

The Wise Men

Key Verse: *“Lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.”*
—*Matthew 2:9*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 2:1-12

FOLLOWING THE BIRTH of Jesus, “wise men from the east” came to Jerusalem. They inquired of Herod the king, asking him where the King of the Jews had been born, saying that they had seen his star and travelled a long distance to worship him. (Matt. 2:1,2) When Herod heard this, “he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (vs. 3) This reaction was

because the king felt his own rule was now threatened. Likewise, others in Jerusalem who may have had some advantages because of Herod’s rulership were fearful of losing these special privileges.

Herod “gathered all the chief priests and scribes” of the Jews and demanded to know where Christ should be born. Knowing the prophecies concerning Messiah, they answered, “Bethlehem of Judaea.” Herod told the wise men, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.” (vss. 4-8) This was a deception by Herod. If he knew where the young child Jesus was, he could then have him killed, thus protecting his rulership.

After the wise men departed from Herod, our Key Verse says that the star, which they had been following, continued to lead them until it stood over where the

young child was. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” (vs. 10) The account goes on to state that when they came into the house, the wise men saw the young child with Mary his mother. They bowed down and worshipped him and then presented him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.—vs. 11

Joseph and Mary were no doubt surprised by the precious gifts received from these strangers. In God’s providence, however, their costly value was probably helpful to meet expenses during their flight to Egypt, which would soon follow.—vss. 13-15

Each of the gifts given by the wise men seems to have had a special meaning. Gold, a rare metal and considered precious throughout history, was a fitting gift for a king—the King of the Jews. Frankincense produces a pleasant odor when burned and was used extensively in Israel’s Tabernacle and Temple. It was one of the ingredients in the holy incense and was also placed on top of the showbread in the Holy compartment. (Exod. 30:34-38; Lev. 24:5-7) The gift of frankincense perhaps pointed forward to Jesus’ priestly service.

Myrrh was one of the ingredients in the holy anointing oil of the Tabernacle. (Exod. 30:23-25) A bitter herb, it may have symbolized in advance how during Jesus’ earthly ministry he would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (Isa. 53:3) Myrrh was also applied to Jesus’ body after his death.—John 19:39,40

After the wise men presented their gifts, having been “warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” (Matt. 2:12) Let us be as the wise men, presenting daily our treasure to the Heavenly Father—all that we have and are. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1 ■