



Worship the King

JESUS THE SAVIOR IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 2:1-12 Memory Verse: Matthew 2:11

Most people share a love for Christmas, but they may have different ideas of what Christmas means. If you ask the average person about the reason for the season, you may hear answers like family gatherings, gifts, delicious food, beautiful decorations, moving music, and special church services. Scrooges among us might counter with words like family conflict, extra debt, weight gain, heartburn, hard travel, and cold weather.

Honestly, both groups miss the point. They are focusing on things, while Christmas is really all about a person. They fail to see the Savior beyond all the stuff.

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. No matter how many times His story gets told, it never gets old. Christmas is about a child announced by angels, born in a stable, visited by shepherds, and worshiped by wise men. This child was unique—born to a young Jewish virgin through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. And this baby was born for one purpose—to live and die for you and me. He is why I love Christmas.



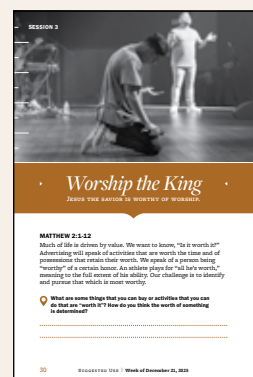
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Much of life is driven by value. We want to know, “It is worth it?” Advertising will speak of activities that are worth the time and of possessions that retain their worth. We speak of a person being “worthy” of a certain honor. An athlete plays for “all he’s worth,” meaning to the full extent of his ability. Our challenge is to identify and pursue that which is most worthy. (PSG, p. 30)

What are some things that you can buy or activities that you can do that are “worth it”?
How do you think the worth of something is determined?



Understand the Context (Matthew 1:1–2:23)

All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16), including genealogical lists. Emphasizing Jesus’s Jewish heritage, Matthew began with Abraham and traveled through the centuries to Christ. His list includes kings and commoners, as well as four women (Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary), which was unusual for ancient genealogies.

Readers find Boaz, the son Rahab (a harlot) and the husband of Ruth (a Moabite). The prominence of Solomon makes sense, but the mention of his mother, Bathsheba, reminds us of David’s adultery and conspiracy to murder Uriah. Actually, inclusion of the good and the bad offers confidence in the authenticity of Scripture and gives us hope that Christ came to save sinners.

Matthew’s account ends with Joseph. He was the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Instead of describing Mary’s experience with the angelic annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), Matthew focused on Joseph’s story.

The term “engaged” does not fully express the relationship of Joseph and Mary. Jewish custom had two marriage ceremonies separated by a year. After the first, the couple was considered husband and wife but did not engage in marital intimacy. So, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, he naturally assumed infidelity. A formal divorce was the only way their relationship could be severed according to Jewish law.

An angel intervened and assured Joseph of Mary’s faithfulness and affirmed the identity

of the child as the Son of God. These points are important as we consider today’s focal passage from Matthew 2. Matthew emphasized Jesus’s messianic role as the King of the Jews along with His position as the Son of God. He emphasized how this disturbed Herod the Great, who ruled Israel on behalf of the Romans.

In addition, wise men—possibly coming from Persia—arrived in Jerusalem looking for the new king. They had been alerted by a singular star they linked with the Messiah’s birth, suggesting they may have been astrologers. The legacy left by Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, and a host of exiled Jews in Persia included knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. They may have known about the predicted star of Jacob (Num. 24:17) and associated that prophecy with this unique star.

Urged to seek out the child by the deceitful Herod, the wise men followed the star until it led them to the house where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were staying. By this time, the family had relocated from the stable to a guest house. Joyously, the pilgrims worshiped the child and offered special presents. Since only God should be worshiped, the fact that Jesus received the worship of humans attests to His deity. He is God the Son.

Read Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; and Jeremiah 31:15 in your Bible, then locate these quotations in Matthew 1–2. Why did Matthew quote Old Testament prophecies so many times in his Gospel? (PSG, p. 31)



INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 30 of the PSG.

ASK:

What are some things that you can buy or activities that you can do that are “worth it”? How do you think the worth of something is determined? (PSG, p. 30)

CONTEXT:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and remind adults that the first two sessions examined the early days of Jesus's ministry on earth. Share that this session will backtrack a couple of chapters and focus on events related to His birth.

