

# WISE MEN

The Magi (traditionally the Wise Men) form a part of many Nativity scenes at Christmas time and are well known to Christians worldwide.

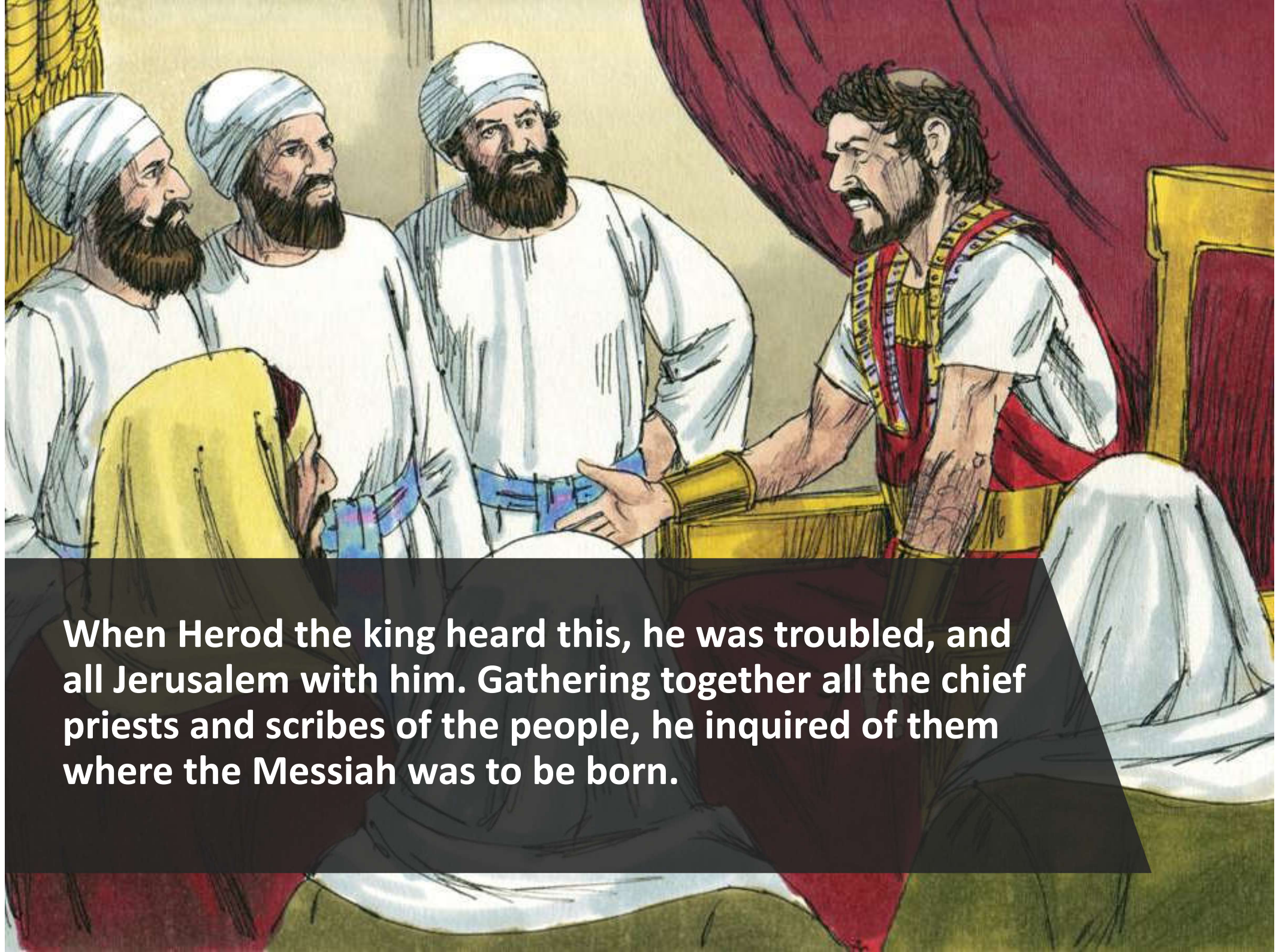


Matt 2:1-12 (NASB) Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem



**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.**





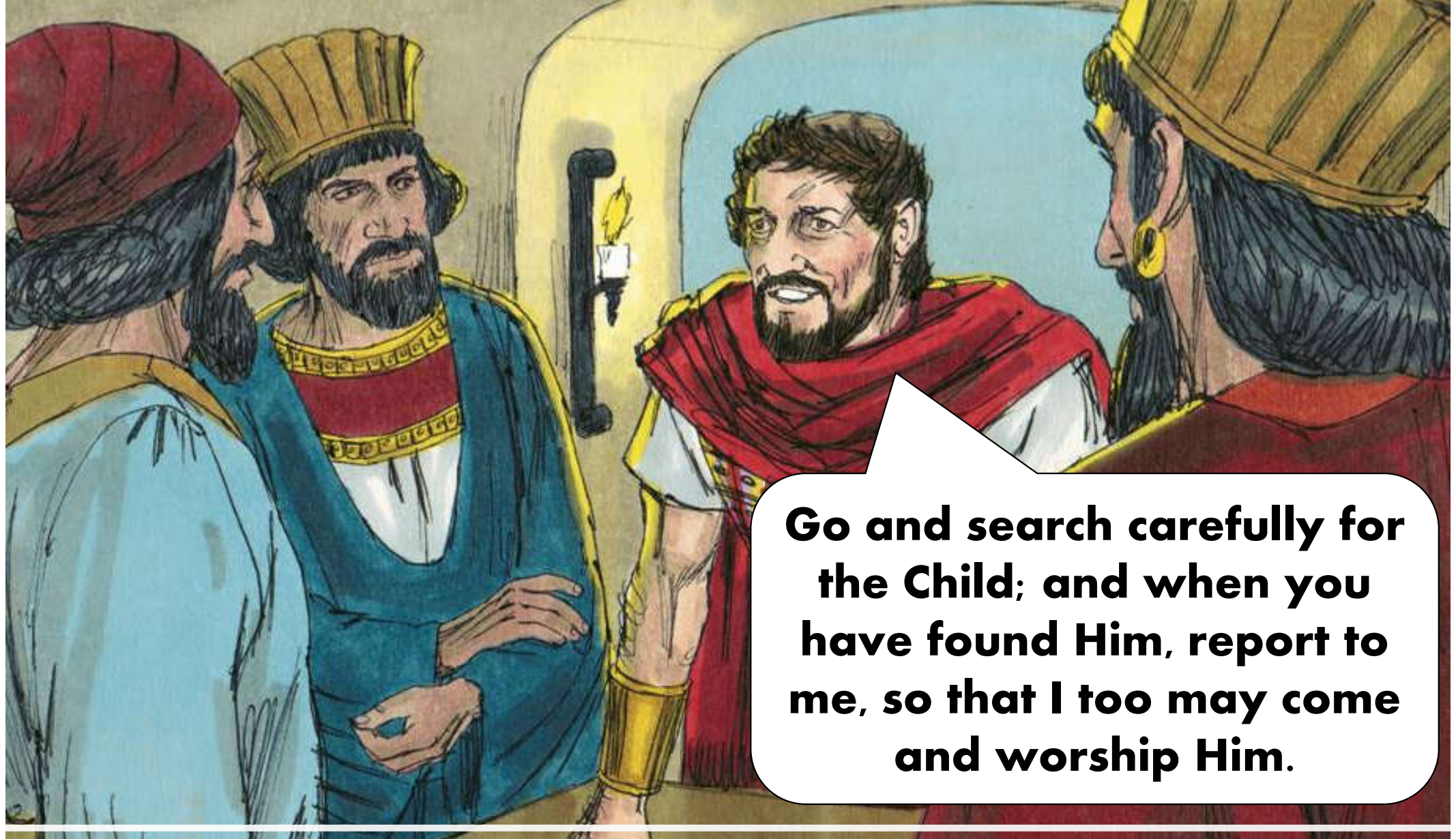
**When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.**



