

3.

Jesus Was Recognized as King of the Jews

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of being willing to accept shame for the name of Jesus. In this topic, we are going to see how God chose to announce the birth of Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders and Herod, the Roman ruler.

Sometime after Jesus was born, a group of men arrived in the city of Jerusalem looking for the new king. Matthew 2:1-4 says, “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, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.” Here, we see that the arrival of this group of men caused the whole city of Jerusalem to be troubled.

Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. However, the Old Testament had predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem because it was the city of David. We see that God allowed the Roman emperor to require his entire empire to register for taxes so that Mary and Joseph would be in the right place at the right time for that birth to happen. Luke 2:1-5 says, “And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.” This meant that Mary and Joseph had to travel about 80 miles, probably by foot or donkey, at a time when Mary was expecting the birth of Jesus any day.

At least forty days and probably several months after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, these men from the east arrived in the city of Jerusalem. The reason it had to be at least forty days is due to the fact that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. Luke 2:22-24 says, “Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD’), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.’” Leviticus 12:1-4 tells us that the days of purification for a woman who had a male child were a total of 40 days.

These men from the East were men who studied the stars. In Jerusalem, they kept asking people about a baby that would be a King until they were finally sent to Herod. The men told Herod that they had come to worship this baby. Immediately, Herod was very troubled. The word “troubled” means *to take away the calmness of mind or to fill the spirit with fear and dread*. Herod was troubled because he was the ruler appointed by the Romans and he was continually afraid that someone might take away his power and control. The rest of the people of Jerusalem were filled with fear because Herod was willing to kill others whenever he was upset or thought that his power was threatened. This is illustrated in Matthew 2:16 which says, “Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.” As a result, everyone in Jerusalem was troubled by these

visitors.

Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes together and demanded of them where the Christ was to be born. Matthew 2:5-6 says, “So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.”””

The chief priests and scribes answered the question of Herod by quoting Micah 5:2. That verse says, ““But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth *are* from of old, from everlasting.”” Here, we see that the chief priests and scribes knew the verse so that they could tell Herod where the Messiah would be born. At the same time, they showed their unbelief because they refused to recognize that He is from eternity because He is God. Here, we have an example of the fact that people can know the facts of the Bible but not believe and receive Christ as the One who came to give them life. That rejection will result in eternal judgment for them.

In contrast, there were people in Jerusalem who had already heard that Jesus was born and were rejoicing. Prior to the arrival of these men from the east at Jerusalem, Luke 2:25-38 tells us that Jesus had been presented to the Lord at the temple when He was 40 days old. Two of the people who saw Jesus at that time were Simeon and Anna. Luke 2:38 tells us that Anna had been telling others about the birth of Jesus. That verse says, “And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” “Redemption” means *to buy us back from sin, to remove us from further sale and to set us free*. Anna had served at the temple for many years. She knew the people who came to the temple that were looking for the Messiah to come and pay the penalty for their sin and redeem them. As a result, she had been telling all the people that looked for the Messiah the good news that the Messiah had come.

By quoting Micah 5:2, the religious leaders also told Herod what kind of a leader Jesus would be for Israel. The religious leaders said, “For out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.” Ezekiel had warned the religious leaders of Israel in Ezekiel 34:8, ““*As I live,*” says the Lord GOD, ‘surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because *there was* no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock.’” That is why Jesus came to be the True Shepherd both to the Jews and also the Gentiles. The religious leaders of Israel were only feeding themselves.

We go on to read in Matthew 2:7-12, “Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.’ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.” Herod feared anyone who might take his power and so he called the men from the east secretly during the night and told them to go to Bethlehem and find the baby. Then, he said to come and tell him, saying he wanted to worship Him also. However, he really planned to kill Jesus.

When the men came out of the palace that night, they saw the Star that they had earlier seen in the East. This was not a regular star. It was probably similar to the light that led Israel at night in the wilderness. Exodus

13:21 says, “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.” This night, God caused His glory to appear like a star that was so low that it could lead the men from the East to the particular house just as the pillar of fire had stood over the tabernacle in the wilderness at night.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus were no longer in the stable of Luke 2 when the wise men arrived. Instead, they were now in a house because Jesus was a young child and no longer a newborn baby. The men from the East were filled with joy when that light led them to the very house where Mary, Joseph and Jesus were now living. These men came into the house and fell down and worshiped Jesus. They also gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gold gave Mary and Joseph money to travel as they had to flee to Egypt to escape before Herod could kill Jesus. The frankincense and myrrh could later be sold to supply their needs while they were in Egypt.

Bethlehem was less than five miles from Jerusalem. God gave some of the men from the East that night a dream to warn them not to return to Herod. As a result, they left to return to their own country by a different route. Here, we see that God helped the wise men to understand that Herod had no intention to worship Jesus. Instead, this was just an attempt of Satan to try and destroy Jesus through the evil plan of Herod. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of letting the Lord guide them so that they will carry out the work of the Lord and not be deceived by the tricks of Satan when he works through others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to grow in wisdom and understanding.