christ is this incredible blazing glory of God.Christ is essentially a spirit being, who now has a glorified body that He received from His resurrection. And there is a sign of blazing glory that accompanies Him: The sign that He showed to His disciples on the Mount and that He will manifest when He returns, is the very same sign as the one identified as a star at the first time He came. I think it was the sign of the Son of Man in heaven rather than a star, a conjunction of planets, or thoughts of human destiny rattling around in somebody's mystical mind. The sign of the Son of Man is the Shekinah of God revealed in blazing, dazzling light.4) Matthew 2:2 -- "...For we have seen His star [Gk. aster]...." The word translated "star" here, is used of other things than literal stars. It merely conveys the idea of something blazing forth or shining. The Magi saw an object shining while they were in the East that they associated with the birth of the King.5) Matthew 2:7 -- Herod wanted to know "what time the star appeared [from Gk. phaino = 'to light up']." In effect, Herod says, "When

did this particular shining forth light up?" That question is sort of a hint that this particular star was something that never existed before and was called into existence only because Jesus was coming.

2.THE GUIDING PURPOSE OF HIS STAR

So, I believe that this star was the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens. It was there at His First Coming just like it will be at His Second Coming. It was not some astral body, because the pseudoscience of astrology could never predict the Lord's coming. I doubt that the Magi concluded merely from their observation of the sky that the Messiah had been born. What they saw was something they had never seen before. Knowing that it had to be something unique, they tied it together with what the Old Testament had prophesied. No astronomical research gave them their direction; God revealed Himself. It was no different than the fire and the cloud in the Old Testament, which stood over the Holy of Holies. In a similar way, this brilliant manifestation went and stood over the house where Christ was born (Mt. 2:9). Now you tell me how a literal star could ever do that. It couldn't. That star was none other than the sign of the Son of Man. You say, "Well, if it was such a blazing magnificent glory of Christ's sign in the heavens, how come only the shepherds over there in the fields of Bethlehem saw it, and the Wise Men over in Persia, but nobody else? Now that's a fair question, and is the second question I asked regarding this star. How come God is so selective? You know that's nothing new for God. He can make everybody in the world blind to something if He wants to. Conversely, God is able to reveal what He wants to reveal just to those whom He wants to reveal it. And that's all I can say about it. To these shepherds and Magi He chose to reveal that manifestation of glory in such a way that they knew that it was connected with Jesus Christ's birth. Matthew doesn't give us all the details of how they saddled a Persian horse, and how many miles the trip was, and where they ate, and all of that, because this isn't the story of these people--it's the story of Jesus Christ. And they have a place in this story only insofar as it's related to Him. Isn't it incredible how God works things out when He wants to get things done? He gave these Magi, these God-fearing Gentile king-makers way off in Persia, His sign, and they not only knew that it was His sign, but also that they needed to go to Jerusalem. The emphasis of Matthew is so beautiful in verse 2, where he records the Wise Men saying, "...For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him." They knew that He was to be worshiped and that there was no other one as worthy as He. And amazingly, they had nothing to guide them but smatterings of Old Testament prophecies and their own science mingled with its superstitions, and yet they were true seekers of God. When the sign came, in spite of their misgivings and lack of a complete understanding, they enthusiastically embarked on a journey to seek a king for whom they had waited a long time. However, the Jewish hierarchy, with the Pentateuch and the prophecies in their hand, reading and studying them every day, were content to be totally indifferent to what was happening five miles away. It's here again that we see Matthew's constant condemnation toward the officials of Judaism, and his sensitivity to the fact that God was opening the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles. There are always hungry hearts somewhere yearning for a divine Savior, and willing to follow even a faint sign that might lead to His feet. It's exciting when you find somebody like those Wise Men, who came to Jerusalem with prepared and seeking hearts. So we have seen the arrival. Secondly, let's briefly consider the second scene, which we we call...