**In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'**



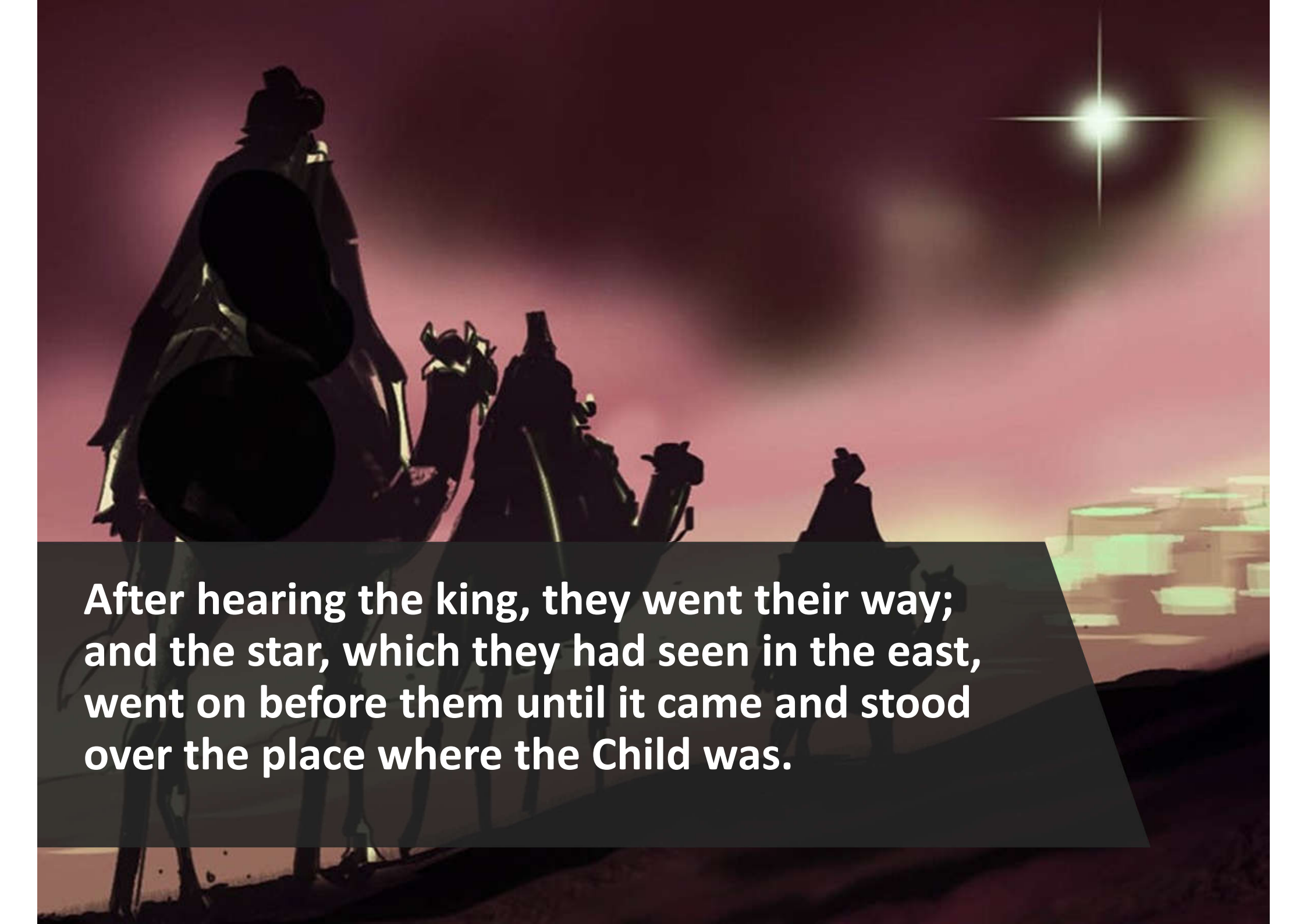




**Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.**

**Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.**



The image depicts the journey of the Three Kings. In the foreground, the silhouettes of three kings on camels are visible against a dark, reddish-purple sky. They are following a bright star that is positioned in the upper right corner of the frame. The star has a prominent cross-like glow. In the background, a distant city with glowing lights is visible on the horizon. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the lower portion of the image, containing white text.

