

# A Just King Is Born

Printed Text • Matthew 2:1–12

Devotional Reading • Exodus 34:1–10

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLAIN how the wise men point to the inclusion of the marginalized, GRIEVE for those who suffer innocently due to the world's brokenness and sin, and IDENTIFY with the wise men's decision to perform an act of civil disobedience.

## In Focus

Edward had been living in El Paso, Texas, for about a year after he moved from Washington, DC. The cost of living had gotten too high for him to maintain in DC, so he saved up, found an apartment, and got a part-time job at a small restaurant while he looked for a better position. One day while he was at the restaurant, a lady came in carrying a small child who was probably about 2 years old. She looked like she hadn't bathed in days and the baby was crying. Edward tried speaking to her and realized she didn't speak English.

Edward felt moved to offer her something to eat, so he went to the kitchen to check with his manager about giving her some food and some oatmeal for the child. His manager replied that he didn't like to give away free food, but he would make an exception since Edward seemed so moved.

Then Edward heard sirens outside as he walked back to the front of the restaurant. He figured it was police, but then he saw the immigration van. His heart sank. What should he do?

*The laws of the land often seem to least protect the lives of the most vulnerable people. Widows, children, and immigrants can easily be overlooked or even opposed by those with power and authority who see the actions of the vulnerable as threats to order instead of cries for help. How do we discern God's justice when the innocent are in danger?*

## Keep In Mind

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh." (Matthew 2:11, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Wiseman** (Matthew 2:7) magos (Gk.) – Name for an important courtly astrologer, seers, etc., from the Persian or Babylonian area

**B. Worship** (v. 8) proskuneo (Gk.) – To adore or reverence; to bow down or even lie down on the ground before the object of our worship

## Say It Correctly

**Magi.** MAH-jie

**Archelaus.** AR-keh-LAY-us

## KJV

**Matthew 2:1** Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

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

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

## NLT

**Matthew 2:1** Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking,

2 "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

3 King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem.

4 He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:

6 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared.

8 Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

9 After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

11 They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Magi.** Matthew 2 opens with wise men coming from “the East.” To people of New Testament days, that would probably have been from Persia, modern-day Iran. This was a center of much belief in astrology. The Bible makes very clear that the study of horoscopes is wrong (Deuteronomy 4:19; 18:9–14; Isaiah 47:11–14), but sometimes God uses the unexpected to bring people to Himself. God most fully revealed Himself to humans through Jesus, but He also uses nature to reveal Himself to all people—not just Judeans of the first century AD. These Magi seem to be responding to “general revelation” that God provided for them in the stars (Deuteronomy 4:19). In calling these Gentiles from far away, God showed that Christ came for us all.

The wise men were astrologers and saw some sort of unusual star (possibly a conjunction of planets) that indicated to them that a new king of the Jews was born; and so they traveled to Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, where they expected to see this baby. They almost certainly arrived in a great caravan with many servants. Scripture mentions three gifts (Matthew 2:11), but it does not say how many wise men there were, nor does it say they came riding on camels—it may have been horses. Their arrival caused quite a stir in Jerusalem, especially as they were asking about the birth of a king.

## Background

Herod the Great was the provincial king of Judea who governed from 37 BC until his death around 4 BC. He was a Jewish king, but worked on behalf of the Roman Empire that actually ruled the region. He was known for his tremendous architectural feats, supervising construction and design of many Romanized cities in Judea and most famously the renovating of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Herod the Great was also known for his terrible violence that was fueled by paranoia. He is said to be responsible for the murders of not only enemies, but also several of his own children and wives that he felt threatened his position. By the first century AD, the oppressive rule of the Romans—who were known for executing anyone who questioned their rule and allowing Herod and his colleagues to charge the Judeans excessive taxes—had led to a height of expectation that the Messiah would come to liberate Judah from its oppressors. It was into this environment that Jesus was born, not as the king that was expected, but as a baby boy born to a poor and faithful woman and her new husband from a small village.

*Why is it important to hold people accountable in weak areas even when they are gifted in other areas?*

### At-A-Glance

1. Revelation from Outsiders (Matthew 2:1–3)
2. Information from Insiders (vv. 4–8)
3. The Savior at His Mother’s Side (vv. 9–12)

## In Depth

### 1. Revelation from Outsiders (Matthew 2:1–3)

Jesus was born just a few years after the Second Temple in Jerusalem was completed. His mother Mary and her husband Joseph were from Nazareth, which was a little village near the Sea of Galilee, north of the big city Jerusalem. They had come to Bethlehem to be counted in Caesar Augustus’ census because Joseph’s family was from Bethlehem. Matthew 1 traces Joseph’s lineage, which

puts him firmly in the line of King David, and Jesus as the son of David born in the hometown of David.

