

LESSON 2

JESUS' FIRST TWO YEARS

We will be looking at the events surrounding the first two years of the life of Jesus. Not much is reported except the commanded visit by Mary and Joseph to the temple when Jesus was eight days old. We find this story in Luke 2.

We will use Matthew 2 as our text for the second part of this lesson. It will set the background for the reason the Romans and the Jews were afraid of the birth of this child.

In the Temple, the family encountered two important people. The first was Simeon. We know very little about him other than he was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the arrival of the promised Messiah. The Scripture also says the Holy Spirit was on him. The Holy Spirit had revealed that he would not die until he had seen the promised Christ.

When Simeon saw the baby, he took him and blessed Him, and he acknowledged that he could now die. In other words, he knew this was the promised child.

There was also a prophetess named Anna. She too was elderly and had the gift of telling future events. It is said that she never left the temple but served God by fasting and praying day and night. When she saw the child, she gave thanks to God and spoke about His being the one the Jews were waiting for.

The trip to the Temple was required. The child had to be circumcised and offerings made on His behalf. When their requirements were complete, they returned to Nazareth.

At about the age of two, some wise men from the East saw a peculiar star, one they had not seen before. They followed it, and it led them to the city of Bethlehem. This would have been a long journey, more than just a few days. Scripture says they came from the East. There was probably a caravan of them, likely more than three. Though the world speaks of three wise men, there were probably many more than this.

We read about the importance of wise men in the book of Daniel. They were also called Magi, probably because of their magic. They were also called magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers (See Daniel 2:2). The wise men of Babylon were also

called soothsayers. Witches were punished under the Old Law. Exodus 22:18 says they were put to death. Wise men seem to have been scholars. Young men captured by Babylon and other nations were educated in the language of the country that captured them. In Daniel, we read how they were trained especially for the king's service. The captors wanted good-looking young men who could learn quickly and be put into full service studying the stars and probably everything that had been written about the heavens. They believed God to be the most powerful of the gods. They remained polytheists.

Remember that Daniel had saved the wise men in Babylon from death. They could not interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, the king could not remember the dream, so he wanted the wise men to tell him the dream and its meaning. When they could not, He commanded all the wise men of Babylon to be destroyed. When the soldiers went out to kill them, they sought Daniel and his friends to destroy as well. Daniel asked to be given a chance to reveal the dream and interpret it. He then asked for God's help, and God revealed the information he needed (Daniel 2).

The wise men who visited Jesus would have traveled a long way to find Him. They went to see King Herod to see if he would know where they might find the King of the Jews. Herod was a cruel man. He had murdered many of his family members, including his own sons, because he was afraid they would try to take his kingdom away from him. Naturally, he was not happy to hear that there was a new king born in his district.

King Herod assembled the chief priests and scribes and asked them where the Christ would be born. They told him that the child was to be born in Bethlehem. They had read this in the prophets. Daniel 9:25 is a prophecy about the coming of "the Messiah the Prince." Of course, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many other references in the Old Testament give numerous prophecies concerning the coming of Christ. So, when the wise men came looking for the Messiah, Herod called them in and sent them to Bethlehem. He told them to go find the child and come back and let him know where the child was located so he could go worship him too.

The wise men left Herod, traveled to Bethlehem, and found Jesus in a house. Notice that he was in a house when they found him, not in a barn. When they saw the child, Matthew says they fell down and worshiped Him. They opened the gifts they brought Him—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These gifts were very precious. Gold was certainly appropriate for the child that would be a prince. Frankincense was an oil made from a tree. It was used when the

priests offered animal sacrifices to make things smell better. It was also used as incense and perfume. Myrrh was also made from a tree. It was used in anointing and embalming. It is interesting to note that frankincense and myrrh are both elements associated with the death of Jesus (Mark 15:23 and John 19:39).

Once they completed their visit, they were warned in a dream not to return to King Herod but rather take another way home. Joseph also had a dream, and an angel told him to take Jesus and Mary and run away to Egypt. They were to remain in Egypt until he was told to return. They stayed in Egypt until King Herod was dead.

King Herod wasn't happy about this. He became angry, sent out his soldiers, and had all the male children in Bethlehem and the surrounding region two years old and under killed.

FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. Why does it matter that we do not teach there were three wise men?
2. How can we imitate the dedication of Simeon and Anna in our daily lives as Christians?
3. What kind of faith would Mary and Joseph have had to complete all the instructions given to them from the time of their visit from the angel, Gabriel, until they returned to Nazareth?
4. What do you suppose Joseph did to provide for his family in Egypt?
5. Why would God have chosen these wise men to visit Joseph, Mary, and Jesus?