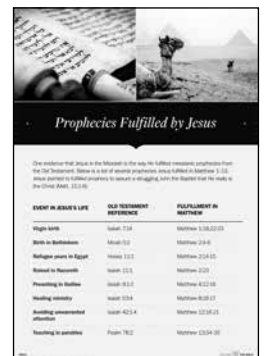
RECAP:

Note that while Mark and Luke wrote for Gentile audiences, Matthew wrote to Jewish readers. Share the following content from page 31 of the PSG to explain how this influenced Matthew's style and approach:

Matthew incorporated numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus. Two of these Old Testament prophecies [Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2] are found in the context for this week's study. Matthew began his Gospel account by tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who was engaged to Mary.

EXPLAIN:

Emphasize that Matthew's point was that Jesus is the Messiah, so He is worthy of our worship. Note that while our earthly ventures may or may not yield dividends, whole-hearted devotion and worship of Jesus is always worth the investment.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play “Worthy of Worship” (*Baptist Hymnal* 2008, No. 3) by Terry W. York and invite the group to list all of the human investments required for worship. Play the song a second time and instruct the group to identify reasons those investments are warranted. Ask: ***What would you add to either one of these lists?***

Seeking the King (Matt. 2:1-3)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

(v. 1) Rather than having only one witness to Jesus’s life, the Holy Spirit inspired four Gospel writers. Each offers a slightly different, but accurate, view of various events. Together, they compose a panorama of insight into Christ.

Following the genealogies and Joseph’s encounter with an angel, Matthew picked up the story *after Jesus was born*. Based on Matthew 2:16, this scene could have happened a year or two following His birth, but the scene remains in **Bethlehem of •Judea**, a small village just a few miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Rather than giving a specific date, Matthew cited *the days of King Herod*. Ruling Jewish territory under the appointment of the Roman government, Herod the Great was an unpopular, but powerful, tyrant. Ruthless, he used every tactic to gain and maintain his position.

During Herod’s reign, *wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem*. Being from “the east” may mean they came from Persia. Various scholars have described them as astrologers, magicians, or sorcerers based on references to royal advisers during Daniel’s era (Dan. 2:2; 4:7). By designating them “wise men,” Matthew may have been emphasizing their scholarly wisdom.

(v. 2) Arriving in Jerusalem, they began asking about a newborn *king of the Jews*. The capital city was the natural location for someone who would be the king. The manner of their inquiry does not suggest a child born to Herod. Although he had numerous children, none was designated as his successor.

If they came from Persia, the wise men likely were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures due to Jewish influence in that region after the Babylonian exile. They probably knew about messianic prophecies, including the Messiah’s connection with the star of Jacob (Num. 24:17).

When they saw a particular star that stood out from the rest, they identified it as the new King’s star. Somehow, God helped them recognize that this star signified the Messiah, who would be

King of the Jews. The wise men were divinely led. They expected this child would be no ordinary monarch because they came *to worship him*, an act reserved for God.

Key Doctrine

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (See Luke 1:35; Hebrews 1:1-3.)

(v. 3) Since the seekers were looking for a king, they may have gone directly to Herod’s palace. However, it would have been unusual for foreigners to have direct access to the king without some type of diplomatic introduction. The phrase *when King Herod heard this* suggests they began by inquiring among various priests or learned persons in the city.

In any case, Herod was *deeply disturbed*. He was not the natural heir to the Jewish throne. With roots in the Gentile region of Idumea (an area south of Judea), he had gained his position through political maneuvering. If a genuine claimant to Israel’s royal line had arrived, Herod would be greatly concerned.

The term “disturbed” connotes severe mental and emotional anguish. News of the wise men’s inquiry spread through the city, leaving *all Jerusalem* on edge. Some scholars believe the term “all Jerusalem” primarily refers to the religious community—the chief priests and scribes (see v. 4). However, it’s reasonable to take the statement as is and consider the effect an emotionally unstable Herod might have on the entire city.