**After hearing the king, they went their way;  
and the star, which they had seen in the east,  
went on before them until it came and stood  
over the place where the Child was.**

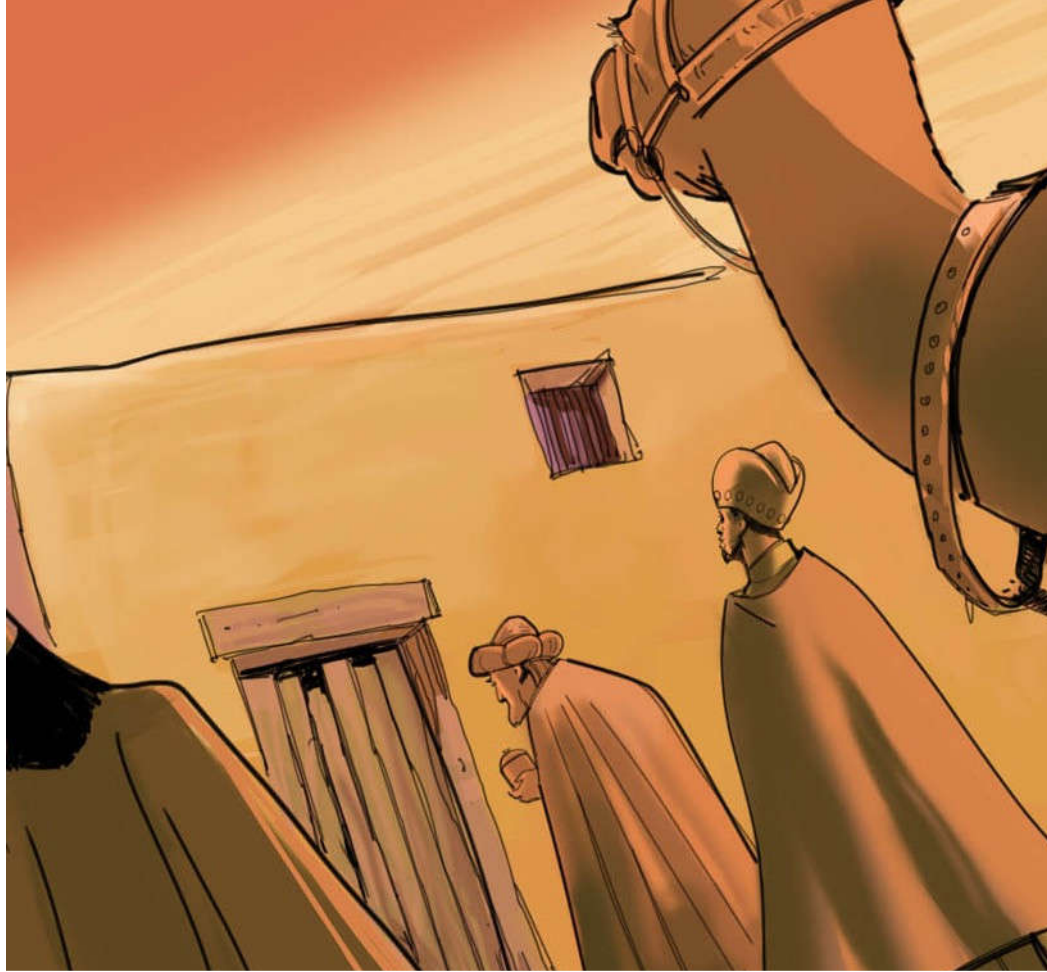




**When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.**





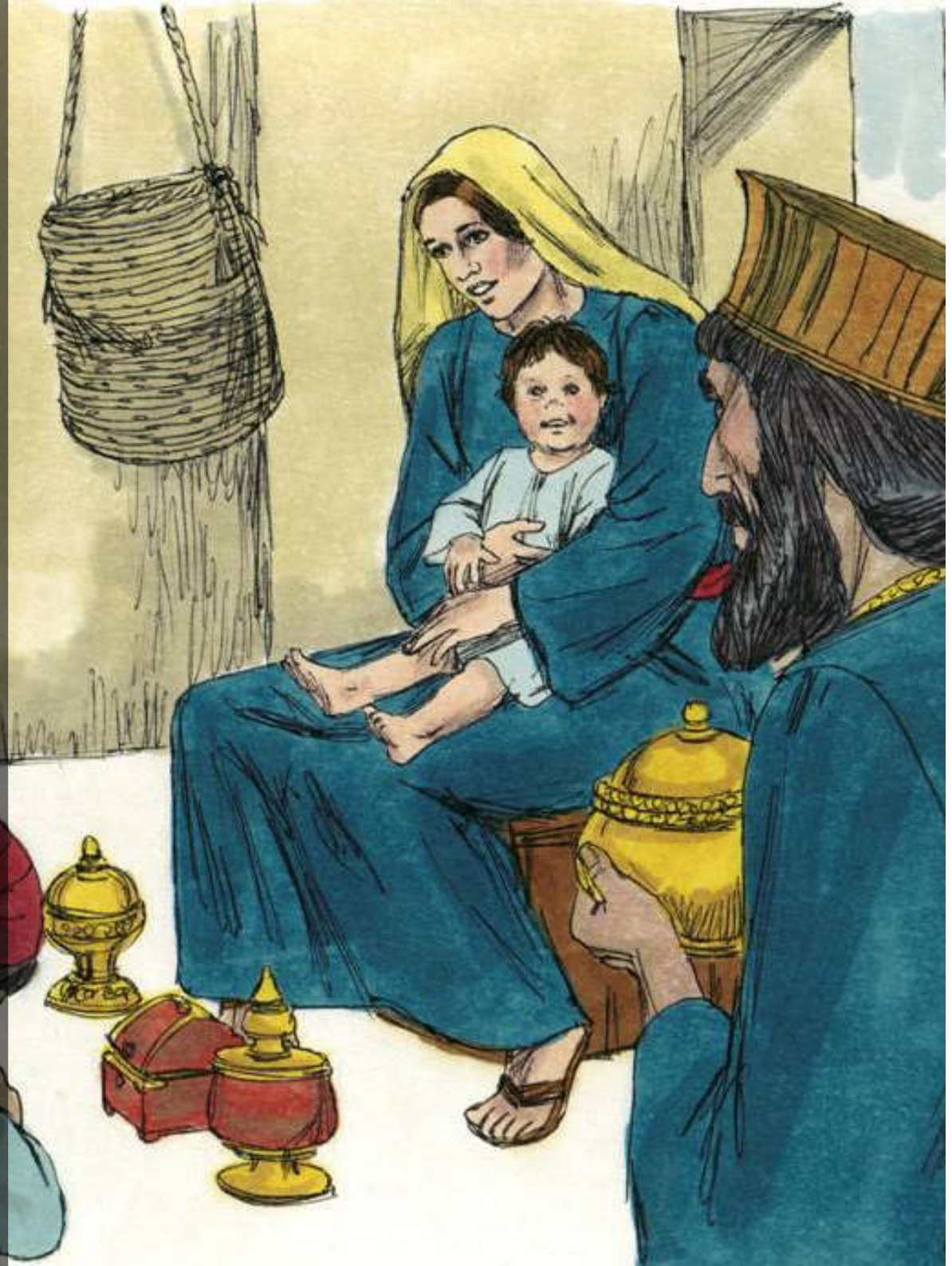


**After coming into the house they saw  
the Child with Mary His mother...**

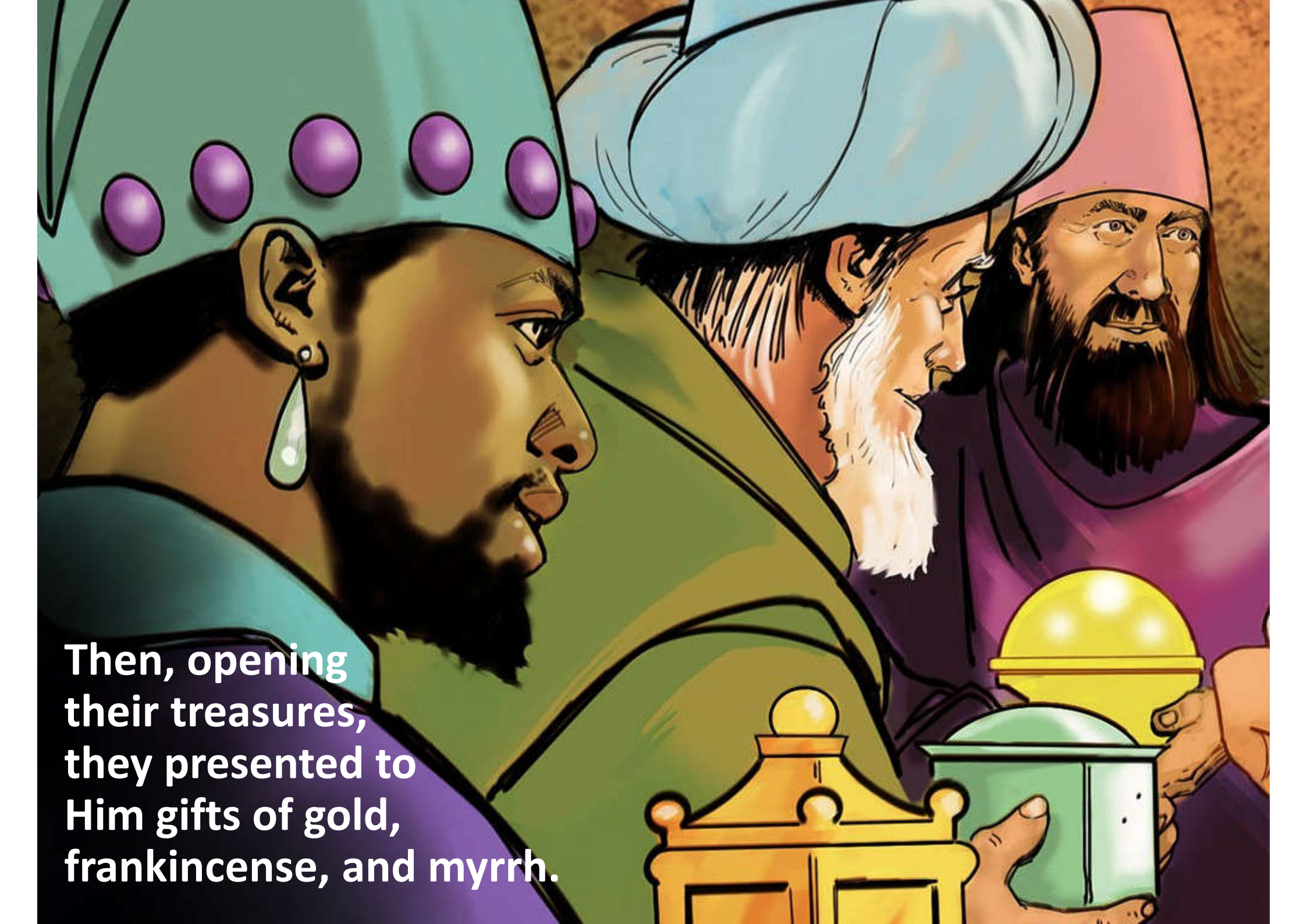




... and they fell to  
the ground and  
worshiped Him.








Then, opening  
their treasures,  
they presented to  
Him gifts of gold,  
frankincense, and myrrh.





And having been warned by  
God in a dream not to return to  
Herod, the magi left for their  
own country by another way.



# WHO WERE THE MAGI?

- The term used of the men in Matthew is “Magi” and the Magi were from Persia or Babylonia.
- The word magi is the plural of Latin magus, borrowed from Greek μάγος magos, as used in the original Greek text of the Gospel of Matthew. Greek magos itself is derived from Old Persian maguš from the Avestan magâunô, i.e. the religious caste into which Zoroaster was born, (see Yasna 33.7: “ýâ sruyê parê magâunô” = “so I can be heard beyond Magi”). The term refers to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. As part of their religion, **these priests paid particular attention to the stars**, and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science. \*

\* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical\\_Magi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Magi)



# PERSIANS?

- The common belief among the Church Fathers is that the Magi were from Persia, which was then part of the Parthian Empire, an enemy of Rome.
- John Chrysostom, a 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Constantinople, writes the following in his homily on the Gospel of Matthew: “The Incarnate Word on coming to the world gave to Persia, in the persons of the Magi, the first manifestation of His mercy and light... so that the Jews themselves learn from the mouths of Persians of the birth of their Messiah.”