II. THE AGITATION (vv. 3-6)

"When Herod, the king, had heard these things [about the Magi seeking a king], he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

A. The Response Of Herod (v. 3a)

1. THE TENSION DESCRIBED

Now Herod knew very well that he was sitting on a powder keg. In the first place, he knew that the people of the city didn't like him or the Roman rule, wanting their own independence and autonomy. Consequently, he expected that they had intentions of overthrowing both him and Rome. He also knew that if the Persians got in on the act and built this huge confederacy headed by this individual

called the King of the Jews, then he would really be in trouble. To make matters worse, the Persians probably arrived with a thousand soldiers at a time when his own army was out of the country temporarily. With the eastern empire posing a constant threat to Rome as the conflict was continuing to foment, Herod knew that his job as well as his life were in the balance. And even though he was at least seventy years old by this time, he still wanted to hang on to every single thing he had struggled so hard to gain.

2. THE TROUBLE DEFINED

Herod was "troubled." That word, in the Greek, appears in the active voice and means "to be shaken up, stirred up, or agitated." He was panicky and upset. In fact, I can't think of a stronger word than this one in reference to this type of reaction. Matthew 14:26, where the very same word is used, illustrates the intensity of the term: "And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were [agitated]...." Because that miracle was really an abnormal thing, they were in a state of panic. Likewise, Herod was agitated with good reason, after all he was the king of the Jews, in his own mind. Having been given the title by Caesar Augustus, he had fought hard to keep it and maintain it, and now, all of a sudden, a new king had apparently arrived who was going to take his throne, and the king-makers were there to make sure He got it. Herod could just imagine this kind of rumor floating all over the city, about a new king of the Jews being crowned by the Persian king-makers. He could also imagine the stirring up of freedom riots among the fanatics and the zealots throughout the country. Realizing that he needed to take some radical steps, the depraved Herod plotted to protect his interests.

B. The Reaction To Herod (v. 3b)

1. THE CAUSE FOR FEAR SUMMARIZED

Frankly, Herod overstated his analysis of the Magi's impact on his subjects, because from Matthew's record it doesn't appear that the Jerusalem population was at all impressed by the Magi's questions. You don't see a mass of people scurrying down to Bethlehem. They didn't seem to get the picture. There didn't seem to be any stirring reaction, which is so hard for me to believe. It's shocking to think that a thousand troops coming into town with these famous king-makers from Persia asking a question like this, wouldn't have set the people into an uproar. Such a reaction was expressed by John, who said, "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (1:10-11). Compared to normal circumstances, such events should have dictated a high level of interest, but there was none. There was no "We shall overcome!" revolt fomenting in Jerusalem. There was no one shouting, "Let's get a new king and knock off Herod!" And I think the reason is that the people were more afraid of Herod than they were trusting in God. Matthew 2:3 says that "all Jerusalem" was troubled with Herod, but it was because they were afraid of what he might do. They had a lot to fear because they had learned by a long and sad experience that there were no limits to the wrath and vengeance of this maniac. They figured that if the Magi upset Herod, there was going to be a bloodbath, and they dreaded that possibility. Apart from the atrocities that he committed, Herod did accomplish some positive things. He was a very capable man, as is usually the case with diabolical people, who rise to this level. While a young governor in Galilee, he had tremendous victories over the bands of guerrillas in the area, bringing real peace there. He was very efficient in collecting taxes for Rome. A capable orator and a very subtle diplomat, history tells us that Herod was a very decisive leader in battle and could turn the tide of a battle from defeat to victory. He was the only ruler in the history of Palestine who ever succeeded in keeping peace and bringing order. In times of difficulty he even gave people back their tax money circle so that they would have enough. In fact, in 25 B.C. when there was a tremendous famine, he melted down the gold plates in the palace and gave the money to the poor. He had a great welfare program so that when people had trouble getting clothes, he imported clothes for them. So, he did do some things to endear himself to the people because he was a smart politician.