The Wise Men, also called Magi, were eastern experts in sacred texts and astrologers who were likely from the former Persian Empire. They were apparently familiar with Jewish traditions about the Messiah, and came to Jerusalem as men who did not know the Lord, but were interested in prophecies about the Savior King of the Jews. They were probably wealthy and influential, which is why they sought direction directly from King Herod to properly identify the Messiah and worship Him. They may have assumed that the prophesied king of the Jews would be easily found at the palace in the capital of Jerusalem. They were likely surprised to find out that the King of Judea did not know where the new king of the Jews was to be found.

The king and his subjects were surprised that there was another king of the Jews they hadn't heard about! This was the ultimate threat to King Herod. Influential foreigners knew about a Jewish prophecy that he was not aware of and had come to worship a newborn that was meant to take the throne of Judea from King Herod.

*How can someone's rules, assumptions, and behaviors keep other people from encountering Jesus?*

## **2. Information from Insiders (vv. 4–8)**

Herod moves to get more information and form a response to this news. This was Good News—Gospel for the world—but was taken as bad news for Herod and the elite. He gathers together the religious leaders in Jerusalem and inquires of them. The question he asks was reasonable and shows something about the culture. An expert in religious texts in that society could be expected to know where the Messiah would be born. The average person would not be able to recall that kind of information from casual study. It is both telling and can be criticized that the king of Judea did not know that information but had just finished rebuilding the most important place in the Jewish faith. He had centered his faith in outward appearances rather than inward devotion.

The religious leaders inform him that the Messiah was supposed to be born in Bethlehem. How do they know? They knew because they had meticulously studied the Scriptures and knew of the verse from Micah 5:2 (quoted in Matthew 2:6) that revealed the Ruler/Shepherd would come from Bethlehem. But they also knew it because the Messiah had to be from the line of David, and David was raised in Bethlehem.

Then Herod goes and speaks privately with the Wise Men. He did not want his plan foiled or his ignorance exposed to any outsiders. He gathers more information about when the star they had followed arose. Then he tells them to go find the Messiah and let him know where he is. Herod was clearly trying to use the Wise Men to get to the newborn Savior. Herod did not want to worship Him as he stated. He wanted to eliminate Him so he could stay in power. This powerful man was intimidated and willing to murder an innocent baby in order to maintain his position.

*What are some ways leaders need to learn from those they lead?*

## **3. The Savior at His Mother's Side (vv. 9–12)**

The Magi followed the star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The star led them right to the house where Mary was staying with her baby Jesus. They rejoiced to see the star rest over a particular place where they knew they would find the Savior. Their hope was rewarded as they saw the child with his mother and they were able to worship Him as they desired. They not only brought gestures of honor, but they

also brought very expensive gifts. These wealthy and influential men bowed to worship the Son of a poor girl from an unpopular village who was pregnant before she was married.

We do not know how many wise men were there, but three gifts are described: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Frankincense and myrrh were both powerful perfumes that were costly in Jesus' day. Myrrh was more commonly used for burials and the other for anointing kings. The Magi honored the Savior King who was born to die for the sins of the world. They were influential outsiders who were some of the first people to recognize, humble themselves, and worship the King of Israel. They represented—from the very beginning of the Gospel—that Jesus Christ was not simply Savior of the Jews, but the Savior of the world. They could have gone from that place and followed Herod's directions, which would have led to an attack on Jesus by Herod. But God was at work in the lives of these non-Jews. These religious outsiders, who did not have the background to follow God as the Jews did, were able to hear God clearly because they had humbled themselves to listen. The Lord warned them in a dream not to return to Herod and so they went back to their own country another way, disobeying King Herod to protect the King of Kings.

*What is the importance of Christmas in your life? How does God speak to you this season?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. How did the priests and religious leaders know Bethlehem was the place where the Messiah was born (Matthew 2:5–6)?
2. How did God communicate with the wise men even though they weren't Israelites (Matthew 2:9, 12)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. There are a variety of reactions to the birth of Jesus in our Scripture today, ranging from fear and anger to excitement and worship.
  - Why do people react so differently to Jesus?
  - How do you react to Jesus' birth?
  - Do you react differently knowing that following Jesus may cost your comfort and put you at odds with influential people?
2. The Magi remind us that it is not always the religious insiders who recognize God's work in the world.
  - How can we create room and be open to people whom we may not expect in church to come to know Jesus?
  - How can we invite them to worship with us, learn with us, and work with us for Kingdom-impact in our communities?

