

FPFWC Christian Development



The Beginning of the Call

December 2020

Winter Quarter

December 19, 2020

Lesson #3 –Called to Worship

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Matthew 2:1-2, 7-15

Key Verse- When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.—Matthew 2:11

ICE BREAKERS-

1. Why is it important to obey God immediately?
2. How can a competitive, prideful, or insecure spirit alter a person's behavior?

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Matthew and Luke provide unique details on the story of Jesus' birth. Both contain genealogies that trace Jesus' human heritage (see lesson 1). Both mention that angels announced Mary would conceive. Luke describes the message delivered to Mary before her pregnancy (Luke 1:26–38), while Matthew describes how Joseph learned of its origins after she was found to be with child (Matthew 1:18–25; see lesson 2).

Luke then offers a detailed description of the events leading up to the night of Jesus' birth, including Joseph and Mary's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the Roman tax census, the fact that the newborn child was laid in a manger, and the visit of the shepherds (Luke 2:1–20). Matthew skips the actual birth story to describe the strange appearance of wealthy and mysterious Gentiles to honor the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:1–18; see lesson text).

The two accounts broaden our awareness of the events surrounding Jesus' birth and also offer complementary perspectives on the implications of Christ's coming. Luke's focus on the manger and the shepherds anticipates Jesus' later emphasis on the poor and outcast (example: Luke 6:20–21). Matthew's story of the wise men shows how Christ's life and death would reach far beyond the borders of Israel to bring salvation to people of many races and nationalities (example: Matthew 28:18–20). Taken together, the two Gospels underscore a key feature of Christ's ministry: reaching across barriers to bring salvation to all (John 3:16–18).

LESSON COMMENTARY –

2:1. Bethlehem was about six miles southwest of Jerusalem. **Herod the king** was the ruthless and paranoid puppet ruler under Rome. His atrocities included killing three sons, a wife, and her mother to protect his regime. There is no

secular record of what happened in Bethlehem, but it is perfectly in keeping with his paranoia to slaughter these children. The **magi** remain enigmatic figures, but were probably wise men specializing in astronomy and astrology. In the Greco-Roman world they purportedly predicted the ascendancy of great leaders (Astyages of Media in the sixth century BC; Alexander the Great, and Augustus). **From the east** could be Egypt, but was more likely Babylonia, where a large and influential group of Jews still lived in exile. It is remotely possible that these magi were familiar with the prophecies of Daniel and that these, in association with the star, would have caused them to come to the Holy Land.

2:2. A **star** could signal the birth of powerful men. In Jewish tradition a new star appeared following the birth of Abraham, and the Messiah is associated with a star (Nm 24:17; Rv 22:16). What was this star? Jupiter and Saturn were aligned in Pisces in 7 BC, but such planetary alignments were never called “stars.” Halley’s Comet was visible in 12 BC but this is certainly too early. That this star appeared (2:7) suggests it had not been documented previously, and 2:9 implies that this star *moved around*, supporting a supernatural origin, and may parallel the pillar of fire that led the Hebrews in the wilderness.

2:7–12. Herod’s deception about worshipping the King of the Jews was consistent with what is known about his *modus operandi*. Matthew’s reference to **gold, frankincense, and myrrh** may intend to establish a parallel with Solomon, a son of David, to whom similar gifts were given (1Kg 10:1–2; 2Ch 9:23–24; Sg 3:6).

b. The Flight to Egypt (2:13–15)

2:15. The exact day of Herod the Great’s death is not known, but Josephus says it happened after a lunar eclipse on March 12–13, 4 BC, and before the Passover on April 11, 4 BC. Matthew’s use of Hs 11:1 (**OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON**) is puzzling. In its OT context, Hosea is looking backward—but not entirely. Hosea 11:9–11 contains the promise of a future restoration of the Jewish people after all their exiles. Hosea 3:4–5 indicates that Hosea knows about the future Son of David, and that He will be involved in the restoration of the nation and people. God had the power and ability to protect His people once in Egypt and brought her out from Egypt (Hs 11:1); He will protect His people and someday restore them (Hs 11:9–11). He will do this with the Son of David (Hs 3:5). Where does Jesus fit in? Jesus is the typological fulfillment of Israel, seen in that God protected both the Hebrews and Jesus in Egypt. The future restoration promised through the Son of David in Hs 3:5 and 11:9–10 will be accomplished through Jesus Christ. Just as the Jews were brought out of Egypt, and that was a proof that they would one day be restored, so Jesus being protected in and brought out of Egypt signals the commencement of Israel’s restoration. Israel’s full restoration will come only at Jesus’ second coming when He will free Israel from Gentile oppression (called “the times of the Gentiles” in Lk 21:24), following their faith in Him (cf. the comments on Mt 23:38–39 and Rm 11:20–27).

LESSON NUGGET – Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth – We see in this chapter that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, would come out of Egypt, and would be called a Nazarene. What is the chance that one person could fulfill all these prophecies? But Mary and Joseph were away from home, so He would be born in Bethlehem. Herod went crazy, so they would flee to Egypt. And Jerusalem wasn't safe, so they moved to Nazareth. Amazing details, all predicted ahead of time.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*