

Christ's Early Childhood continued
Matthew 2:1—23

The Magi were renown for the ability as astrologers. They go back to Daniel's time when he was brought to Babylon around 600 B.C. It was Daniel (through the Holy Spirit) who wrote the absolutely accurate timeline for Israel's history up to Christ's death and the Tribulation. Since he was ruling over Babylon and was in charge of the Wise Men (Magi) at that time it only makes sense that his book remained in the royal or Magi library. The Magi down through the years certainly would have studied the book of Daniel and been able to see how accurate it was in listing the rise and fall of the various kingdoms. From Daniel 9 they would have known that a King was to come on the scene at a certain point in time and they would have been looking for a sign of His coming.

Daniel 2:48 Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

This sign did indeed appear. I believe it was the same sign that the shepherds saw while out in the fields when the sky lit up with God's Shekinah glory. I believe this phenomenon was visible almost 500 miles to the east and to the Magi was seen as a star low on the horizon. Without refraction an object would need to be about 27 miles high for them to see it but because of atmosphere and temperature differences an object could be seen that was much lower in the sky. It's even possible for light rays to be refracted to match the curvature of the earth so that theoretically it would be possible to look to the horizon and see the back of your head. In other words, the light from the Shekinah glory would not need to be very high to be seen by the Magi some 500 miles to the east.

Verses 2 and 9 seem to indicate that the star was in the east when seen by the Magi. I believe what it is actually saying is that the star was in the west and the Magi were east in relation to the star.

Timing of the Magi's Visit

Although the Magi are often portrayed to be with Jesus lying in the manger with the shepherds and sheep surrounding them we know that this could not be. Luke 2:16 says the shepherds were with the baby. This word (Greek: βρέφος) always indicates an infant or baby, even an unborn baby as in the case of Elizabeth in Luke 1:44. The Magi came into the house and found a child (Greek: παιδίον). Usually interpreted as young child or little child. Jesus had gotten beyond the baby stage and was now a little child. The family also moved from a place where animals were kept (because there was a manger or feeding trough at that location—see Luke 2:7) to a house in Matthew 2:11. This probably occurred after Mary's lawful time of purification was complete. After her purification Luke 2:22 says they went back to their own city, Nazareth. For a male child the woman was to remain in her house for seven days and then on the eighth day bring the baby to the Temple to be circumcised. The woman was then to stay home for 33 additional days after which time she was declared pure (Leviticus 12).

Since they left 40 days after Jesus was born and they probably had to travel a total of about 950 miles to stay on the main thoroughfare, in order for the Magi to visit them at the stable they would need to travel about 25 miles per day to get there just before Joseph and Mary left for Nazareth. Since the Magi were probably traveling as part of a large caravan, this would be highly unlikely to happen. Imagine walking from Minneapolis to the Black Hills in a little more than a month. Since they could not have arrived before Joseph and Mary left for Nazareth and since King Herod killed all children two and under the assumption can be made that they arrived sometime between two months and two years of Jesus' birth. My guess is that they came around one year after Jesus was born and King Herod killed children up to two years old just to make sure he destroyed the one who is to be Israel's King. If this were the case then John (the Baptist) would have been in danger also.

Reaction to the News

Scripture records two different reactions to the news that the King of the Jews was born. We see the shepherds hurried to see this Baby and went away glorifying and praising God (Luke 2:20). Likewise, the Magi were looking for the long-promised King to come. When they saw His sign in the sky they desired to worship Him (Matthew 2:2, 11). In contrast we see King Herod troubled by the news that the King of the Jews was born. His one desire was to destroy this King and keep himself in power. Surprisingly, Jerusalem was also troubled by this news of a King (Matthew 2:3). The reference to all Jerusalem being troubled could mean that because King Herod was troubled that Jerusalem was afraid of what he might do. I believe it was all the leadership in Jerusalem who were troubled because having their King come on the scene would upset the status quo. Those in the Sanhedrin (Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes) wanted to retain their power over the people. We see this in our own political system where those in power want to be served by the people instead of serving the people.

Slaughter of the Innocents

The account of King Herod killing all the male children up to two years old is sometimes called the slaughter (or massacre) of the innocents. We find this only in Matthew. King Herod was so enraged when the Magi did not come back to report on the whereabouts of the Child King that he murdered all the baby boys in the area of Bethlehem. This is reminiscent of God taking the life of the first-born Egyptians in the tenth plague. This satanic-inspired hatred was Satan's attempt to upset God's plan of redemption.

Israel is called God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22). Satan has been trying to exterminate Israel just as he tried to kill off God's Son.

Flight to Egypt

Right after the Magi left Joseph had a dream with an angel of the Lord telling him to leave immediately for Egypt because King Herod was going to be killing the infants. This was in fulfillment of Scripture, which compares Israel coming out of Egypt with Jesus Christ coming out of Egypt.

Numbers 24:8—9 ⁸ "God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations *who are* his adversaries, And will crush their bones in pieces, And shatter *them* with his arrows. ⁹ "He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, And cursed is everyone who curses you."

Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.

After King Herod's death an angel of the Lord again appeared to Joseph and told him to go back home. They went back to Nazareth and lived there probably until Jesus' public ministry. This was also in fulfillment of Scripture that said: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

The problem with this last prophecy is that there is no specific Scripture that says Jesus will be called a Nazarene. Some may think that this prophecy was uttered by a prophet of God but did not become a part of Scripture. Notice, however, that the prophets (plural) said He would be called a Nazarene pointing to a generalization of the idea of being a Nazarene. There is no specific quote but the idea is throughout the prophets. Being a Nazarene had a negative connotation. The question asked by Nathanael when he heard that Jesus was from Nazareth is: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) The label of Nazarene was used in a derogatory sense used to put someone down. We sometimes do this in a lighthearted manner when we compare people in our own state with those of a bordering state.

The general idea of being despised comes through when someone is called a Nazarene. Calling Jesus a Nazarene indicates that He will be despised and rejected, a person given no respect. (Psalm 22:6—8; 69:20—21; Isaiah 49:7; 53:2—3)

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