### **Liberating Lesson**

The story of Christmas and the Magi invites us to consider standing in solidarity with the most vulnerable among us. The Savior of the world was born as an innocent baby instead of descending from the heavens with angels. The Son of God, who had all glory, chose to be the Son of Man who was rejected by His own people. Our Savior King chose to give up heaven to love us and live with us on Earth.

The Magi were influential outsiders who were willing to leave their places of comfort and familiarity to find a newborn King who could be Savior of the world. They did not worry about being rejected because they weren't born into the chosen people; they humbled themselves to worship the Messiah. They were willing to risk upsetting the violent King Herod to protect the

innocent King Jesus and His family. They were willing to follow a God they just met and disobey the laws of a liar to show their devotion to the Light of the world.

We are called to follow the example of the Magi, and ultimately of Jesus. Will we give up or use our positions, our influence, our resources, our time, our reputations to worship God and protect the vulnerable? Will we risk upsetting unjust leaders to pursue true righteousness before God? Will we stand in humble solidarity with those at risk of being hurt the most? Will we care for the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, the prisoner, the vulnerable, and the innocent by giving of ourselves? Think about how you can challenge yourself and your church to live more into these calls of Jesus' birth and example this holiday season.

### **Application for Activation**

We are entering a new year next week, and often people make New Year's resolutions. But as we remember Jesus' birth and the Magi's worship of the Savior, let's make sure we put seeking God as the top priority of the New Year. How can we worship God in new ways in the New Year? How can we make seeking justice part of our worship? Take some time to pray and write down a person or group of people you want to advocate for, extend hospitality toward, or share Jesus with in the New Year. Spend the week praying for yourself and that person or group so that you can turn that compassion into Spirit-led action in the New Year.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

---

---

---

---

### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

---

---

---

---

## **More Light on the Text**

### **Matthew 2:1–12**

**1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.**

Matthew sets the stage in this introductory verse by identifying the place as Bethlehem and the time as the days of Herod the King. The specific historical context of Bethlehem tells the reader some things about Jesus. It reminds us that He is of the line of David, since Bethlehem was the city of David (1 Samuel 16:18). The name of the town means "house of bread," implying the area's agricultural bounty, an appropriate birthplace for the Bread of Life.

“In the days of Herod” refers to the time period when Herod and his sons ruled over a section of Judea (Matthew 2:1–3). By all accounts, this period was marked by political subjugation, religious interference, and conflict within the territories of Israel. According to scholars, Rome gave Herod the title “King of the Jews.” He was a psychologically troubled man who was so suspicious and paranoid that he executed one of his wives and two of his sons. The entire Herod family, including Herod the Great, was wicked and murderous (see Luke 13:31–32; 23:6–12; Acts 4:27). Herod had three surviving sons who divided up the kingdom and ruled after his death: Herod Archelaus, Herod Philip, and Herod Antipas (who executed John the Baptist, Luke 9:9, and participated in Jesus’ trial, Luke 23:11).

In the midst of Herod’s folly, wise men came. There were still people looking for the good. There were still human beings who were wise enough to seek out the good, not to kill and destroy, but to acknowledge good and give thanks. The wise men (Gk. magos, MAH-GOS) were men of rank who more than likely had wealth in abundance; they were considered by some early scholars to be kings. Origen, a third century theologian, identified three wise men, probably because of the three gifts, even though no definite number is mentioned in the biblical text.

### **2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.**

These wise men were usually knowledgeable in astrological analysis. We now know that African people were familiar with the constellations, and with that knowledge came the ability to interpret the effect of what was happening in the solar systems. The Dogon and Ibos people of West Africa exemplify such knowledge among African peoples. Of course, the ancient Egyptians knew the movement of heavenly bodies as well. Scholars debate whether these wise men came from Babylon, Persia, or Arabia, as the term “East” could mean any of these locations. Herodotus, an ancient historian, uses the term Magi for a class of priests in Persia.

They ask a question that changed the mindset of many throughout history and brought the people of God out of their sleepwalking. No longer would the people of Israel and their pretend king be able to avoid the divine interrogative. By asking this question, these wise ones were forcing Herod and his court to think about the promise of the everlasting God. Imagine, they were foreigners, but still the first to understand that the Messiah had come— they had seen His star! Not only did they see the sign, but they also came to worship. Remember, these men were deeply learned, but with all of their learning and wealth, they still came to worship. The word “worship” is the Greek word proskuneo (proce-koo-NEH-oh), meaning “to prostrate oneself in homage.” They came to give reverence and to adore this newborn King.

