

The Magi's Route to Palestine; The Magi's Visit to Palestine: Arrival in Jerusalem, Matt 2:1; The Magi's Disturbing Question & Stated Purpose, Details about the Star, v. 2; Herod Goes into Trepidation; Herod's Major Concerns, v. 3

XV. The Magi's Visit to Palestine: Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2:1 - Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, (NASB)

This verse begins with the Lord's proper name, Ἰησοῦς (*Iêsous*) followed by the aorist passive participle of the verb γεννάω, *gennaō*. This is translated, "After Jesus, had been born."

- 1) The aorist participle precedes the action of the main verb which is the aorist active indicative of the verb παραγίνομαι (*paraginomai*), translated "came."
- 2) The Magi's arrival in Jerusalem occurred after the virgin birth.
- 3) In context, the emphasis is placed on the main verb rather than the participle.
- 4) However, the participle is a prerequisite before the action of the main verb can occur.

Matthew informs us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, an event that had already occurred and, which later commentary will confirm, happened as much as two years prior. However, neither the Magi nor Herod know the location at the moment.

The Magi are said to arrive in Jerusalem "from the east." This does not refer to the direction from which they entered Jerusalem but rather to their origin.

The word "east" is plural noun ἀνατολή (*anatolē*) and should be translated, "from regions to the east," namely the Parthian Empire whose capital, Hecatompylos, is over 1,000 miles east of Palestine. The Magi approached the city from the north down the Damascus Road-Jordan River-Jericho-Jerusalem route.

Matthew 2:1 - After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Magi from regions to the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, (CTL)

v. 2 - "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." (NASB)

Indications are that the Magi made know their intentions upon entering the city. Their caravan consisted of thousands of men and animals. To calm the city they announced the intent of their visit and made it known they desired an audience with King Herod. After receiving directions to his palace they informed him of their mission: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"

This question sent chills down Herod's spine. *He* was king of the Jews. No doubt he had several things go through his mind, "These Parthians have crossed the Euphrates River, they have come thousands strong to my country, they have entered my capital city, and they are in search of a person *born* King of the Jews!?"



Herod was not born king of the Jews. He is an Arab from Idumaea. The Magi imply there is a legitimate heir to the throne recently born. The Parthians at one time controlled Palestine and now they contend there is a legal claimant to its throne. This means there is an heir apparent whose bloodline goes back to David. Herod had eliminated the Hasmonaean line over thirty years ago by the murder of his wife Mariamne and the assassination of his two sons sired through her. Now Magi appear at his door with this disturbing question: "Where is He who has been born the King of the Jews?"

The grammar of the query posed by the Magi contributes to the mounting evidence that the Lord's birth occurred much before their arrival in Jerusalem.

The word for *born* is the aorist passive participle of the verb **τίκτω (tikō)**. The aorist participle precedes the action of the main verb which is the verb "to be," which is the present active indicative of **εἰμί (eimí)**: "Where is presently He who has been born previously."

They then go on to stipulate who the person is by referring to Him as **βασιλεύς (basileus)**, "King," plus **Ἰουδαίος (Ioudaios)**, "of the Jews."

The Magi then give the reason they are seeking this person: "Because we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

The thing that motivated the Magi to organize a complicated and politically dangerous international mission was the result of having seen a "star in the east."

Notice the parsing of the verb "to see": the aorist active indicative of **ὁράω (horaō)**:

aorist:	Constatative; contemplates the action in its entirety. It takes the occurrence and, regardless of its extent of duration, gathers it into a single whole.
active:	The Magi produced the action of seeing the star.
indicative:	This is a statement of fact.

The use of the constative aorist indicates that the Magi are not saying that they observed the star all the way from Hecatompylos to Jerusalem. They saw the star in Hecatompylos and from that observation they were led to make the trip to Jerusalem.

Had they [the Magi] used the imperfect tense we would translate, "We have been watching His star since first saw it." But the imperfect tense is not here. We conclude from the context that the star did not lead them across the desert to Jerusalem.¹

The encounter with the star is the source of motivation but not guidance. Had it been for guidance then it would have led them to Bethlehem. The Magi's membership included many within the traveling party who, although Parthians, had the blood of various tribes of Israel. Protocol demanded that they go first to Jerusalem and pay a call on the current king of the Jews, Herod the Great.

After asking their question they add the purpose for wanting to locate the child: "to worship Him." This indicates the Magi believe the child they seek is the Messiah and that in Parthia there is a significant influence of Judaism among its people both Jew and Gentile.

