

The Story of the Magi – Matthew 2:1-12

Brief Commentary: Matthew's gospel, composed a half century after Jesus' life came to an enigmatic end, constructs this rich and fanciful tale about the beginning of a Galilean peasant rabbi's life that was portrayed by the gospel writer to be a threat to the established authorities from the start. Inherent in the story is proof-text fulfilment of various messianic prophecies (Micah 5:2 – the foretold birthplace of the anointed one) and the mythical tableau, where galaxies get rearranged and magicians from alien lands get the news before the proper authorities do. Matthew's "good news" message is intended to be shared with the larger non-Jewish audience to whom the gospel would increasingly be shared.



In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.



Triptych at right: Contemporary artist He Qi