- In the earliest depictions, the Magi are shown wearing Persian dress of trousers and Phrygian caps, usually in profile, advancing in step with their gifts held out before them. \*

\* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration\\_of\\_the\\_Magi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration_of_the_Magi)





## **PERSIANS?**

- Primitive Christian art in the second-century Roman Catacombs of Priscilla ... outside of Rome, dresses them in Persian garments, and a majority of early church fathers interpret them as Persians. \*

\*<http://billpetro.com/history-of-the-wise-men>



**BYZANTINE MOSAIC DEPICTION OF THE MAGI (AD 526):**  
Byzantine art usually depicts the Magi in Persian clothing  
which includes breeches, capes and Phrygian caps.





# PERSIANS?

- Did the Wise Men come from Persia, now modern day Iran? It was a belief prevalent in the early Christian Church. A letter written by the Synod of Jerusalem in AD 836 contains a story about an incident that occurred in AD 614 when the Persian army invaded the Holy Land destroying Christian Churches. When they came to the Basilica in Bethlehem, they refused to destroy it because of a mosaic depicting the Magi, which were dressed like them – Persians. \*
- In Persian writings in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, 7:1, there is a reference to the Magi (Wise Men), coming to Jerusalem to worship an infant born to a virgin, the son having power to raise the dead, and defeat the forces of evil. \*

\* <http://www.main.nc.us/graham/mcclung/Wise%20Men.html>



# WISE MEN

- In modern English Bible versions like the NIV and NASB, the Greek “magoi” is rendered by the transliterated Latin form – “Magi”. In the KJV, the translators rendered it as “wise men”.
- These Magi were indeed “wise men” as indicated by their actions. But what can we learn today from their story?





