

of Discipleship

December 19, 2021

Day 1: Matthew 2:2

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'

Bethlehem is called the ancestral home of David because it is the place where not only his family resided but where Samuel anointed David as king over God's people (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Though we have no idea where this house might be located in Bethlehem, the current Church of the Nativity is built over a series of caves that most likely served as lodging or stables. The exact time of year and date of Jesus' birth is not known. In 533 Dionysius Exiguus (Denis the Short) proposed to reckon years no longer from the foundation of Rome but from the birth of Jesus. He chose to call AD 1 - the beginning, however this was four years after Herod died. The best estimate is that Jesus was born in about 6 BCE.

Question: What was the reason for going first to Jerusalem?

Challenge: Think back on your journey of faith. Was there something like a star to guide you? It may not have been a star, but some sign that pointed you in the correct direction?

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Day 2: Matthew 2:3-6

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'

The response of Herod and the chiefs and scribes (they were startled) is akin to the response of the Sanhedrin at Jesus' trial. The Magi are following the astrological data and it leads them only so far toward their goal. It takes a review of the scripture to direct them further. It seems that the king (who ought to know) does not know the scripture. The king was not to be just an administrator but a spiritual leader as well. I heard a story of when President Regan was visiting an Eastern European county. A man from that country wanted to immigrate to America after the President left because he heard him pray in public. The immigrant said, "I want to live in a county where the leader prays in public."

Question: Do a little research - what was the population of Bethlehem in the time of the birth and what were they known for?

Challenge: How does the expression 'ruler and shepherd' go together in your mind?

Scripture: Micah 5:2-5a

Day 3: Matthew 2:7-8

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'

The Gentile world is coming to Jesus (in the form of the Magi) to pay Him homage. Herod is not planning on paying homage to the child. Herod was planning to kill him. At Jesus' very birth we see that both religious and secular authorities have been afraid of Him and have sought to silence Him. John, in Revelation, tells us that the religious and secular authorities will try to silence, through persecution, the Christians he is writing to.

Question: How many wise men came to see Herod?

Challenge: The Magi somehow thought that Herod might be lying to them. How do you tell if a leader is lying to you?

Scripture: 1 John 4

Day 4: Matthew 2:9-10

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Given the size of Bethlehem there may have been up to 20 young children. The Magi did not know how old the child might be but with the guidance of the scripture and their belief, the Magi were able to see hope when they came to it. Our willingness to follow God's lead will help us to recognize hope when we see it.

Question: How old do you think Jesus was when the Magi came?

Challenge: When was the last time you were overwhelmed by joy? What was the event?

Scripture: Psalm 67:1-7

Day 5: Matthew 2:11

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Magi offered gifts that represented something precious (gold), something to make life more pleasant (frankincense) and something practical (myrrh). Today we can give royal gifts to those we love by giving something that is precious (our love), something that makes their life easier (our being with them in times of trouble), and something practical (clothes, shelter or food). The gifts given to Jesus were nice but more importantly they were given to say something about the nature of the one receiving the gifts. Can we give gifts today that not only say I love you but say how important that other person is to the world around us? Can we give a gift that says "if you were not born the world would be a lesser place"?

Question: Where was Joseph?

Challenge: Think of one gift that would be precious, practical and fun.

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-7

Day 6: Matthew 2:12

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Magi had learned from the Jewish scriptures God's plan of salvation - the Messiah. It is a paradox that those who had the scriptures were not willing to worship the new born king yet the outsiders looking for hope are willing and eager to worship the one God sent. We today who know the scripture must be on guard so that we do not make Jesus into our image but rather be transformed by the babe of Bethlehem into His image.

Question: How did Herod respond to the Magi not telling him where the child was to be found?

Challenge: How have you in the past made Jesus into your image?

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-23