

Visit of the Magi (2 BC)

Matthew 2:1–12

- 1 Now *after* Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,
- 2 saying, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”
- 3 And *when* King Herod heard *it*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him,
- 4 and *after* calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired from them where the Christ was to be born.
- 5 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet,
- 6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,
for from you will go out a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’” [[Mic 5:2](#)]
- 7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men *and* determined precisely from them the time *when* the star appeared.
- 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem *and* said, “Go, inquire carefully concerning the child, and when you have found *him*, report to me so that I also may come *and* worship him.”
- 9 *After* they listened to the king, they went out, and behold, the star which they had seen at its rising led them until it came *and* stood above *the place* where the child was.
- 10 Now *when they* saw the star, they rejoiced *with* very great joy.
- 11 And *when they* came into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down *and* worshiped him. And opening their treasure boxes, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.
- 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their *own* country by another route.

Flight to Egypt / Massacre of the Innocents (2 BC)

Matthew 2:13–18

- 13 Now *after* they had gone away, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, saying, “Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to seek the child to destroy him.”
- 14 So he got up *and* took the child and his mother during the night and went away to Egypt.
- 15 And he was there until the death of Herod, in order that what was said by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled, saying,
- “Out of Egypt I called my son.” [[Hos 11:1](#)]
- 16 Then Herod, *when he* saw that he had been deceived by the wise men, became very angry, and he sent *soldiers and* executed all the children in Bethlehem and in all the region *around* it from *the age of* two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined precisely from the wise men.
- 17 Then what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled, saying,
- 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping *for* her children,
and she did not want to be comforted,
because they exist no longer.” [[Jer 31:15](#)]

Chronological Notes

1) Visit of the Magi.

- A) It seems unlikely that Joseph and Mary would have returned to Nazareth immediately after Jesus' birth, only to return to Jerusalem a month and a half later. The more likely scenario would be for them to have stayed with relatives in Bethlehem until the forty day purification period was completed (cf. Lev 12). However, the question remains: did the magi visit them before or after Jesus' presentation at the temple? The answer is found in Luke 2:28 where it records that Joseph and Mary offered "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" — the offering prescribed for those who were poor (Lev 12:8). Had the Magi visited them before the presentation at the temple, Joseph and Mary, who were careful to observe the Law, could have afforded the more costly offering of a sheep (cf. Matt 2:11—the gift of "gold").¹ Thus we conclude that the Magi's visit to Bethlehem occurred just after Jesus' presentation at the temple.
- B) What of the star which the Magi reported seeing prior to their journey to Jerusalem? There have been many proposals which attempt to explain the astronomical phenomenon described by the Magi.² However, there is not enough data in Matthew's account to determine definitively which proposal is correct. "At most we can say that the star could have appeared as early as 4 BC, no more than two years before Jesus' birth."³

¹ Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 252–253.

² See the extensive discussion in Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 306–320.

³ Steinmann, 249–251.