# **WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM**



# WISE MAN

**W**AITING

**I**NTERPRETING

**S**EARCHING

**E**XALTING

**M**AKING GOOD CHOICES

**A**TENTIVE

**N**EW DIRECTION





# WISE MAN

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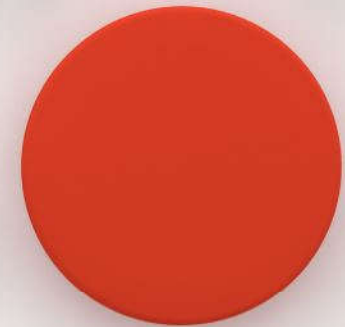
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# WAITING

- The Wise Men were waiting for God's promised Redeemer.
- Like these Magi, wise men today are anxiously waiting for the promised return of the same Redeemer.
  - Phil 3:20 (NKJV) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ



# WISE MAN

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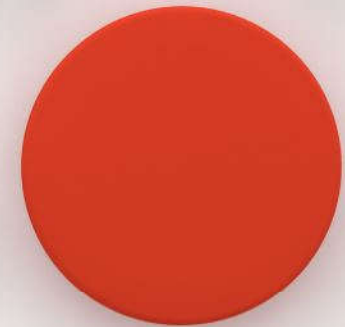
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# **I**NTERPRETING

- Wise men look for and seek to understand the signs of the times. These Wise Men were aware of the imminent coming Messiah and were looking diligently for the signs that had been prophesied by an ancient prophet.





# THE COMING KING

- Jacob had prophesied in Gen 49:10 “The **sceptre** will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, **until he comes to whom it belongs** and the **obedience of the nations is his.**” (NIV)
- The sceptre is a royal symbol and this was seen as being evidence that the Messiah King would come from the tribe of Judah.

# WHY WERE THE MAGI LOOKING FOR A STAR?



- The king (sceptre) is linked to a star. The Gentile prophet Balaam had prophesied:
  - “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A **star** will come out of Jacob; a **sceptre** will rise out of Israel.” (Num 24:17, NIV).





In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Irenaeus links this prophecy to the Magi:

Therefore there is one and the same God ... and His Son, who was of ... the virgin of [the house of] David, and Emmanuel; whose star also Balaam thus prophesied: "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a leader shall rise in Israel." But Matthew says that the Magi, coming from the east, exclaimed "For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him;" and that, having been led by the star into the house of Jacob to Emmanuel, they showed, by these gifts which they offered, who it was that was worshipped ... (Adversus Haereses, III, 9:2)

# UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

- We too should be aware of the imminent return of that same Messiah to rule and reign on earth. We have been given many signs of his return to look for.
- Dan 12:9-10 (NIV) He replied, “Go your way, Daniel, because **the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end**. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but **those who are wise will understand.**”



# UNDERSTAND THE TIMES



- Wise people will be ready and prepared for Jesus' return:
  - Matt 25:6-12 (NIV) "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. **The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'**"

# UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

- Wise men are occupied with the master's business when he returns:
  - Matt 24:44-46 (NIV) "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and **wise servant**, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? **It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.**"



# UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

- But it's not just prophetic signs we need to be aware of. We should be like the men of Issachar, of whom it was said that they "understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chron 12:32). These men were useful to their generation because of their wisdom regarding the times they lived in. This is not just an understanding of the facts, but a skillful analysis of what something truly means.
- Dr. Dan Hayden writes, "The ability to correctly analyze contemporary situations is what leadership is all about... Every generation needs leaders who can understand the times and know what to do in light of them."

# UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

“So that needs to be our prayer in our own generation—“Lord, help us to understand the times, and to know what to do.” This is **not a matter of simply understanding the Bible**, as crucial as that is. Rather, it is **knowing how to apply the truths of God’s Word to the issues of our day**.

“Where is the culture going? Why do people think the way they do? What are the real needs of people, as contrasted to their merely felt needs?

“How can we be effective with the Gospel by correctly perceiving the uniqueness of our times? How can we apply the truth of Scripture in a meaningful way to our generation?” \*

\* Dr. Dan Hayden <http://www.awordfromtheword.org/understanding>



# WISE MAN

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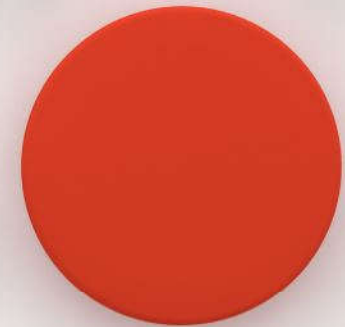
**S**EARCHING

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**N**EW DIRECTION



# SEARCHING

The wise men were not just waiting for the King; they were **actively searching** for him.

**Where is He  
who has been  
born King of  
the Jews?**





- The Magi would most likely have travelled on camels. A camel can walk 25 to 30 miles (30 to 40 km) a day, day after day, while carrying 300 pounds (136 kg) of cargo.



# SEARCHING

- The distance from the ancient city of Susa in Persia to Jerusalem is about 766 miles (1233 km). Travelling in a straight line would make the journey in about 31 to 41 days. Assuming a less direct route the journey could be around 2 to 3 months.
- The Wise Men **made an effort to find the truth**. They went a great distance to a foreign country incurring considerable expense. When necessary, they made enquiries in order to reach their goal.
- Isn't it sad that the religious leaders in Jerusalem who pointed the Magi to Bethlehem (right next to Jerusalem) don't appear to have made any effort to go there themselves.



# SEARCHING

- Wise people today still actively search for the truth.
  - Ps 105:4-5 (ESV) Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!
  - Jer 29:12-14 (NIV) Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord ...
- Jesus said “Keep on seeking, and you will find.” (Luke 11:7, NLT) and “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:33, ESV)

# WISE MAN

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- And upon finding Jesus, the Wise Men worship him and present him with gifts:

- Matt 2:11 (NKJV) And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

**EXALTING**



# EXALTING

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- When the King of the Jews is born, it is not only the Jews (like the shepherds, Simeon and Anna) who worship him, but the Gentiles too.
- Simeon prays in Luke 2:30-32, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a **light for revelation to the Gentiles** and for glory to your people Israel.”
- So the worship of the Messiah by the Magi symbolises the fact that the Gospel was to be proclaimed to the Gentiles too as part of God’s plan.

