



Almost everything we know about the magi is wrong. There were most certainly more than three. We don't know their names. They were not kings. They didn't show up shortly after the shepherds. They don't find a baby in a manger. By the time they show up, Jesus is more than likely a precocious toddler. My guess is that he makes a mad dash to hide behind his mom's skirt when they show up. The child doesn't perform miracles or have an otherworldly aura. He's just a kid. The scene is as ordinary as they come, except for the Magi.

When we read their story, we immediately want to know: Who are these guys? Where did they come from? What's up with that star? Matthew doesn't satisfy our curiosity.

Over the years, we've filled in the blanks, created our own stories, and written our own songs. But if we are not telling the same story or singing from the same score as Matthew, then we are probably asking the wrong questions. The big questions are not who are these guys and what's up with the star. The big questions are what does their presence tell us about who Jesus is and how we respond to him.

## AN UNSETTLING QUESTION (vv. 1-3)

Matthew does a magnificent job of setting the scene. He introduces us to the key players—Jesus, Herod, and the Magi. He prepares us for a crazy clash of cultures between Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and the East, and he builds the tension between two rivals for the same throne.

*<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*

1. The Magi were a priestly ruling class in the Persian empire. They were skilled in predicting the movement of the stars, discerning their meaning, and interpreting dreams. When we meet Magi in the Old Testament (particularly in the book of Daniel), they are usually incapable of living up to their billing. What do you make of the fact that God used the stars to lead a group of stargazers to Jesus?
2. What do these verses reveal about Jesus?
3. Why is this important?
4. Herod’s official title was “King of Judea.” He earned the title through political intrigue and ruthlessly clung to power.
  - a. What about Jesus might have been threatening to him?
  - b. Why do you think Jerusalem was troubled with him?
5. If Jesus is indeed king, then he reserves the right to challenge our priorities and rearrange our lives. What about Jesus might be threatening to us?

## A FRANTIC SEARCH FOR ANSWERS (vv. 4-8)

Herod and the Magi are seeking the same king, but they are seeking him for entirely different reasons. Herod wants to eliminate the threat, the Magi want to pay homage to the true king.

*<sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> “ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and*

*search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him.”*

1. While a star led the magi to Jerusalem, only Scripture could lead them to Bethlehem and Jesus.
  - a. How does God reveal his glory to us apart from Scripture?
  - b. Why do we need Scripture to appropriately respond to the glory of God revealed in Scripture?
  - c. How does Scripture lead us to Christ?
  - d. How does Scripture nurture our relationship with Christ?
2. What motivates Herod’s search for answers?
3. What is tragic about his response?

## A JOYFUL RESPONSE (vv. 9-11)

Luke wants us to respond to the good news of Christ’s birth in the same way the shepherds do—to investigate the things we have seen and heard, and to spread the news of God’s faithfulness to his people. Matthew wants us to respond in the same way the Magi do—to find joy in our discovery of Jesus, to worship the true king, and open our treasures to him.

*<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

1. Why do you think the Magi were overjoyed at the reappearance of the star?
2. We have far more information than the Magi did. Why should we be overjoyed by the birth of our Lord?
3. While the Magi were simply venerating Jesus as king, worship has come to mean so much more for us. What does it mean to worship Jesus? Why is it the only appropriate response?
4. What are the gifts we have received from Christ?
5. What are the gifts he most desires from us?