We should recognize Jesus as the one, true King—not just of Jews, but of everyone. He is our Savior, Lord, and King. As such, He deserves our allegiance and obedience in context.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We can recognize Jesus as the one, true King.

Guide the group to read Matthew 2:1-3 silently and to look for information they may not have noticed in the past.

DESCRIBE:

Direct adults to work in pairs to scan the information for verse 1 (PSG, pp. 32-33) and to record information about the wise men in the margins of their PSGs. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Messianic Prophecies*) as an additional resource. After a few minutes, allow some volunteers to share what they discovered. Use page 42 of the Leader Guide to supplement the discussion.

ASK:

How did Herod respond to the wise men's inquiries? Why?

RECAP:

Summarize the following information from page 34 of the PSG to provide more context about Herod:

"Herod ruled as king of the Jews from 37 BC to his death in 4 BC. While he is known for many building projects including an extensive renovation of the Jerusalem temple, he is better known for his insane fear of losing his throne. He exhibited constant paranoia that someone was going to steal his throne. To satisfy his fears, Herod had his wife, three sons, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law killed because he thought they were trying to take over his throne. As he approached death, he had leading citizens of Jerusalem imprisoned with the instruction that upon his death, they were to be killed. His reasoning was no one would weep when he died, but at least when these prominent Jews died, there would be weeping on the day of his death."

STATE:

That makes it easier to understand why all of Jerusalem was troubled when Herod was disturbed. But it didn't stop the wise men from seeking the true King of the Jews.

ASK:

In what ways is Jesus a King? (PSG, p. 34) Discuss the group's responses. Emphasize that Jesus isn't just the King of the Jews. Share that He is the King of all creation, and we are called to recognize Him as our Ruler and as the One who is worthy of all worship.

Finding the King (Matt. 2:4-8)

4 So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

(v. 4) The word **Messiah** means the “Anointed One.” In terms of language, “Messiah” is the Hebrew rendering, while Greek translates *Christos* or Christ.

For his part, Herod was both informed and ignorant about the Messiah’s role. To a degree, he may have understood that “King of the Jews” referred to the Messiah. However, like many in his day, he missed the Messiah’s true, spiritual significance. Instead, the “king of the Jews” reacted to the “King of the Jews” as a threat to his power.

Herod also demonstrated a profound lack of knowledge regarding the details of messianic prophecy. To gain more information, he gathered the nation’s religious leaders, **the chief priests and scribes**. The term “chief priests” does not refer only to the High Priest, but to the leaders among the priests. “Scribes” made handwritten copies of the Scriptures. More important, they were masters of the Mosaic law who taught its meaning to the people. Herod **asked them where the Messiah would be born**. As we will see, he wanted more than an answer to give the wise men.

(vv. 5-6) The leaders told Herod that the Messiah would be born **in Bethlehem . . . of Judea**. This small village, with a name that means “house of bread,” also was the birthplace of King David. “Judea” distinguished it from another Bethlehem in northern Israel. The religious experts noted that the prophecy was **written by the prophet**, quoting part of Micah 5:2.

The scribes and priests knew the text, but they showed no interest in finding the long-awaited Christ. The reference to Micah’s prophecy was key to Matthew’s argument that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Christ because He fulfilled messianic prophecy.

As noted, Bethlehem had been the home of David, but Micah foretold the birth of a much

greater King, a Ruler who would come **out of you** and **shepherd my people**. This statement also recalls the words applied to David, “You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be ruler over Israel” (2 Sam. 5:2). Jesus, however, would be the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His flock (John 10:11).

Scholars point out the phrases **by no means** and “shepherd my people Israel” are not verbatim quotations from Micah’s prophecy. Matthew was not saying these were part of Micah’s quotation, but rather he reported what the scribes told Herod. Scribes typically added extrapolations as part of their interpretations. This pattern does not affect the validity of the original prophecy.

(v. 7) Getting what he wanted, Herod dismissed the leaders and **secretly summoned the wise men**. He inquired about **the exact time the star appeared**. Based on Ezra’s journey four centuries earlier, a trip from Babylon could have taken four months. A trip originating in Persia would have been even longer (Ezra 7:9). The star probably appeared even earlier than that, allowing time for them to prepare for their journey. So, Jesus may have been born at least a year before the wise man arrived in Jerusalem.