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

Herod, who perceived himself to be the foundation of power and sovereignty in Judah, heard this news and was troubled. The implication is that a king of Israelite descent had been born to replace the mean, destructive ruler Herod. The word translated “was troubled” is from the Greek word tarasso (ta-ra-SO), which means to “stir or to agitate.” Simply stated, Herod was angry. This man, who had worked so hard to be accepted by the people of Israel, now realized this threat could usurp his title.

This stirring was not just for Herod, but for all of Jerusalem. This is a city of peace gripped in fear, not because of an army, but because God has just arrived in the flesh. Herod represents the resistance of the world to the divine kingship represented by Jesus. Jerusalem shows the tendency of God’s people to let the fear of the world become their fear in the midst of the divine revelation.

**4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.**

In this verse, we see Herod's strategy for dealing with his troubled heart. First, he calls the very people who were guardians of the promise—the chief priests. Even though the word here (Gk. *archieras*, *are-KIE-air-oss*) can be translated as “high priest,” the word is clearly plural. There was only one high priest at a time, so this translation “chief priests” must refer to some elite group of priests, chief among the Levite clan. We also read here that Herod brought together the scribes (Gk. *grammateus*, *gram-mah-teh-OOSE*), referring to people vastly learned in linguistic and grammatical processes. They were also interpretive writers of divine proclamations who recorded various occurrences in relation to the Word of God. The idea here is that Herod gathered them together as God would have gathered them. They convened in response to what God was doing, but not with joy.

**5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet.**

Those who study God's revelation have a ready answer for Herod's question: Bethlehem. We find Matthew using his signature phrase: “thus it is written.” The Israelites always looked at what God spoke through the prophets to determine what was happening in the present. This passage states “the prophet,” yet has no name attached to it. For the Israelites, the prophet's identity (though known) was not important because the prophet simply acted as a foreteller. What is important to remember is that they saw the Scripture as being inspired by God. To them, these things were not mere poetic verses, but divine insight into the future.

**6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.**

Verse 6 is a paraphrase of Micah 5:2. This prophecy gave the religious leaders and the people hope that the promises made to their ancestors, via the prophets, would be fulfilled. This religious assembly had no problem stating that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Yet, all their belief, knowledge, and hope did not keep them from joining Herod in his paranoia. Bethlehem was the birthplace of their beloved king of Israel, David, who was the monarchical ancestor of the Messiah. The promise is made specifically to include the Israelites who were a part of Judah.

This verse features a correlation to the story of David. The Greek word *elachistos* (*eh-LACK-see-toce*) is translated “least”; it is the superlative form of the word *elachus*, which means “short.” It also means least in terms of size, quantity, or dignity. Recall that David, who was considered the “least,” was appointed king, and this event took place in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16). Even the prophet Samuel was misled by David's size (1 Samuel 16:7). Here the prophet Micah is emphatic: “thou Bethlehem ... art not the least.”

Implicit is the understanding that people might have considered Bethlehem to be of no consequence, just as David's father considered him to be of no consequence. Yet, in God's eyes, neither David nor Bethlehem were by any means “the least.” Economically, Bethlehem did not have the power to rival Jerusalem or Bethel. Yet God was about to do something great with it. Just as God looked beyond David's stature and anointed him king, so it would be with the city of the coming Messiah's birth. The passage states that something substantial—someone of importance—was going to come out of this city. Someone considered to be a nobody would emerge as a chief among leaders.

Verse 6 also describes what the leader will do. The Greek word used here for “rule” is *poimaino* (*poy-MY-no*), which means “to tend as a shepherd and to feed the sheep.” It was a common idiom from

the time of Homer to call leaders the “shepherds” of their people, so this verb for ruling is etymologically descended from the word for shepherd.

**7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.**

Having discovered that this King would be born among a people he thought inferior, Herod called the wise men privately (KJV: privily), to ask them when the Child was to be born. The verb phrase “enquired ... diligently” is translated from the Greek word akriboō (ah– kree-BOH–oh), meaning that he wanted the wise men to provide the exact or specific time of the star’s appearance.

Herod attempts to use these men of wisdom to lead him to the Christ child before any other news of the Messiah could spread. Herod lets them depart for the purpose of accomplishing an objective different from what he states. He hopes they will recognize the kingship of Herod as opposed to the King who had been divinely revealed to them. Again, they are to search for the child “diligently,” which is the adverbial form of the verb from the previous verse (Gk. akribos, ah–kree–BOCE). This highlights the determination of Herod as he sought to undermine the work of God.

