



**Matthew 2: 3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**

**A Christmas Mystery: Who Are These Men, And Where Were They On The Eve Of The First Christmas?**

**News flash, this just in from Israel: archeologists have uncovered a document recording an incident as witnessed by King Herod's homeland security, dating from about 4 or 5 BC. The document is still being translated, but early reports indicate that a group of men were secretly summoned to Herod's palace for an audience with the King. After thorough questioning, the men were deemed not to be terrorists, seemed to be rational and well educated, did not steal the expensive gifts they had with them, and most importantly, they had vital information concerning Herod's well-being.**

**Eventually the men were cleared (including full body scans) to have an audience with King Herod. The men told the story of how they had seen an unusual star two years earlier, and they had been searching for one born "The King of the Jews". After Herod's disappointment that the men were not talking about him, and that the gifts were not for him, and after a lengthy discussion between Herod and his advisers, the men were appeased with information that someone meeting their**

description was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and the men were released. The big question is "what is the rest of the story"?

As with many archeological finds, part of the document is missing, leaving us to turn to the Bible to verify and complete the story. There is a little known field of study called "Bible Forensics" which we can use to get to the bottom of this story. We will call this episode "Conducting Scriptural Investigation of the Nativity", code words "CSI Bethlehem".

To begin with, Bible Forensics involves gathering all the information available to determine the possible scenarios, including looking at the Bible in context to really get an accurate picture of the story, a conclusion, and all the implications to our Christian world view.

From the Bible we know the visitors to Herod were known as the Magi (or wise men). And I believe our duty is to find out where in history does this newly found document fit, and ultimately determine "were the Magi present at, or just after, or as much as 2 years after the birth of The King of the Jews?" Obviously we have some contentions on this issue (theological and traditional), but I will attempt to build a case for a 'Christmas Eve visitation of the Magi'.

What about two years later? There is some historical scuttlebutt about 'a great conjunction of planets' about this time which may have alerted the Magi to something going on for two years. This is what Herod heard and why he went after all babies less than 2 years old.

**And, if the Magi had followed the star in the east, they would have gone to China. I have to believe the Magi had to know something else to get them to Jerusalem. And according to many sources, Herod died one year after Christ's birth and the trip to Egypt. If the Magi showed up 2 years later, then their visit with Herod is a myth or an unbelievable and unacceptable Scriptural error.**

**What about 40 days later (or even 8)? It is interesting that Mt 2:3 shows Herod and 'all of Jerusalem' to be astonished about an event that occurred just 6 miles away. Surely some rumors and excitement of such an event would not have taken 40 (or even 8) days to get to Jerusalem. An important question is why did Herod wait at least 40 days until he began his massacre? And I have to ask why did he not immediately send soldiers to follow the Magi? He had to think it was just another rumor. But when Simeon made his proclamation in the Temple after 40 days (Luke 2:22-39 and Lev 12 - ceremonial cleansing), Herod thought it is time to act: Daniel 11:44 - bad news from the North (Rome and Caesarea) and bad news from the East (one born King of the Jews). Herod had to see the handwriting (pink slip) on the wall. Not unusual for God to confuse an enemy camp in a time of spiritual significance.**

**What about the Magi visiting Jesus in a 'house' (Mt 2:11)? There is no 'stable' in the Gospels, just a 'manger', and I thought of a lean-to on the back of a house for animals. Not bad. There is also some evidence for houses of that period having the first floor as a stable. Not bad. But then again,**

**Jesus may have been born in the stable, and some compassionate and persuasive Jewish mother, with a house, let the new family stay in the basement. Not bad.**

**Some people say Matthew's account (2:12) of the Magi's dream to avoid Herod and Joseph's dream about going to Egypt both occurred in Nazareth. Is this all because of the house interpretation or the two year theory? Seems logical that Joseph's family stayed in Bethlehem for at least 40 days (includes eighth day circumcised and fortieth day purification) before being told to go to Egypt (from Nazareth) and that the Magi went home a different way a lot sooner (from Bethlehem).**

