

Wise Men

Isaiah 9:6-7

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD, Almighty will accomplish this."

The role of the Wise Men in our Walk is to confirm the birth of a Savior and complete the traditional Christmas story. (Although we know this did not happen all in the same night). It can also be a reference place to suggest these men were searching, as we do today, for a Savior, and we find Him in Jesus Christ.

YOUR BIBLE REFERENCE: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him...After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. (NIV Matt 2:1-2 and 9-10)

BACKGROUND: The nationality of the Wise Men is not disclosed. It is simply stated they came "from the East". To the Jews, Assyria was the "north", and Babylon was the "east". Babylonian astrologer-priests had studied the stars for more than 3000 years. They had defined and named the main constellations. They had introduced the twelvefold division of the Zodiac. The Babylonians gave Abraham to the Jews. The father of the faithful came from Ur of the Chaldeed (GEN 11:31). It was a land of portent, a strange and compelling land. It would be fitting if the Wise Men were Babylonians.

It was early believed they came from Persia. Persia, beyond Babylon, was known as the "far east". There, astrologers built towers, which were the world's first "observatories". From them they charted the courses of the heavenly bodies. They connected these movements with events on the earth, especially with important births. In this old Median language, *mog, mag*, meant priest. The Medes were divided into six tribes, one of which was the *Magi*, corresponding to the Levites. Matthew's word for "Wise Men" was *Magi*. At first it was a title of honor. The Wise Men were credited with great wisdom in philosophy. They were thought to possess rare skills in natural science and medicine. They were held in very high repute. Later on, the word lost its nobler meaning. Among the Greeks and Romans it was the general designation of all who claimed supernatural knowledge of any kind. Gradually it came to be used only of charlatans and dabblers in the black arts. It has come down to us in the word "Magician".

History has immortalized Matthew's Wise Men as earnest seekers after truth, willing to follow the light of a star in the belief that it would bring them to the light of God; most likely the magi were pious men, whose minds had ascended from nature to nature's God. They had noted that the Supreme Being was not dealing with them, or with others, as they deserved. He was dealing with them in mercy. This whetted their appetite for more knowledge of Him. They pursued their studies to this end. Being students of lights, they are represented as longing to bow themselves on adoration before "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world". (KJV Luke 2:25) When they saw the Star, they immediately associated it with the birth of "the King of the Jews" (Matt 2:2). This suggests they, too, were "waiting for the consolation of Israel". (Luke 2:25)

They may have searched the Old Testament Scriptures, and became acquainted with the prophecy of Balaam, "There shall come a star out of Jacob" (Num 24:17). The book of Daniel was very widely read among the Gentiles, and the Wise Men may have learned of Israel's hope from that source. Wherever they came from, there were many Jews in the land where they lived. Some of them were noted for their scholarship. They were to be found in most schools. The Wise Men may have learned of the coming One from them. It may have been revealed to them directly by Almighty God Himself. However the knowledge came to them, the important thing is they acted upon it. Among a nation of materialists, they were men who believed in spiritual values. They craved to know the mysteries of fuller, deeper life. They had seen a Star. Obey it they must. They represented the scientist of their age. They observed a new star, and their "science" led them to Jesus. It was not the Star which led them. It was the inferences they drew from what they observed. Matthew tells us (2:2,9) that the Star which they saw when they were in the East was not visible to them during their journey, so that, for the greater part of their way to the Holy Land", they had to "walk by faith, not by sight". It first appeared to announce Messiah's birth. It was His Natal Star. When it reappeared at Jerusalem, they were filled with "exceeding great joy". (KJV Matt 2:9)

Tid-Bit Information: Bethlehem is a small village, 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem. Land is hilly—with lots of rocks. Temperature can be 25 to 75 degrees. May through October no rain and December through March is the rainy season. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle are some. Most people walk to Bethlehem from Jerusalem on a narrow winding road. One could possibly travel 15 miles on a good day. They would never travel on the Sabbath. Roads from Jericho to Jerusalem were very treacherous, steep, narrow, and lots of places for robbers to hide. In Bethlehem you could find many beggars too. Just east of Bethlehem you can see the white and chalky wilderness of Judea.

CENSUS: the Romans started the census system shortly before Jesus' birth. They require registration every 14 years. People were required to return to the place of their birth to get their property registered so Rome would know how much tax would be charged. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the fanatical Jews—but tolerant of the quiet Jew. They can compel anyone to carry their burden for one mile.

CUSTOMS: Business as property transfers, marriages, etc. was transacted at the village gate. The Elders sat on benches there. The SYNAGOGUE is a place of learning. Scribes are experts of law and instruct in the synagogue. Priests serve in the Temples ONLY—there was no Temple in Bethlehem. Women didn't have equal rights—only in work. They worked in the fields alongside of men. Women and girls were not forbidden in synagogue but were held to the back. Houses were small but always had a guest room—even tents had guest rooms. Animals often housed under or near house—often goats and sheep come into the city at night. A farm would be the size of 4-6 acres. Most families kept a goat or two to milk, a few sheep for wool, and one or two donkeys or oxen as draft animals. Chickens or other fowl were in the courtyard.

INTERACTION OF WISE MEN WITH ALL GUIDES AND GUESTS:

The three Wise Men will meet each group "coming from the East". Guides are instructed to plan their Walk to give Wise Men time to go back after meeting one group and to come forward as the next group approaches. Guides are also instructed to bring the children to the front of the group. Wise Men are encouraged to try to get the children to participate.

Wise Men may choose who will be speaking.

GUIDE: Shalom.

WISE MEN: Shalom. We have been traveling for a long distance. We are seeking a Babe who is born that will be the king of the Jews. Have you seen any such Baby? (Hopefully the children will respond—encourage them. This may require added lines.)

WISE MEN: We know that it has been prophesied that out of Bethlehem will come a Savior. We saw this brilliant star and have taken it as a sign. We have come to Bethlehem to worship Him.

GUIDE: I see you have gifts.

**WISE MEN: We have brought gold for His glory,
Frankincense for the fragrance of His life and
Sweet smelling myrrh.**

Come, our journey has been long and dangerous, and we must find the King. Shalom.
