

QUESTION:

My Bible group had a good time yesterday comparing Matthew and Luke's accounts of the Christmas story. One question that came up was why would Matthew relate the story of the Magi?

RESPONSE

Ah, it's a great question and – as it turns out – an important one for understanding the Gospel of Matthew. The story is found only in this Gospel (But this time of year, who can keep ones mind from jumping to: “We Three Kings of Orient Are...”), and it is filled with intriguing conundra.

For example, why would pagan astrologers from the East be interested in knowing where the King of Israel was born and come to worship him? Were they doing this for all babies who were bound to become kings of foreign countries? How does a star lead them to Jerusalem and then disappear and then reappear and lead the Magi not just to Bethlehem but stop over a *house*? How does a star stop over a house? If Herod really sent out the troops to kill all the boys of Bethlehem, two years and under, why is there no report of this in any historical records (e.g., Josephus)? If it's true that Joseph took Mary and Jesus and whisked them away to Egypt (a rather long walk; it's 460 miles or so from Bethlehem to Cairo) and waited there till Herod's death before returning (another rather long walk), how can Luke be right that the family stayed in the Bethlehem/Jerusalem area for a bit over a month and then returned directly home to Nazareth up in Galilee? Etc. etc.

These various points contribute to the common scholarly view that Matthew's story is almost certainly ...

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