# EXALTING

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- Wise men still worship God. God is looking for true worshippers:
  - John 4:23-24 (NIV) “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”



# THE GIFTS

- Irenaeus was the first to see the gold, frankincense and myrrh as representing King, God and Suffering Redeemer respectively:
  - But Matthew says that the Magi, coming from the east, exclaimed “For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him;” and that, having been led by the star into the house of Jacob to Emmanuel, they showed, by these gifts which they offered, who it was that was worshipped; **myrrh, because it was He who should die** and be buried for the mortal human met; **gold, because He was a King**, “of whose kingdom is no end;” and **frankincense, because He was God**, who also “was made known in Judea,” and was “declared to those who sought Him not.” \*

\* Against Heresies, Book 3 Ch 9.2

# A) GOLD - KING

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Gold because of  
its great value has  
always been  
associated with  
royalty. (2 Sam  
12:30)

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## **B) FRANKINCENSE - GOD**

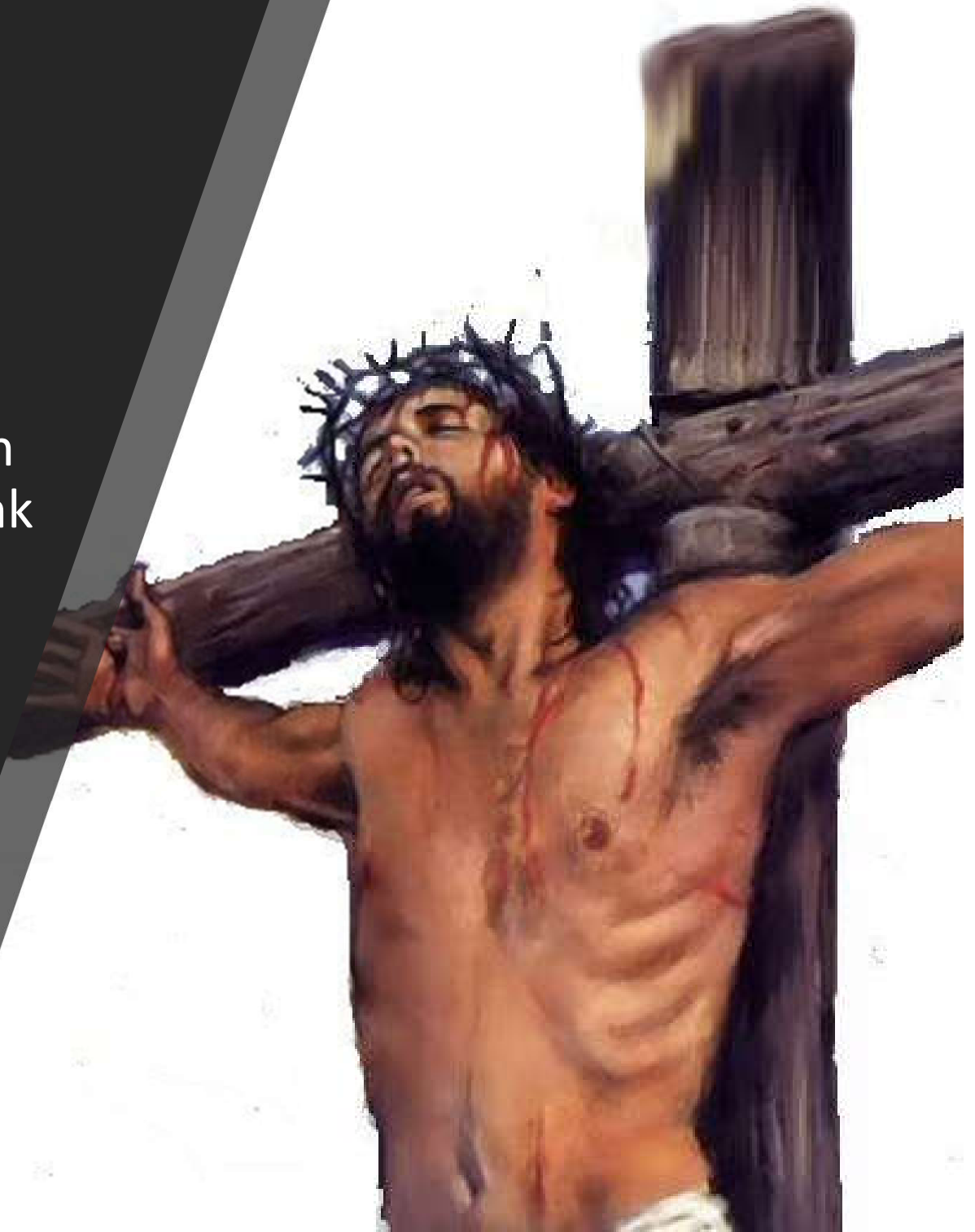


Frankincense is highly fragrant when burned, and was used in worship, where it was burned as a pleasant offering to God. (Ex 30:7,34)



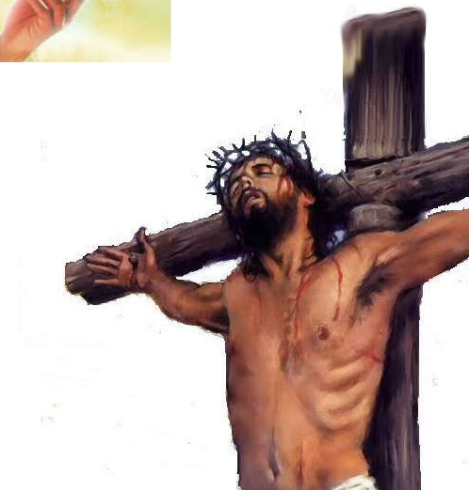
## C) MYRRH - SUFFERING REDEEMER

- Myrrh also had medicinal qualities and was mixed with wine to offer to Jesus to drink on the cross. (Mark 15:23 )
- It was also used for embalming and after his death Jesus' body was wrapped with a mixture of myrrh and aloes. (John 19:39-40)



As the words of the carol go:

- Born a king on Bethlehem's plain  
**GOLD** I bring to crown him again,  
**KING** for ever, ceasing never over us all to reign
- **FRANKINCENSE** to offer have I,  
Incense owns a deity nigh  
Prayer and praising, all men raising  
Worship him **GOD** on high
- **MYRRH** is mine, its bitter perfume  
Breathes a lift of gathering gloom  
**SORROWING**, sighing, bleeding, dying  
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb
- Glorious now behold him arise,  
**KING** and **GOD** and **SACRIFICE**  
Alleluia, Alleluia - Peals through the earth and skies



# EXALTING



- So too, wise men today will worship the king once they have found him and give him what is most valuable to them.
  1. We bring him gold when we honour him as King.
  2. We bring him frankincense when we worship him as God in flesh.
  3. We bring him myrrh when we remember that he identified with us in our pain and sorrow – and specifically for his suffering on the cross to bring about our salvation.