**A big concern (without contextual evidence) is Matthew 2:1-13, where there is a summary of events from Bethlehem to Nazareth to Egypt: the 'star', the house, the child (Greek seems to be flexible as to infant or older), the gifts, the Magi's dream about avoiding Herod, and Joseph's dream about Egypt. A narrow investigation limited to Matthew 2 may lead us to an 8 or 40 day or 2 year after birth event.**

**And if we consider the two year star which we have to believe was merely a celestial event, we then have to consider another 'star' that alerted them to the Christ child being born in what the Magi assumed to be Jerusalem, but information from Herod (Micah) got them to Bethlehem.**

**It is quite possible that the Wise men were near Jerusalem and listened to some shepherds excitedly relating some 'goings on'**

**in fields to the south. Going to Herod may have been the next logical step in finding out where exactly.**

**This 'star', I have to assume was the presence of God at His Son's birth, and I have to assume was only a one-time event and for a limited amount of time, lest Herod's soldiers would have come a lot sooner. And an important point: the Magi could not possibly triangulate a 'star in the east' to 'a house'; they would need some specific guidance like what appears to be a star; and a star that would have been at Christ's birth, and not some time later or sooner.**

**Luke 2:39 is also a puzzler though: Luke says after the 40 day event 'they returned to Galilee...', but then he continues directly into 'and the child grew...' without even mentioning a trip to Egypt. We have to believe that Luke's account includes while excluding the Egypt trip, as they did travel from Nazareth (where Joseph's dream did occur) to Egypt.**

**What about Luke 2:24, the 2 doves or 2 pigeons and gifts of the Magi that should have elevated Joseph's family to lamb status: we do not know the value of those gifts (Jesus the 'son of a carpenter') and there are other elements of the same Levitical Law that indicates a three tier structure: poor, middle class, and rich. We can imagine Joseph's family being elevated from poor (grain) to middle class or 2 doves or 2 pigeons for a time - seems appropriate. Another important point: a trip to Egypt would take some time and I suppose the 'gifts' helped to finance the trip.**

**Now, what did the Magi know and when did they know it? The Magi came from the east and some say they were Persians. Did they have some foreknowledge of the Messiah's Birth that the Jews had religiously overlooked? Zechariah's (about John the Baptist) silent proclamation (Luke 1), 6 months to a year before Christ's birth, could have given the Magi advance notice that something big was coming.**

**But even more interesting would be the Magi's interest in this story and where did it begin? My whole argument here presupposes the Magi already being in the area of Jerusalem on Christmas Eve, and a short 6 mile camel ride to Bethlehem.**

**The Book of Daniel contains some historical prophecies that were amazingly fulfilled during the Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires, and even prophecy about Herod himself (Dan 11 – Magi were ‘bad news from the east’). Of course the 70 Week Prophecy (Dan 9 - 490 years from rebuilding Jerusalem until the ‘cutting off of the Messiah’ and to ‘one who brings desolation’) would help an avid researcher in approximating dates for future events.**

**Am I saying the Magi had the Book of Daniel? Could be. Daniel was a big part of their recorded history and they were big on documentation, just ask Esther and Mordecai. Any information about Daniel would be viewed much like what people do with Nostradamus today: what prophecies are accurate - of course with Daniel's prophecies, they were 100 percent. We just have trouble seeing it all correctly.**

**(If the Magi were there, on time, they had to have some form of Daniel. Or something based on Daniel. Historical realism!)**

**The Magi made an accurate and educated guess and were at the right place and the right time – would God deny their enthusiasm? And would it take a worldwide ban on Nativity sets (Magi or not) to incite our enthusiasm? Culturally, religiously, and judiciously it seems like we are headed in that direction.**

**I have presented my evidence. And of course the archaeological story is a fabrication just to make a point. But nothing explains the 'reason for the season' like a nativity set, and nothing like the Magi shows to the world that all are welcome to worship the Christ Child.**

**Finally, our battle is not over nativity sets, but the battle is about convincing the world to also worship at the foot of Christ's Cross. The two wooden symbols, the manger and the cross, represent the two major events in human history - and they are inseparable and vitally important.**

**The Magi were neither lucky nor late, they were Historists. See Daniel 11 Tab.**

**Ps It seems like Jesus rode a donkey through Jerusalem on His way to His birth. He also rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on His way to His death. Who said donkeys were stubborn? Even Balaam's donkey was obedient.**