(v. 8) Herod told the wise men to search **carefully** for the King in **Bethlehem**, possibly as his emissaries. They were to make sure they found the right child and then **report back** to him. True to his deceitful nature, Herod told them he wanted to **worship** the child, as well. As we see later, the king was bent on homicide, not homage.

We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Details foretold centuries earlier came to pass through His birth. Prophecies concerning the Messiah’s life, death, and resurrection also would be realized in Jesus alone.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Lead the group to read Matthew 2:4-8 silently to track the next steps of Herod. Draw attention to Herod's need to fill gaps in his knowledge of Scripture.

ASK:

Why would prophecy be important to understanding who Jesus is both then and now?

SHARE:

Point out that the prophecy found in Micah 5:2 was key to Matthew's argument that Jesus was the Messiah. Direct attention **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus*). Note that the first three prophecies relate to Jesus's birth. Emphasize that we can know He is the Christ because He fulfilled messianic prophecy.

RECAP:

Summarize the following content from page 36 of the PSG to illustrate the true character and motives of Herod:

"In light of this revelation to Herod of the birthplace of this King, he hatched a terrible and murderous plot. [His] desire to know "the exact time the star appeared" was to ascertain the approximate age of the child. This would prove useful when he issued a death warrant for every male child two years and under living in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16). . . . He certainly had no intentions of joining the wise men in worshiping the Christ child."

STATE:

Neither Herod nor the leaders were interested in finding the Messiah for the right reasons. In contrast, the wise men longed to worship the King whom God was revealing to them.

ASK:

How can you help people come to know Jesus as their King?
(PSG, p. 36)

Group Activity Option

Charades

Before the session, enlist two adults for charades. During the session, allow the adults to act out their words as the group guesses. Share that some people play a game of "spiritual charades" at Christmas. Note that, like Herod and the religious leaders, they go through the motions of honoring Jesus, but their hearts are not in it. Challenge adults to evaluate their hearts this Christmas and to ask God to help them respond with proper motives, not religious rituals.

Worshipping the King (Matt. 2:9-12)

9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

(v. 9) Each aspect of Jesus’s story proclaims His divine nature. The wise men came to worship the Messiah. *After hearing the king*, the wise men followed his directions and *went on their way* to complete their search.

As they traveled, they saw *the star* again. The original wording suggests a sudden reappearance, but they recognized it as the unique sign they had previously followed.

Supernaturally, the star *stopped above the place where the child was*. No typical explanations of stars fit this description. If it had been an alignment of planets, it would not have moved before them. If it had been a comet, it could not have stopped moving. But this star identified both the town of Bethlehem and the specific place where Jesus’s family was staying.

(vv. 10-11) Upon seeing the star again, the wise men reacted intensely. *They were overwhelmed with joy*. This phrase could literally be rendered “rejoiced with exceedingly greatest joy.” They did not try to explain or define the star. It was enough that divine intervention had led them to the divine child. Having given birth in the humble stable, Mary and Joseph now lived in a *house*.

The sight of *the child with Mary his mother* moved the wise men even more than the star. They immediately responded by *falling to their knees*, and *they worshiped him*. The original language describes prostration as an act of reverence. No ordinary child or king deserves worship. But, as these Gentiles fell on their faces before Jesus, they represented God’s love for the entire world.

Giving is one way we worship. The wise men *opened their treasures*. They didn’t simply offer a few baubles for the child. The phrase implies they emptied their treasure boxes and *presented him with gifts*.

Offering three types of gifts unnecessarily gives rise to the conjecture that there were three men. They gave Him *gold*, which seemed fitting for the King of the Jews. They also offered *frankincense*, a substance used in the temple and appropriate for humanity’s heavenly High Priest. Finally, without understanding its fuller meaning, they gave Him *myrrh*, a spice used in preparing bodies for burial.

(v. 12) We don’t know how long the wise men stayed or what they shared with Mary and Joseph. At the least, they stayed nearby as they were *warned in a dream not to go back to Herod*. As with Joseph who later would be alerted to danger (Matt. 2:13), the wise men understood Herod’s evil intentions.