# WISE MAN

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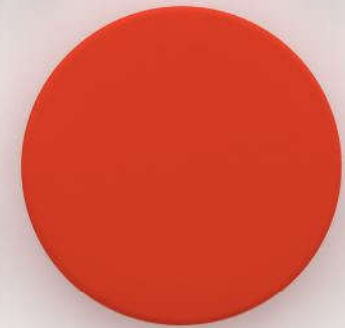
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# MAKING GOOD CHOICES

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- There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom.
- **Knowledge** is what you know.  
**Wisdom** is **who you are in the light of what you know.**
- The religious leaders had knowledge, but when the Wise Men discovered that same knowledge - it changed their lives.



# MAKING GOOD CHOICES

- In fact, Herod, the religious leaders in Jerusalem and the Magi all had the same knowledge - A KING HAS BEEN BORN IN BETHLEHEM. But what they do with that knowledge is what differentiates them.
  - a) Herod uses his knowledge to try and silence the voice of the King forever (**antagonism**).
  - b) The religious leaders appear to ignore what has happened (**indifference**).
  - c) The Magi uses their knowledge to seek out the king, pay him tribute in worship and gifts and then refuse to assist Herod in silencing him (**wisdom**).



# KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But **to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.** (Charles Spurgeon)

- Wisdom entails having common sense, good judgement, insight - and the ability to discern or judge what is true and right and to act accordingly.



# KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

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This involves an understanding of people, things, events and situations, and the willingness and the ability to apply perceptions, judgements and actions in keeping with an understanding of what is the right course of actions... In short, wisdom is a disposition to find the truth coupled with an optimum judgement as to right actions. \*

\* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom>

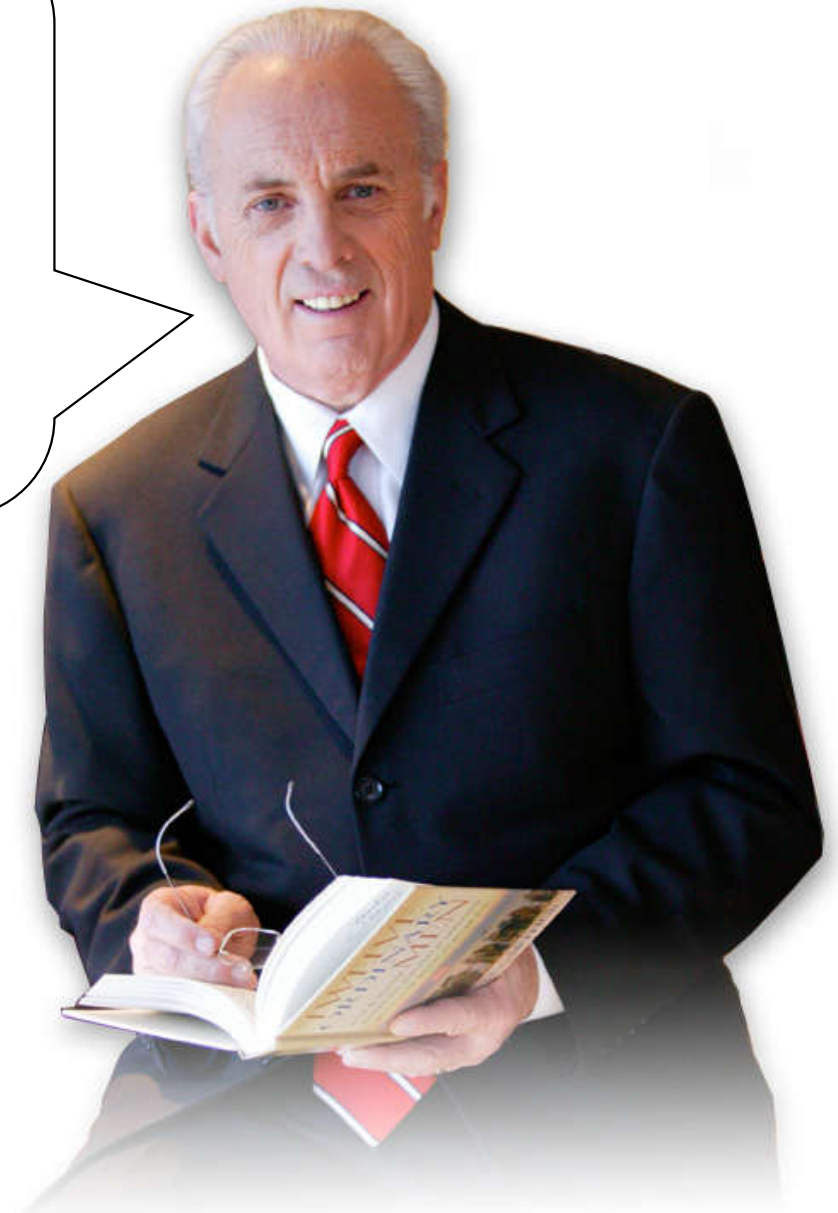


# KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

‘Wise’ speaks not of one who merely knows some fact, but of one who is skilled in the art of godly living. He submits to Scripture and knows how to apply it to his circumstances.

(John MacArthur - Source: Our Sufficiency in Christ)

- Knowledge is knowing facts and truths, but wisdom is the practical ability to consistently make good decisions based on our knowledge.
- Jesus said that “wisdom is proved right by her deeds” (Matt 11:19).





# WISE MAN

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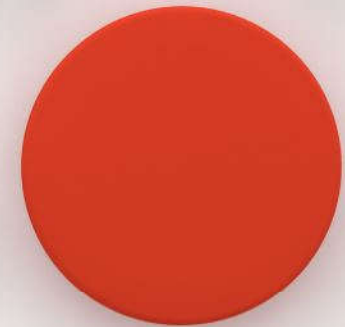
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## **ATTENTIVE**

- The Wise Men are attentive and sensitive to the voice of God.
- Matt 2:12 (NIV) And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod ...

