

Visit of the Magi (2 BC)

Matthew 2:1–12

- 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the time of King Herod, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem
- 2 saying, “Where is the one who is born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”
- 3 When King Herod heard this he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him.
- 4 After assembling all the chief priests and experts in the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.
- 5 “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they said, “for it is written this way by the prophet:
- 6 *‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are in no way least among the rulers of Judah,
for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’*” [[Mic 5:2](#)]
- 7 Then Herod privately summoned the wise men and determined from them when the star had appeared.
- 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and look carefully for the child. When you find him, inform me so that I can go and worship him as well.”
- 9 After listening to the king they left, and once again the star they saw when it rose led them until it stopped above the place where the child was.
- 10 When they saw the star they shouted joyfully.
- 11 As they came into the house and saw the child with Mary his mother, they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their treasure boxes and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
- 12 After being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back by another route to their own country.

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

Matthew 2:13–18

- 13 After they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to look for the child to kill him.”
- 14 Then he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and went to Egypt.
- 15 He stayed there until Herod died. In this way what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled: “*I called my Son out of Egypt.*” [[Hos 11:1](#)]
- 16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he became enraged. He sent men to kill all the children in Bethlehem and throughout the surrounding region from the age of two and under, according to the time he had learned from the wise men.
- 17 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:
- 18 *“A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud wailing,
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she did not want to be comforted, because they were gone.”* [[Jer 31:15](#)]

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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.