Having fulfilled their quest, the wise men started home *by another route*. They would not risk Jesus’s life (or their own) by going back to Jerusalem.

We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship. Perhaps we worship through our gifts, our songs, our prayers, our lives, or our service. Whatever the mode, we bow before the Lord in love and adoration as we worship Him.

Bible Skill

Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary to help understand a passage.

Use a concordance to find references in Scripture to “myrrh” and “frankincense.” (See Gen. 37:25; Ex. 30:23,34-37; Esth. 2:12; Ps. 45:8; John 19:39.) Read about “myrrh” and “frankincense” in a Bible dictionary. Make a list of the various ways these spices were used in biblical times.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship.

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 2:9-12 as the group considers the emotions the wise men may have felt at different moments in these verses.

ASK:

What motivated the wise men's incredible sense of joy?

RECAP:

To highlight the wise men's response, summarize this content from page 37 of the PSG:

"The wise men were overwhelmed with joy. The Greek text piles up superlatives here—'they gladly rejoiced exceedingly with abundant joy and delight.' All the weeks and months of anticipation were complete; they had reached their goal. The joy they experienced, no doubt, was brought about by the fact that the star pinpointed the very house in which Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child were living."

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to work in groups of two or three to read the passage again and to identify elements of worship. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share. Highlight the passion for reaching Jesus, as well as their willingness to bow down to Him and their gifts to Him. Suggest that genuine worship involves bowing our hearts to Jesus and giving ourselves to Him.

ASK:

What gifts can you offer to Jesus as an act of worship?
(PSG, p. 38)

MEMORIZE:

Highlight Matthew 2:11 as the session's memory verse and repeat it together. Encourage adults to continue memorizing it this week. Suggest they spend time leading up to Christmas asking God to guide them toward worshiping the Savior well.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Collectibles

Prior to the session, research some valuable collectibles online. (*Examples: vinyl albums, toys, paintings, and so forth*) Show the group some photos of valuable items. Ask: **How much do you think each of these is worth?** Share the asking prices. Note that something's value may be inherent or may depend on what someone is willing to pay. Emphasize that Jesus's value is inestimable and that He is inherently worthy of our worship. Say: *His value is not based on any amount we could pay, but on the price He paid for us.*

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 39 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- We can recognize Jesus as the one, true King.
- We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.
- We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship.

STATE:

The wise men's reverence and passion provide us with a wonderful example of what it means to recognize and acknowledge the Christ—whether during the Christmas season or during any other season of the year.

GUIDE:

Direct adults to the second set of questions on page 39 of the PSG. Encourage them to share things they consider worthy or valuable. List their responses on the board. Remind them that the true message of Christmas points us to the Savior, the One whose worth is beyond measure.

REFLECT:

Encourage adults to respond to the first set of questions on page 39 of the PSG during the week. Challenge them to find ways to connect in worship with other adults as they prepare to celebrate Christmas this week and move toward the new year in the weeks to come.

PRAY:

Invite adults to offer sentence prayers, simple declarations to share their devotion to Jesus.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group to encourage them to remember the gift of Jesus, as well as anything they need to present to Him in the days to come. Suggest that such an offering might include a special offering to the church, missions, or a needy family. Point out that physical and material offerings are meaningful acts of worship, just like bowing, praying, singing, and service.

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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

First Century Bethlehem

Dennis Cole



When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, this corner of the Roman world was undergoing dramatic changes. Herod the Great served as a client king to the Caesar Augustus (Octavius), with lesser responsibility given to the regional governor, Quirinius (Luke 2:1-12). Under Herod, numerous building projects had been launched, including work at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. When completed in all of its magnificent array, the

Temple Mount would gleam as one of the largest temple complexes in the entire Roman world, larger than the entire Acropolis in Athens.

Economically, Judea was experiencing tremendous wealth and prosperity under Herod's accomplished financial and political savvy. His investments in trade, mining, and agriculture enabled him to carry out the building projects and establish a loyal network of political bureaucrats, which was important for a king known for his personal paranoia and political assassinations.