2. THE CAUSE FOR FEAR SPECIFIED

But he was also cruel, diabolical, and maniacal. He was hopelessly jealous and suspicious of everybody. He was threatened by everybody and everything so that he spent his entire life plotting the murders of people. Because he distrusted the Hasmoneans, who were descendants from the Maccabees that fought against the Greeks for Israel's freedom, Herod plotted to murder that entire family. When the Romans came in, he was afraid that these descendants of the Maccabees might similarly rebel against him, therefore, he conspired to kill them all so that none of them would have any hope of ever doing that to him. He even killed his own wife, Mariamne, as well as her mother, Alexandra; and because he was afraid that his two sons by Mariamne might take his throne, he slaughtered both of them. Then five days before his death, he ordered a third son executed. He had a lust for power, a suspicion of others, and insane eagerness to avenge himself that enslaved the man all the days of his life. The cruel and bloodthirsty character of this tyrant reached a climax when he knew he was about to die: Herod retired to Jericho, giving orders that a collection of the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem be made, who were arrested, falsely charged, and put in prison with instructions to slaughter them all at the moment of his death. The reason for this was that he knew no one would mourn when he died, and he was determined to have mourning in the city at his death. Now when these Magi rode into town saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?..." Matthew says that Herod was agitated. What disturbed him more than anything was a threat to his power, so he was really shaken. What a contrast between the peace in the hearts of the Magi, and the panic in the heart of Herod! And maybe it's because Herod, rather than being a wise man, was a fool. Dr. Gabelein clearly summarizes why Jerusalem and Herod were both troubled: "The great city with its magnificent religious institutions, its wonderful Herodian temple, then still in process of erection, its aristocratic priesthood and benevolent institutions, had no knowledge of that King; nay, they did not desire that King to come, they were self-satisfied. This foreshadows the whole story of the rejection of the King, the Lord from heaven, that there was not alone no room for Him in the inn, but there was likewise no room for Him among His own; they received Him not. Herod, the king, was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. He feared for his throne, which was not his. Jerusalem knew what Herod's fear meant--rebellion, bloodshed, and suffering." He's right. The reason everybody else was upset was that they knew the kind of man that Herod was...and they feared what would happen. And let me tell you, they had a right to fear because it wasn't long until Herod sent his soldiers to slaughter every single baby in the town of Bethlehem under two years of age just to make sure that he slaughtered this potential King. That's why Jerusalem was shook up.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Where is Bethlehem located in relation to Jerusalem? What is the possible twofold significance of its location?
2. When did Herod the Great die? In relation to this, when would Christ probably have been born? Why?
3. Briefly, how did Herod acquire the position of being the king of the Jews?
4. What were people in many places anticipating at this time according to ancient historians?
5. What verse of Paul's captures the appropriateness of the time for the arrival of the Messiah?
6. Why were the Magi probably shocked at the response of the people to their question?
7. What are some natural explanations for the star that the Wise Men saw? What is the supernatural explanation that connects it with what the shepherds saw in Luke 2:8-9?
8. In what ways was God's glorious presence manifested in the Old Testament? in the New Testament?
9. What can the sign of the Son of Man best be understood to be?
10. What does Herod's question about the appearing of the star imply about it?
11. Besides their observation of the sky, what else did the Magi no doubt use to conclude that the Messiah had been born?

12. What is an explanation for why only a select few were able to see such a magnificent sign as the shepherds and Wise Men saw?
13. Rather than getting involved in the details about the Wise Men, what does Matthew emphasize about them in 2:2?
14. Why would tension have been created when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem?
15. What is lacking in Matthew's record which shows that the Magi's questioning had very little impact upon the people of Jerusalem?
16. What reaction did the people of Jerusalem have? Why?
17. Briefly describe what made Herod's reputation both one of a capable and a diabolical ruler.

Pondering the Principles

1. It's easy to say that if we had been there in Jerusalem when the Wise Men arrived, we would have been excited about the possibility of the Messiah being born; but we probably would have been typically indifferent with the rest of the crowd, unless we were truth seekers acquainted with the Old Testament. But such a hypothetical statement like "If only I had been there, I would have believed," is of no value really. What does matter is the quality of our response now. Meditatively read through 1 Peter 1:3-9 several times as you evaluate the sincerity of your love for and the depth of your trust in the Savior you have never seen. Are you experiencing the joy mentioned in verse 8? What connection do you see to be between the joy, and the love and faith which precede it?
2. Who did the people of Jerusalem fear more, God or Herod? Consequently, who directed their lives? In Matthew 10:28, Jesus warned His disciples that when they faced opposition, they were not to fear what man could do to them, but rather what God would do to those who never responded to their proclamation of the gospel. Is your fear of world events and economic disaster greater than your reverential fear of God, so that temporal things are controlling your life rather than eternal things? Which fear would give you the greatest sense of freedom? Why? (cf. vv. 29-32)

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