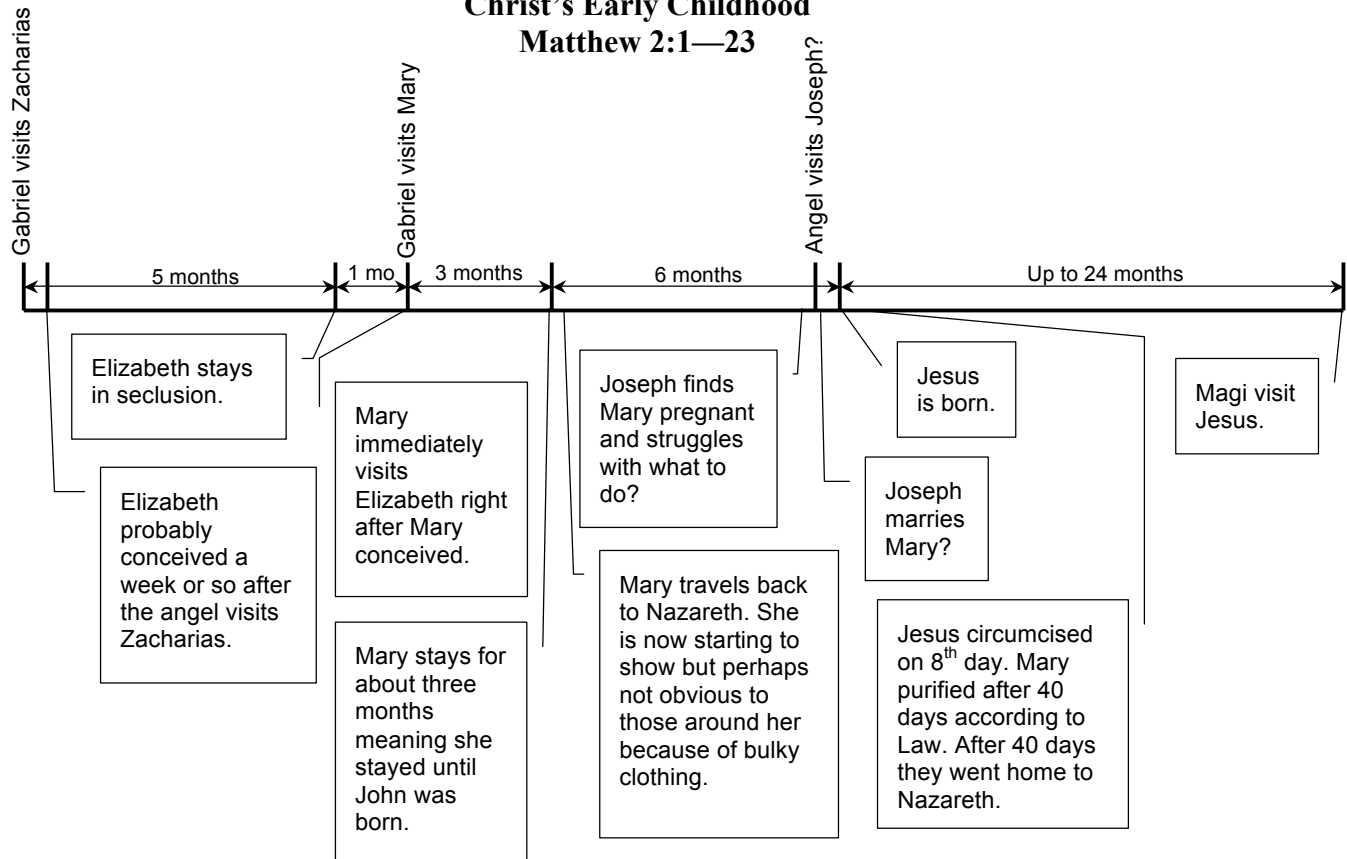


MATTHEW

Bible Study

Christ's Early Childhood Matthew 2:1—23



Zacharias was the 8th order of 24 orders of priests who served in the temple (1 Chronicles 24:7—18). This would give each order 15 days to serve every year. The priestly orders would serve from Sabbath to Sabbath so Zacharias would be called up twice each year. This order was reinstated after the end of the Babylonian captivity. After Zacharias finished serving he went home and Elizabeth conceived shortly after.