Socially and religiously, the region experienced an undercurrent of instability. In a realm known for its staunch commitment to the Jewish faith, sectarianism was becoming more and more fragmented. Beyond the temple-minded Sadducees and the Pharisees, whose focus was on the law, the Essenes, Zealots, and other groups with religious-political goals gained influence. At the same time, the common people were often neglected, creating strife between social classes.

Just a few miles south of Jerusalem sat the village suburb of Bethlehem. Though often in Jerusalem's shadow, Bethlehem boasted an illustrious past of its own. The site was first mentioned as Ephrath, just south of where Rachel died after giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:19; 48:7). Salma, a grandson of Caleb, was called the father of Bethlehem (1 Chron. 2:51).

Israelite inhabitants in Bethlehem are known from the time of the judges (Judg. 17:7). Bethlehem was home to Elimelech and Naomi who

“They had to make do with what was available, preparing for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior born King of the Jews.”

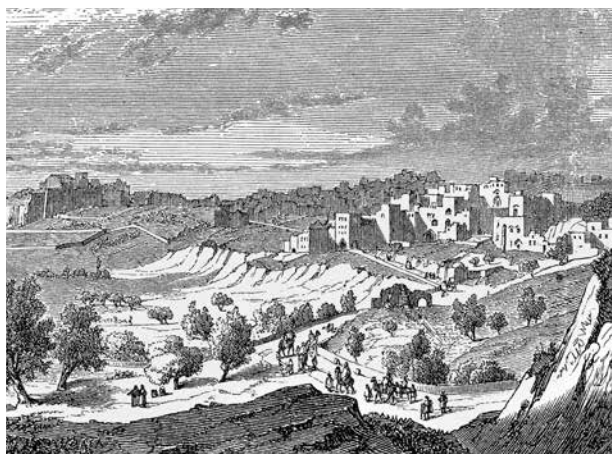
went to live in Moab during a time of famine. After Elimelech and the couple’s two sons died, Naomi returned to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth. Boaz, who was also of the clan of Elimelech, became Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer in accordance with Israelite law (Lev. 25:25; Deut. 25:7-9).

In addition, Bethlehem was the hometown of David, the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth, through Obed and Jesse. This was the line of earthly kings through which the Messiah, the ultimate King, would come.

Bethlehem, which means “house of bread,” rose to prominence after Samuel anointed David as the second king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1-13), though the Philistines established a military outpost there while Saul was still king (2 Sam. 23:13-17). According to Micah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah (Mic. 5:2), a great ruler of timeless origin would rise from Bethlehem and shepherd God’s flock in righteousness and peace.

Micah’s prophecy was familiar to the religious leaders of Jerusalem whom Herod summoned when the wise men sought Israel’s new king (Matt. 2:1-8). Matthew recorded that the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem (2:9-12). Later, after the wise men avoided Herod and went home another way, the king ordered the slaughter of all male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem (2:13-18). An angel told Joseph, Mary’s husband, to escape to Egypt with his family and to stay there until Herod’s death. Afterward they moved to Nazareth.

The duration of their stay in Bethlehem is unspecified, but the simple austerity of the setting of Jesus’s birth is magnified by Luke’s story (Luke 2:1-7) of the inn and the inability of Joseph and Mary to find lodging. Small towns had fewer guest rooms for travelers. Even those that could be found often did not have quality accommodations, especially for delivering a baby.



The term “manger” refers to a feeding trough, often hewn out of a block of limestone, a material that was common to Judea’s hill country. The manger might have been located in an animal quartering structure adjacent to the inn or in a nearby cave as early Christian tradition preserves.

The inn of Bethlehem is depicted by the Greek term *kataluma*, the same term Luke used in referring to the “upper room” (or “guest room”) where Jesus shared the Passover meal with His disciples (Luke 22:11). The word is used in Hellenistic literature to denote a resting place, a guest chamber in a house, or a public facility providing quarters for overnight lodging.

However, no such room was available in the guest house for Joseph and Mary. They had to make do with what was available, preparing for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior born King of the Jews.

Dennis Cole is professor of archaeology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. This article originally appeared in the Winter 2002-03 edition of *Biblical Illustrator*. Used with permission.