**9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.**

The wise men did follow a number of the king’s suggestions. They did indeed traverse the land. They removed themselves from Herod’s presence. They did not stop their journey; they kept on walking in the light of the star. They were led by divine light, not by their own wisdom.

An important word here is the Greek word proago (pro–AH–go), which is translated as “go before.” The star is now seen as a princely messenger leading an audience into the presence of a powerful king. They were preceded by this divine messenger, which announced to them the place where God, in meekness, now lay.

Similarly, the light of God’s Word will lead us until we come to the time and place that He intends for us. The light of God’s presence will lead us to fulfill His purpose in our lives.

**10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.**

Here we read the wise men’s response. As you recall, when they were talking with Herod, the star was hidden from their sight. Now, “they saw the star” (v. 10). This second sight affirmed the experience they had back in their home town. Their knowledge was now confirmed by seeing the star again.

We are told that they “rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” The Greek word sphodra (SFODE–rah) translated as “exceeding,” can mean violently or vehemently. They might have burst into ecstatic dancing. Not only does Matthew use the word sphodra, he also adds another word, megas (Gk. MEH–gas) which literally means big. Translated, they were high in the spirit or they became loud in a mighty way.

**11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.**

The star guided the magi to the exact location in Bethlehem. They entered the house (Gk. oikia, oy-KEY-ah), which means residence. Note that the wise men are not at the stable; they are in the abode of the family. The Greek word heurisko (hyoo-REES-ko), translated here as "saw," is more literally translated "found." They found what they were looking for, as will any who truly seek Him (cf. Matthew 7:7).

They brought three gifts: gold, for Jesus as King; sweet-smelling frankincense, for burning in worship and prayer for Jesus the divine; and the embalming spice myrrh, for Jesus the crucified Savior. Much has been made of the symbolism of the gifts. Gold was a sign of wealth representing the king's or queen's ability to provide for his or her subjects. It was also used for religious ornamentation. The word "frankincense" (Gk. libanos, LEE-bah-NOCE) is taken from the Hebrew lebonah, which refers to the incense tree, as well as to incense itself. Myrrh (Gk. smurna, sm-EARN-ah) was an ointment used for burial in many African traditions. The perfumed or scented oil is still used in many parts of Africa and Asia today.

These wise ones had saved their treasures so they would be able to give. In fact, the word "treasure" (Gk. thesauros, theh-sow-ROCE) could also mean a deposit of wealth. We are told that they offered gifts to Him. The word for "gifts" is doron (Gk. doe-ROAN), which refers to "a present," but can specifically imply the sense of making a sacrifice.

## **12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.**

This verse deals with divine intervention to save the wise men from serving as instruments for Herod's work. We are told that God appeared and spoke to them in a dream (Gk. onar, OH-nar), which means an utterance similar to what occurred in oracles. For the first time in all of these conversations and in their long journeying, God speaks to the wise ones.

The word translated "warned" (Gk. chrematizo, kray-mah-TEED-zo) means that they were called or admonished. God revealed something to them. This dream was so authoritative that they did not return to Herod. After they had seen the Lord, they could not bear to think of Herod and his request. Instead, they went back to their homeland another way. The Greek word translated "departed" (anachoreo, ah-nah-kho-REH-oh) means that they turned aside; in this case they turned aside from the way of Herod. They withdrew themselves from their commitment to Herod. By doing this, God gave them divine progress. They thought they knew the way; or they may have thought that the only way back was through Herod's house. But God shows them that there is always another way to get out of a deal with the devil. He opens their eyes and shows them the divine highway leading to the will of God.

The wise men could have tried to excuse themselves from following God's message to them. After all, they were foreigners, only there by the grace of the host country. They did not follow the God of this area. They had made a promise to the nation's king that they would do as he asked. Should they lose their honor by breaking a promise? It was not their fault what the king did with the knowledge they gave him. But the wise men chose to rise above and uphold true justice. Likewise, we always have a choice to obey the just and righteous commands of God whenever they contradict unjust laws of our land.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

God's Chosen Nation  
(Psalm 33:1-12)

## **TUESDAY**

A People Whom God Has Blessed  
(Isaiah 61:4-9)

## **WEDNESDAY**

Mary, the Servant of the Lord  
(Luke 1:26-37)

## **THURSDAY**

May God's King Rule Justly  
(Psalm 72:1-8, 11-14)

## **FRIDAY**

God Lifts Up the Lowly  
(Luke 1:46-55)

## **SATURDAY**

Jesus Born Into an Unjust World  
(Luke 2:1-7)

## **SUNDAY**

God Avenges God's People  
(Matthew 2:1-12)