Mary conceived right after the angel visited her and she immediately went to visit Elizabeth in the Bethlehem area (60 miles south of Nazareth). We know Mary was pregnant with Jesus because the baby John leaped in Elizabeth's womb when Mary entered the room. John did not leap because of Mary. Mary was carrying Jesus less than one month after conception, not just a piece of tissue.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months (Luke 1:56) then traveled back home to Nazareth. She was now about 4 months pregnant and was found with child (Matthew 1:18). I don't believe this means she found herself pregnant because she probably knew when the Holy Spirit came upon her (Luke 1:35) and was confirmed when John leaped in Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:41).

Matthew 1:24 gives the impression that Joseph married Mary right after the angel came to him while Luke 2:5 makes it appear that they were still engaged as they traveled to Bethlehem. It's possible that Mary was able to hide her condition for quite a while seeing how bulky her cloths were. Joseph could have found out she was pregnant as late as her 8th month and could have been wrestling with what to do with Mary even as they traveled to Bethlehem. If this were the case then the angel would have come to Joseph shortly before or within 7 days after Jesus was born to explain the situation and tell him to name the baby Jesus. However, Matthew 2:25 says he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son implying that they were married before Christ was born. I personally believe the angel came to Joseph after the decree from Caesar Augustus but before they traveled to Bethlehem and were married before they began their trip.

Since Jesus needed to be born in Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy (Mica 5:2) God used Caesar Augustus to make it happen (Luke 2:1). Joseph's genealogy connects him directly to David, born in Bethlehem. God often uses unbelievers to accomplish His will. We see that with Pharaoh before the Jews escaped from Egypt and even Christ's sacrificial death was accomplished through evil men (Acts 2:23).

The Magi

Matthew is the only book in the Bible where we find the story of the Wise Men coming from the east to pay homage to Christ. This is appropriate because Jesus is portrayed as King and we see other kings coming to worship Him. This is a picture of the Millennial Kingdom when all nations will give tribute to Christ as He sits on the throne in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16—19). The Feast of Booths mentioned in Zacharias 14 is a required Jewish festival that looks ahead to the Millennial Kingdom and the rest promised to Israel.

Contrary to popular belief, the Magi were not present at the birth of Jesus. They saw the "star" from their native land (probably Babylon), which would have been approximately 500 miles straight east of Jerusalem. The sign they saw in the sky did not stay there because they ended up in Jerusalem instead of going directly to Jesus. I believe they saw what the shepherds saw as they tended their flocks outside of Bethlehem. The sky lit up from the glory of the Lord (Shekinah glory). This same Shekinah glory alerted the Magi that prophecy was being fulfilled.

The Shekinah glory was in the burning bush and led the Israelites through the desert. It was visible as Moses was given the Law and filled the newly built tabernacle. The Lord filled the temple built by Solomon (2 Chronicles 5:13—14). Ezekiel shows God's glory leaving the temple (Ezekiel 10:4, 18, 11:23). In Revelation 21:22 the Shekinah glory comes back to fill the temple. The word indicates the presence of Jehovah God at a certain location. We are not physically able to see God Himself but we can see His glory if He chooses to do so.

After the Magi inquired of Herod about the birth of Jesus, the "star" reappeared and led them to the house where Jesus and family were living. Since Jesus is now called child instead of baby and they are now living in a house and not in the stable we know the Magi saw Jesus after he was born and was probably at least a year old. He could be as old as two years old since Herod ordered that all children two and under be killed. I personally believe Jesus was about one year old and Herod killed children as old as two just to make sure Jesus was in that group. What he didn't understand is that Joseph, Mary and Jesus left for Nazareth shortly after Mary completed her 40-day purification (Luke 2:39).

How would the Magi have known that the "star" indicated the birth of Jesus, future King of Israel? 600 years earlier Daniel and many Israelites were carted off to Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's prophecy pinpoints the birth of Jesus to this time. The Magi 600 years after Daniel wrote his book the Magi had access to his writings. They could see how perfectly Daniel predicted the fall and rise of empires throughout the past 600 years and could see that the next thing on the timeline was the coming of a King. This is why some in Israel were looking for their Messiah (Anna and Simeon in Luke 2). They understood the preciseness of Daniel's prophecy and knew that the time had come for Him to appear.

The Gifts

The gifts brought by the Magi also indicate that they were expecting to meet royalty. Gold pointed to a King. The priests used frankincense as incense in their temple service. Myrrh was often used to embalm bodies before burial. Nicodemus embalmed the body of Christ with about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). The gold, frankincense and myrrh all pointed to various aspects of Jesus Christ's life. Tradition tells us there were three Wise Men because there were three gifts but that is pure speculation.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com