

Lesson 2 . . . In Pursuit of the King

Gospel of Matthew



Suggested responses to questions about Matthew 2:1-23

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. 1 Samuel 16:1-13 describes how God led the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David as king of Israel. Since the Messiah had been prophesied to be from the line of David, Bethlehem was fitting place for the Messiah to be born. Bethlehem means “house of bread,” and in John 6:51, Jesus speaks of himself in the Eucharist saying: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Jesus gives himself to men and women in the Eucharist. Paragraph 1405 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Every time this mystery [of the Eucharist] is celebrated, ‘the work of our redemption is carried on’ and we ‘break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food with makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ.’”
2. Herod was a paranoid ruler who would have done anything to protect his throne—even have his own children put to death—so news of the birth of a new king of the Jews would have troubled him greatly. Herod feared fulfillment of the prophecy of Numbers 24:17: “[A] star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth.” In a continuation of the same prophecy, Numbers 24:18 foretold that the people from whom Herod was descended, the Edomites, would “be dispossessed . . . while Israel does valiantly.”
3. Micah 5:2 records this messianic prophecy: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days.” In 2 Samuel 5:2, this messianic prophecy is recorded in conjunction with David and his heirs: “In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and the LORD said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’”
4. Paragraph 528 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the “great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East. . . . In the magi, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. . . . [They] seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations.” The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh represent the kingship of Jesus, his priesthood and divinity, and his sacrificial death.
5. In Matthew 2:8, Herod instructed the wise men: “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” In Matthew

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2:12, the wise men are warned in a dream not to return to King Herod, so they go home by another route.

6. Matthew 1:20-21 and Matthew 2:13-22 record that Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, has prophetic dreams. Genesis 37:5-11 describes the prophetic dreams of Joseph, the eleventh son of the Old Testament patriarch Jacob. In Matthew 2:13-15 and Genesis 45:16-20, both Josephs rescue their families by taking them to Egypt. Matthew 1:16 and Genesis 30:19-24 record that both Josephs had fathers named Jacob. Matthew 1:19 and Genesis 39:7-18 record that both were just, chaste men—the Old Testament Joseph could be trusted with the wife of his master Potiphar, and the New Testament Joseph could be trusted with the spouse of his Master.
7. The prophecy in Hosea 11:1: “[O]ut of Egypt I called my son,” recalls Moses leading God’s chosen people out of Egypt. In Exodus 4:22-23a, God says to Moses: “And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’”” Paragraph 530 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Jesus’ departure from Egypt recalls the exodus and presents him as the definitive liberator of God’s people.” *Responses to the last part of this question will vary.* Some similarities between Moses and Jesus include—both their lives were threatened as infants by imperial decree (*Ex* 1:15-16 and *Mt* 2:16), both were protected by a member of their immediate family (*Ex* 2:1-10 and *Mt* 2:13-15), both found sanctuary in Egypt (*Ex* 2:5-10 and *Mt* 2:14-15), and both were called back to their homes after a period of exile (*Ex* 4:19 and *Mt* 2:20).
8. Matthew 2:16 records that when Herod learns that he’s been tricked by the wise men he goes into “a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under,” an act that fulfilled the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not.” The city of Ramah was located a few miles north of Jerusalem and was associated with sorrow and exile because it was the place where the Jews, in the eighth century B.C., crossed over into Babylonian captivity. Isaiah 10:29 records: “[T]hey have crossed over the pass, at Geba they lodge for the night; Ramah trembles.” Hosea 5:8 describes the same event: “Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Bethaven; tremble, O Benjamin!” And in Jeremiah 40:1 it’s written: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.”
9. Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife who was unable to bear children for many years but finally gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin—Jacob’s youngest sons. She died giving birth to Benjamin, and Genesis 35:19 records that “she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is Bethlehem).”
10. The statement in Matthew 2:23: “He shall be called a Nazarene,” is attributed to “the prophets” rather than to one specific prophet. This suggests that Matthew is pointing to the

numerous references to the Messiah as a branch on the family tree of Jesse, the father of David—especially this reference in Isaiah 11:1-2: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.”

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.

Matthew Notes