

Wise Men

Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? Matt 2:2.

What prompted the wise ones to ask such a question? And why would they direct this question to Herod, the one known as a “wiley Idumaeen” puppet of Julius Caesar? Surely they knew who Herod was; that he was the reigning king. Maybe they assumed the child would be Herod’s. Why not just continue to follow the star as they had been doing?

In fact they did follow the star, but not to Bethlehem. Tradition has it that they went to Bethlehem and there saw a newborn. Scripture plainly says otherwise.

Matthew 2:9–11

- 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was.
- 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
- 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

We know that the family came to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord in accordance with the Law of Moses (Ex 13:2, Num 3:13). This was certainly no later than 33 days (Lev 12:3) after His birth but was more likely to be just 8 days after. Luke 2:21-22. Simeon was there to see them carry out for Him the custom of the Law (v27. the Circumcision?). Anna was there in the temple at that ceremony and prophesied. (v38) From there the family journeyed back to Nazareth. (Luke 2:39)

Matt 2:1 clearly tells us that the magi did not turn up in Jerusalem until after the birth. Once there, they had to gain admission to the palace and to Herod and to have his advisors determine the birthplace. Therefore it is highly unlikely that the family was still in Bethlehem. Given the age of the children that Herod ordered to be slaughtered (Matt 2:16), it is more likely to be a year or more after the birth that these events occurred.

The strong likelihood is that they were back in their house in Nazareth when the magi found them. Matt 2:11. After this they flee to Egypt in obedience to the angel of the Lord. Thus they avoid the slaughter.

How careful then must we be of tradition?