

Ancient Prophecy & Mysterious Sign

#2 in a series on – Advent2010

Matthew 2:1-12, Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:4 [NIV-2010]

Last week I posed the question,

“Could we have Christ and the Church without the Christmas event?”

YES, certainly.

Only Luke mentions it... except for an indirect reference by Matthew.

Today I want to look at HOW Matthew did, in fact, begin his story of the incredible “GOOD NEWS” that came to the world in the person of Jesus.

Matthew’s gospel consistently connects the ancient Jewish prophecies and contemporary mysterious signs with many of the teachings and amazing powers of Jesus.

Matthew’s first section is a genealogy... something that is meaningless to us. But it tells a great deal about the audience for whom he was writing... Jews most likely. THEY would have paid great attention to those details.

Matthew’s point is....

Jesus COULD BE the long-promised and much anticipated Jewish Messiah who was to be descended from King David.

The genealogy was a big deal to those people.

It was not conclusive proof that Jesus WAS the Messiah. But it DID establish that he COULD BE the Messiah.

So where does Matthew go from there... to Joseph’s mysterious visit with an angel in a dream.

Some people dismiss dreams as fanciful or pointless.

Since Freud, many professionals make a living trying to decipher them and help people live their lives thereby.

Joseph – he took it as a clear indication of what he must do.

Joseph accepted the unwanted attention and unmerited gossip about Mary and continued the betrothal. But they did not have conjugal relations until after Jesus’s birth. Matt 1:25.

So what is the next event that Matthew tells... it is the coming of the ‘wise men’ or ‘magi’ (3 kings – the # is not mentioned by Matthew but that is the inference from the 3 gifts they brought.)

Magi were probably highly placed people in various places in the Roman Empire (mostly in the Eastern regions) who used astrology and other means of insight to predict some things and to recognize important signs of the times. Our word magic comes from it and signifies the ability to create illusions... but in that day it had a better meaning and lots of people put a lot of stock in it.

That is the point Matthew is making... these wise ones or specially enabled and informed people saw some mysterious sign in the heavens and it led them to Jerusalem seeking the birth of a new king and not just any ordinary prince’s birth, one who would one day become a king.

Clearly they did not have full knowledge of what had taken place because they went to the current king, ‘Herod the Great’, also called ‘king of the Jews’ and who wanted HIS son to also be known that way.

THIS is the man they went to for further directions.

The Romans were not choosy about the character of the local potentate whom they allowed to be king and have substantial rule over a region.

This Herod was one of the really nasty ones.

Executing people who opposed his rule presented no problems to him.

Thus, his jealousy readily was expressed in a cruel way...
just kill any baby boy or toddler up to 2 years old who lives
any where near Bethlehem.

So God intervened by giving a stark and realistic dream to
Joseph warning him.
Give great credit to Joseph for – once again – paying heed to
a dream.

They left in a hurry.

And now, thanks to the gifts of the magi, they had the
means to flee to Egypt, well outside the reach of Herod.

Only AFTER Herod died, about 4BC, did Joseph dare return.
But... the SON of Herod, similarly nasty as his father but not
as accomplished a ruler or politician, now was given charge
of that region by the Romans.

Instead, another son's region in Galilee was safer, so Joseph
went to Nazareth...

Nazareth was a very out-of-the way place, nobody would look
for a king-to-be there.

From that point, Matthew jumps to John the Baptist as the
introduction to the adult years of Jesus.

This was the same progression that Mark used.

The GOSPEL is about the ministry of Jesus...

HIS teaching

HIS life

HIS power

HIS truth

HIS death, burial, and resurrection.

THAT is what every Christian believed and it is what Paul
specifically passed along at every opportunity.

I Corinthians 15:3-8 – I passed on to you what was most important and
what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as
the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the
dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by
Peter[c] and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more

than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive,
though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all
the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong
time, I also saw him.

Luke, no less than the others affirms the same.

But he, alone, begins with a different perspective...

the more human side of things...

– OR – the feminine side of things...

It is also what the Apostle John affirms – the GOSPEL is Jesus
and Jesus is GOD.

And the Christmas carol, "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"
affirms this Jesus, who came as a baby to Bethlehem
will call us who believe in HIM to dwell in HIS HOME.

v. 3-4 is your invitation to join that band

or if you have already made that commitment,

every year at Christmas, when we sing the wonderful
carols, we get to reaffirm that . . .

JESUS IS THE ONLY ONE SENT FROM GOD
JESUS IS MY LORD.

It is true, he is also my Savior...

but more importantly, HE IS LORD...

AND I HAVE GIVEN MYSELF TO HIM.

