

Bible Background

When Jesus was born, many hundreds of years after the events of Exodus with Moses and the Israelites, the descendants of the Israelites were part of the Roman Empire. As a result, they were ruled by a king who had been appointed by the caesar in Rome. This king's name was Herod, and he took threats to his rule very seriously.

Matthew 2 tells the story of some magi who came to Jerusalem in search of “the newborn king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). These magi—who were most likely from Persia—are established as astrologers, since they tell Herod they have seen a star heralding the arrival of the newborn king.

Herod is troubled by the magi's news. He asks for more information, saying he wants to honor the newborn king himself. But Herod has no plans to honor this king. He knows the signs the magi saw in the stars have nothing to do with him or his sons. He is only king because Rome has no interest in directly ruling Judea on their own. Furthermore, Herod is not a descendant of King David, unlike Jesus whose genealogy at the beginning of Matthew notes his royal ancestry. Therefore this child born in Bethlehem, in the city of David, has more legitimacy to Israel's throne than Herod does. This sends Herod—as well as anyone who benefits from his rule—into desperation.

Herod sends the magi on to Bethlehem with instructions to return with more information about the child. The magi arrive and meet Jesus, fall to their knees paying homage to this newborn king, and present him with gifts. This recognition of the kingship of Jesus by Gentiles in this moment marks the beginning of a new community that recognizes Jesus and praises him as Lord. It shows us that his kingship is not just for Israel, but for us all. The magi are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. They return home, but by a different route so as to not risk meeting Herod's people along the way. Herod ruled by fear, but the magi fear God and are guided to protect this newborn king by their hope in this new kingdom.

The call from God can come in many different ways. Heroes listen to God and await God's call! The cosmic signs that led the magi to Jesus should not be all that surprising to us—after all, this newborn king is the same person who will, years later, calm the winds and the seas in Matthew 8. God sends the magi back home to bear witness to the love and joy they have experienced meeting Jesus. We are called to bear witness to our own experiences under Jesus' lordship, sharing that same love and joy with others. At Hero Hotline VBS, we are learning how exciting life can be when we listen for God's call!



Bible Story

The Magnificent Magi
Matthew 2:1-12

Hotline Verse

So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.
(Romans 14:19)

Hotline Tip

Heroes are called to...
Listen to God!

Teacher Tip

This Bible Background feature is a supplemental aid provided for you, the Storyteller, to give context for each session's story before you teach on it. You may share this information with your Heroes, if desired, but it is not a recommended portion of the intended lesson.