

The Gifts of the Magi

Our concept today is PROPHECY

We will learn: What the word prophecy means and why is it important to Christian people. Here is what it says about Jesus birth in the Bible:

Visitors from the East

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

“In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they answered. “For this is what the prophet Micah of ancient days wrote:

“Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you will become very important, for from you will come a leader who will guide my people Israel.””

Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: “Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him.”

The visitors left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The gifts the Magi gave are in fact very important prophecies about Jesus and his future.

Find out more about the Magi...

After Jesus was born, some men came from THE EAST to look for Him We **think** they were , probably from either Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, southern Turkey, or northern Syria.

Although, they are often called "The Three Kings", the Bible does not say how many there were, or that they were kings. One theory is that they might have been Kings of the Yemen, as during this time the Kings of Yemen were Jews. Three is only a guess because they brought with them three gifts.

Some people call them "Wise Men". Some call them **Magi**.

They were certainly men of great learning. The word Magi comes from the Greek word 'magos' (where the English word 'magic' comes from). Magos itself comes from the old Persian word 'Magupati'.

This was the title given to priests in ancient Persia (now called Iran). Today we would call them **astrologers**. Back then, **astronomy** and **astrology** were part of the same 'science' and went hand in hand with each other. The magi would have followed the patterns of the stars religiously. They would have also probably been very rich and held high **esteem** in their own society and by people who were not from their country or religion.

These men had seen an unusual, new star in the sky, and knew that it told of the birth of a special king in Israel, because they had read about the prophecies of a special Jewish Saviour (also known as the Messiah) from a time when the Jews were **captive**, in a place called Babylon, in ancient times.

No one really knows what the new star in the sky was, and there are many theories including comets, supernovas, and conjunctions of planets or something **supernatural**.

There are many **legends** about the magi but all that is really known about them from the Bible is that they travelled from the East, studied the stars and were looking for the Messiah whose star they had seen in the sky. They have been given names but in truth, we do not know their names:

- Gaspar (or Caspar), traditionally has brown hair and a brown beard (or no beard!) and wears a green cloak and a gold crown with green jewels on it. He is the King of Sheba. Gaspar represents the Frankincense brought to Jesus.
- Melchior, traditionally has long white hair and a white beard and wears a gold cloak. He is the King of Arabia. Melchior represents the Gold brought to Jesus.
- Balthazar, traditionally has black skin and a black beard (or no beard!) and wears a purple cloak. He is the King of Tarse and Egypt. Balthazar represents the gift of Myrrh brought to Jesus

Although the Magi always form part of traditional Nativity scenes, they actually would not have had time in those days to travel several hundreds of miles on foot or by camel, and arrive when Jesus was still a baby. It is more likely that when the Wise Men found Jesus and Mary, they would have been living in a normal house, probably in Bethlehem or Jerusalem, because by this time Jesus would have been aged between one and two.

What about the gifts the visitors gave to Jesus?

The gifts, which are all things that come **from east** of Israel in Arabia, seem quite strange to give to a baby, but Christians believe that they foretold or prophesied Jesus' future life and death, and had the following meanings:

- Gold: is associated with Kings and Christians believe that Jesus is the King of Kings.
- Frankincense: used in worship in Churches, showed that people would worship Jesus.
- Myrrh: is a perfume put on dead bodies to make them smell nice; Christians believe that it showed that Jesus would suffer and die.

The Magi thought that they would find Jesus in a palace. However, when they did not find him there they left, and the King (Herod) asked them if they would tell him where he was, not so he could go and worship him too. However, he actually wanted to kill Jesus because he saw him as a threat to his power. Luckily for Jesus, when the wise men were about to go to tell Herod where Jesus was, they were warned in a dream not to, so Herod could not carry out his horrible plan.