Matthew 2:1-12 [NLT]

Visitors From the East

- 1 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod.
[*cf. section below on the Herod Family*]
About that time some wise men [*magi* - royal astrologers] from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, 2 “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, [*or -- in the East*] and we have come to worship him.”
- 3 King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. 4 He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”
- 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: 6 ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’ ” [*cf. Micah 5:2, 2 Samuel 5:2*”
- 7 Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. 8 Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”
- 9 After this interview the wise men [*magi*] went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! 11 They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
- 12 When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

- 13 After the wise men [*magi*] were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his

mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

- 14 That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, 15 and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.” [*cf. Hosea 11:1*]
- 16 Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men [*magi*] had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. 17 Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:
- 18 “A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.” [*Jeremiah 31:15*]

The Return to Nazareth

- 19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. 20 “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”
- 21 So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. 22 But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. 23 So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

The Lives of the Herod Family Intertwine with the Life of Jesus and the Lives of His Apostles

www.sundayschoollessons.com/herod.htm

Herod Antipater, the father of Herod the Great, is not mentioned in the New Testament, but ten of his descendants played major roles in the lives of Jesus and of the apostles.

The Herod family were Idumeans (*i.e., Edomites – the region south of Israel.*) That is, they were descended from Abraham through Isaac and Esau, rather than through Isaac and Jacob. They saw themselves as Jewish, participating in God's covenant with Abraham, but their ancestors had not gone to Egypt with Joseph and returned with Moses and Joshua.

Herod Antipater formally converted to the Jewish religious practice of the descendants of Jacob. His family would not allow their portraits (graven images) on the coins they issued, they did not eat pork as they followed the Jewish dietary laws, and the women of the family were not allowed to marry men who were uncircumcised.

But the family also followed Roman social practices. They traveled to Rome frequently and commissioned buildings in the Roman style of architecture. Herod the Great sent his sons to live in the household of Octavian (Caesar Augustus) in Rome while they received their formal educations.

Members of the family sponsored athletic games in the Greek style, which were offensive to the Jews. And they also arranged marriages between uncles and nieces in the Roman fashion.

Herod the Great undertook great building projects in Palestine, including whole cities like Caesarea Maritima and Masada and the rebuilding of Jericho. Most important, he rebuilt the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. After he completed the work, he deeply offended the Jews of Jerusalem by placing an eagle, the emblem of Roman rule, on the Temple. His last act in life was overseeing the execution of the Jews who tore it down.

In Matthew 2, the wise men from the East asked Herod the Great where the King of the Jews was to be born. Herod was deeply disturbed, because he had earned the title, King of the Jews, from the Romans, and he was planning that one of his sons would inherit the title from him. Equally disturbing was the news that the child would be born in Bethlehem, the site of Herod's summer palace.

Herod the Great ordered the slaughter of all boys under the age of two years, and Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt for safety. Joseph did not bring his family back to Nazareth until after Herod the Great's death in 4 b.c.

After the death of Herod the Great, the Romans divided his kingdom between his sons, and none of them was called King of the Jews.

Herod Archelaus ruled Judea after the death of his father. In Matthew 2: 22, Joseph decided to take his family north to Galilee, because he was also afraid of Archelaus. Archelaus ruled badly, and the Romans removed him after ten years, replacing him with a Roman.

His brother, Herod Antipas, was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. In the New Testament, he is called Herod the Tetrarch. Another brother, Herod Philip, was tetrarch of Iturea, Gaulanitis, and Trachonitis. Their cousin, Herodias, first married and divorced an uncle living in Rome, then married Philip, and then divorced Philip to marry Antipas.

When John the Baptist preached against this marriage and divorce pattern within the family, Antipas had him thrown into prison. The daughter of Herodias by her first marriage is unnamed in the New Testament, but she is called Salome (a common name in the family) in later accounts. With her mother's prompting, she requested the head of John the Baptist on a platter, and Antipas ordered John beheaded (Mark 6).

In Mark 8:15, when Jesus warned the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, he was talking about Herod Antipas. Antipas was also the fox that the Pharisees warned Jesus about in Luke 13: 31.

Antipas presided over Jesus' trial in Luke 23, and with Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, determined Jesus' death sentence on Good Friday. John and Peter refer to the decision of Antipas and Pontius Pilate to execute Jesus in Acts 4: 27.

Herod Agrippa I, King of Iturea, Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Galilee, and Perea, was the grandson of Herod the Great and the nephew of Philip and Antipas. He ordered the execution of James the Elder, and was so buoyed by the public response that he had Peter arrested and put in prison (Acts 12).

Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I and the great-grandson of Herod the Great. His sister Bernice accompanied him at public functions, and Paul spoke before them in Acts 25 and 26, asking for his right to be tried as a Roman citizen. Agrippa seemed to enjoy talking to Paul, and he used the word Christian to describe him.

Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, was married to Felix, the Roman procurator. She may have argued for compassionate treatment of Paul by her husband (Acts 24: 24).