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~ **Strange Visitors from the East** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Matthew 2.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story.**

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Matthew 2 NASB	Matthew 2 ERV
<p>Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” <sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard <i>this</i>, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:</p> <p><sup>6</sup> ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”</p> <p><sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup>And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found <i>Him</i>, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.” <sup>9</sup>After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over <i>the place</i> where the Child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup>After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned <i>by God</i> in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.</p> <p><b>The Flight to Egypt</b></p> <p><sup>13</sup> Now when they had gone, behold, 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 remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.”</p> <p><sup>14</sup> So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it</p>	<p>Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. After Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>They asked people, “Where is the child who has been born to be the king of the Jews? We saw the star that shows he was born. We saw it rise in the sky in the east and have come to worship him.”</p> <p><sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard about this, it upset him as well as everyone else in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>Herod called a meeting of all the leading Jewish priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah would be born. <sup>5</sup>They answered, “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea, just as the prophet wrote:</p> <p><sup>6</sup> ‘Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are important among the rulers of Judah. Yes, a ruler will come from you, and that ruler will lead Israel, my people.’”</p> <p><sup>7</sup>Then Herod had a private meeting with the wise men from the east. He learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem. He said, “Go and look carefully for the child. When you find him, come tell me. Then I can go worship him too.”</p> <p><sup>9</sup>After the wise men heard the king, they left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east, and they followed it. The star went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>They were very happy and excited to see the star.</p> <p><sup>11</sup>The wise men came to the house where the child was with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened the boxes of gifts they had brought for him. They gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went home to their own country a different way.</p>

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was still night, and left for Egypt.<sup>15</sup> He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

## **Herod Slaughters Babies**

<sup>16</sup> Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> “A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,  
WEeping AND GREAT MOURNING,  
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;  
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,  
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”

<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord \*appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, <sup>20</sup> “Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.” <sup>21</sup> So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned *by God* in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, <sup>23</sup> and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

## **Jesus’ Parents Take Him to Egypt**

<sup>13</sup> After the wise men left, an angel from the Lord came to Joseph in a dream. The angel said, “Get up! Take the child with his mother and escape to Egypt. Herod wants to kill the child and will soon start looking for him. Stay in Egypt until I tell you to come back.”

<sup>14</sup> So Joseph got ready and left for Egypt with the child and the mother. They left during the night. <sup>15</sup> Joseph stayed in Egypt until Herod died. This gave full meaning to what the Lord said through the prophet: “I called my son to come out of Egypt.”

## **Herod Kills the Baby Boys in Bethlehem**

<sup>16</sup> Herod saw that the wise men had fooled him, and he was very angry. So he gave an order to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and the whole area around Bethlehem. Herod had learned from the wise men the time the baby was born. It was now two years from that time. So he said to kill all the boys who were two years old and younger. <sup>17</sup> This gave full meaning to what God said through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> “A sound was heard in Ramah—  
bitter crying and great sadness.  
Rachel cries for her children,  
and she cannot be comforted,  
because her children are gone.”

## **Joseph and Mary Return From Egypt**

<sup>19</sup> While Joseph was in Egypt, Herod died. An angel from the Lord came to Joseph in a dream <sup>20</sup> and said, “Get up! Take the child with his mother and go to Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are now dead.”

<sup>21</sup> So Joseph took the child and the mother and went to Israel. <sup>22</sup> But he heard that Archelaus was now king in Judea. Archelaus became king when his father Herod died. So Joseph was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he went away to the area of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> He went to a town called Nazareth and lived there. This gave full meaning to what God said through the prophets. God said the Messiah would be called a Nazarene.

## **2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.**

- The magi were priests and men of learning and wisdom who studied science, the stars, and religion. They came from Persia, Babylon, or Arabia and were influenced by the Jewish communities in those parts of the world.
- Herod’s desire to kill young male children from two years old and downward fits well with what we know of his character as a ruler. He killed his own sons in order to preserve his power.

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- Joseph and Mary were afraid to enter back into the land because of Archelaus. He was like his father Herod and upon receiving the throne after Herod's death, he killed 3000 Jews during Passover.

*These insights were gleaned from The Words and Works of Jesus Christ by J.Dwight Pentecost.*

**Answer these reflective questions.**

**The prophecy in Micah was that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. We know he must be born there because that is where David was born, but is there something else about Bethlehem that shows why God chose that village?**

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**The story tells us of the grief and sorrow from the murder of the young infants in Bethlehem. How do you think God felt over those deaths? How does he feel about the injustices that are practiced today in different parts of the world against the young and the weak?**

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**Jesus was born in Bethlehem not far from where Herod reigned in one of his palaces. Then the family had to flee for their lives from Herod and then they were in danger from Archelaus. What does this say about the character of God, that he would enter the world in such a dangerous place and in danger from evil rulers at that time? How does God feel about evil rulers today?**

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