¹ Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament* (Bowling Green, KY: Renaissance Press, 1976), 1:110.



The visiting Magi include both Jews and Gentiles but all are familiar with the Old Testament prophets that predict the coming of a King who would rule the Jews and become God incarnate. Their realization of these things is evident by their use of the Greek word for “worship”:

προσκυνέω (*proskuneō*): from *pros*, to, and *kuneō*, to kiss. To worship, do obeisance, show respect, fall or prostrate before. Literally to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage. The ancient oriental (especially Persian) mode of salutation between persons of equal ranks was to kiss each other on the lips; when the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek; when one was much inferior, he fell on his knees and touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, throwing kisses at the same time toward the superior. It is this latter mode of salutation that Greek writers express by *proskuneō*. In the New Testament, generally, to do reverence or homage to someone, usually by kneeling or prostrating oneself before him. Followed by the dative of person and with words expressing prostration (Matt. 2:11).²

This last application in Matthew 2:11 is indicated by the phrase “they fell to the ground and worshipped Him.” It is the translation of only three words: **πίπτω (*piptō*)** plus **προσκυνέω (*proskuneō*)** plus **αὐτός (*autos*)**.

Piptō in this context means “to fall down or prostrate,” joined with *proskuneō*, to worship (Matt. 2:11).³ *Proskuneō* is used by the Magi in Matthew 2:2 in a general way as the stated purpose of their coming to Jerusalem.

The Magi are the high priesthood of Parthia. They hold great spiritual and political power in the Empire. They have the power to depose monarchs and to select their successors. They are made up of Gentiles as well as Jews, the latter of which are the progeny of three Diasporas over seven centuries. The Hebrew Scripture, with emphasis on their prophets, has informed these men of the advent of a coming King of the Jews and a “star” has alerted them that the fullness of time has come.

These Parthians contend that the purpose of their mission is to prostrate themselves before the recently-born King of the Jews, but to do so they must learn of his location. The Idumaeen king of the Jews, Herod the Great, has no clue while the priests and scribes over at the Sanhedrin know the prophetic location to be Bethlehem, but well over a year has passed since the virgin birth and none of them have shown any interest in going six miles down the road to worship Him. The Magi have traveled a thousand miles to do so.

Matthew 2:2 - “Where is presently He who has been born previously the King of the Jews? Because we in the east⁴ saw His star and we have come to prostrate ourselves before Him in worship as our superior.” (CTL)

v. 3 - When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (NASB)

² Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1233–34.

³ *Ibid.*, 1159.

⁴ Previously, I mentioned in oral commentary that the star’s location was to the east of the Magi, however the phrase ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ (*en tēi ananolēi*) uses the locative of place for the noun “east” indicating where the *Magi* were when they observed the star, not where the *star* was when the Magi observed it.



The news that there was a recently born child that could lay claim to the throne in Jerusalem is said to have troubled Herod. The word is the aorist passive indicative of the verb **ταράσσω (tarassō)** and in the passive voice it means to be in trepidation. The KJV and NASB translation is “troubled,” the NIV is “disturbed,” and the NET is “alarmed.” The best English word for this is “trepidation”:

Fear 1a: an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger. FEAR implies anxiety and usually loss of courage. Synonyms: DREAD usually adds the idea of intense reluctance to face or meet a person or situation and suggests aversion as well as anxiety. TREPIDATION adds to dread the implications of timidity, trembling, and hesitation.⁵

Several startling implications of the Magi’s statement incite trepidation in Herod’s soul. These include:

- 1) The implication there is an heir apparent from the house of David. Herod had shed gallons of blood to remove any descendants of the Hasmonaean dynasty which he assumed had cut off the Davidic line.
- 2) The dashed hopes of his descendants ruling Palestine in perpetuity. If this child was truly from the tribe of Judah and house of David, then he posed a threat to the longevity of the Herodian line.
- 3) The suspicion that the Magi and their entourage intend to depose him and install a vassal king in his place as they had done with Antigonus some 30 years before.
- 4) The possibility that this incident could become a flash point setting off another confrontation between Rome and Parthia.
- 5) Even if the child the Magi referred to was not a legitimate heir to the throne, there was trepidation that if the Parthians caused any trouble and Rome learned of it then he was in jeopardy of being removed from office by Augustus.

Therefore, Herod experiences trepidation. This includes dread which is the reluctance to face a person or a situation which he wishes to somehow avert. Anxiety from this circumstance leads to trepidation, the emotions of timidity, trembling, and hesitation.

⁵ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v.: “fear.”