# ATTENTIVE

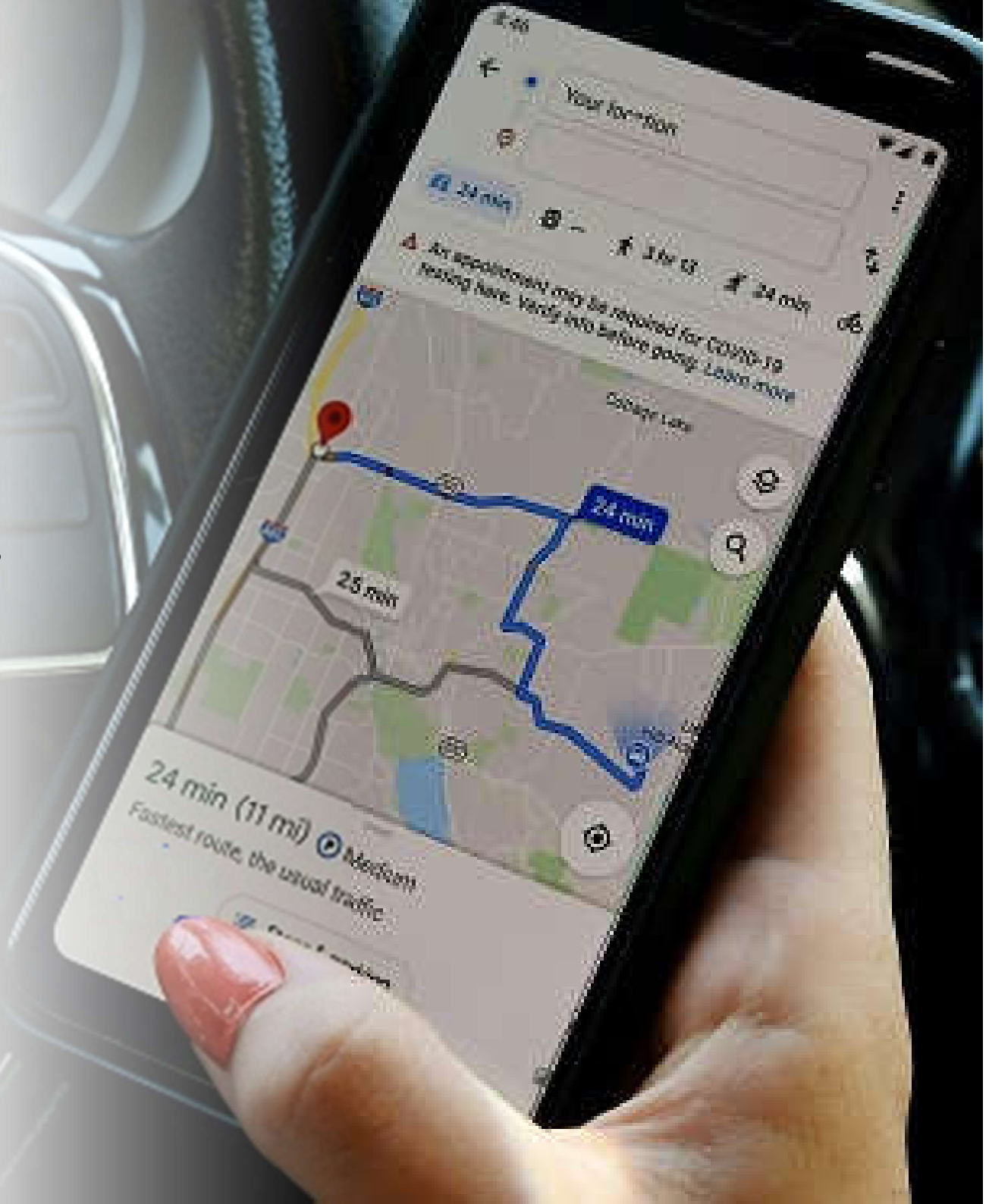
- Sarah Butterfield relates this story:
  - Earlier this month, I drove 95 miles to a speaking engagement up in Orange County. I plugged my phone into my car's stereo system and listened to a podcast with the occasional interruption from Google Maps. Eighty miles into my road trip and I pressed the "OFF" button on the car radio. I needed space to think before pulling into the church parking lot.
  - But I nearly didn't make it. I just about missed my exit for the 91 East interchange. I realized just in time that 103A was my exit and I had to cross three lanes of traffic over the course of a quarter mile. I nearly got into an accident with a Ford Explorer, but I made it. \*

\* <https://sarahkbutterfield.com/2020/02/26/how-to-train-yourself-to-be-attentive-to-gods-voice/>



- When my heart stopped racing, I looked with irritation at my phone. Where was Google Maps? Why hadn't it warned me to get over to the right lane? I picked up my phone from the passenger seat. The right app was open, so why the silence? ) \*
- It took me a minute to realize that I had turned off the car radio. The phone was still plugged in to the car stereo, so I had inadvertently silenced Google Maps. \*

\* Ibid.



# ATTENTIVE

- Sometimes we wonder why God is silent, when we are the ones who have stopped listening. We have unplugged ourselves from our source of power. We are too loud to hear his quiet whisper and too distracted to notice a burning bush. \*
- Or we are treating God as a vending machine, wondering why we don't get what we want. Or we are treating what's meant to be a relationship with him like a checklist full of tasks to complete. We may have forgotten that his Holy Spirit is always with us, even in the mundane, the ordinary, the downright drudgery. \*
- God speaks to us in many ways but we won't hear him unless we're **attentive** and paying attention.

\* Ibid.

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- After seeing Jesus, the Wise Men don't go back the way they came.
- Matt 2:12 (NIV)  
And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, **they returned to their country by another route.**

**NEW**  
**DIRECTION**

- After their encounter with Jesus, the direction of their lives was changed; **he set them on a new road.**
- The Bible is full of accounts of people who met Jesus and their lives were radically changed.
  - Zacchaeus changes from being a thief to someone who is concerned about restitution and the welfare of the poor.
  - Mary Magdalene changes from being a demoniac to being a financial supporter of Christ's ministry.
  - John changes from being a "son of Thunder" who wants his enemies' town to be burnt down, to being the apostle of love.



- The man from Gadara changes from a violent crazed lunatic who runs around naked in graveyards to being an evangelist.
- The former serial-divorcee Samaritan woman from Sychar meets Jesus and becomes an evangelist.
- A career criminal sentenced to death for his crimes becomes a defender of Christ who begs to be admitted into Jesus' kingdom.
- Paul changes from being a Christian-hating murderer to becoming a missionary and apostle of Jesus.
- Jesus is **still in the business of changing people**. Once you meet him – like the wise men – you can be set on a new direction.





# ARE YOU A WISE MAN?

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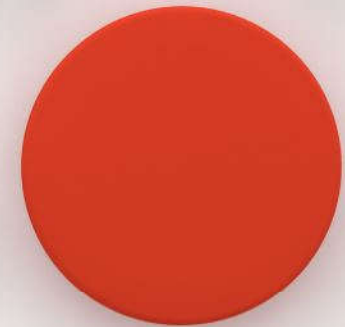
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