

The wise men

Matthew 2

This part of the Christmas story gives rise to more misconceptions than any other. We all think we know what happens, but check the actual narration in the Bible against the following, which I'm not claiming as absolute fact, but read on and see what you think...

- They probably did not visit Jesus when he was born but up to 2 years later. It's probable that they saw the phenomenon in the sky when Jesus was born and recognised that it had something to do with a king in Israel (because of their understanding of the meaning of the stars) so they set off towards Israel on a journey that took a long time – on foot and maybe camel, horse, donkey – it doesn't say! – and headed for Jerusalem where the royal palace was. When Herod decided to kill the babies it was those *"who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi"*.
- They were not kings. The word magi meant those who studied the stars as part of their religion.
- They were not necessarily all men.
- There were not necessarily three of them – it's very unlikely – although there *were* three gifts. It's probable that there was a large group, comprising the magi, their families, their servants and maybe hired people of various kinds.
- We don't know their names. They have been traditionally called Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar.
- They did not follow the star all the way from home, but only from Jerusalem.
- They did not find Jesus in a stable but in a house (in most translations) and Jesus is described as a child – probably a toddler. The implication being that Mary and Joseph had decided to stay in Bethlehem and some time had passed (see first note above).

Watch the story here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRMPCI-qgBA>

(Sorry about the poor animation (!?) – but it's the best telling of the story!)

1. Our twenty-fourth decoration for the Jesse Tree

You've got a choice of decorations today. You can either make a star for the Jesse Tree or a crown. Both are simple to make.

If you make a star, try to make it look different to the Star of David that you made earlier. There's a template on the other page. Decorate it well and hang it on the Jesse Tree.

A crown will remind us that the magi came seeking a king, and also of the words of the prophet Micah that *"you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel"*. Did you recognise that prophecy?

Take some card (if you've not got any sheets of card use an old cereal box) and cut it into a strip about 10cm wide. Use plastic if it's going to be outside. Make it long enough to go round your head – you might have to attach two strips together if you've got a big head! Cut along one edge of the strip to make the pattern of the crown that you want. Decorate with foil, sequins, jewels, whatever you've got to make it look rich and suitable for a king. Hang it on your Jesse Tree.

If you don't want to wear it you can make a smaller one just as a decoration.



2. Offering gifts

The magi brought gifts to Jesus. Tomorrow we will be exchanging gifts with those we love. Gold, frankincense and myrrh were not cheap gifts and they were given with much thought. Gold indicated a king, frankincense was used as an anointing oil and for sacrifices – indicating God, and myrrh was used to embalm the dead. All of these meanings applied to Jesus.

Have you given care and thought to the gifts you are giving this Christmas? Are they given with love? Have you been careful in their wrapping?

God carefully thought about what we needed the most when he gave us a gift. He gave us the gift of a saviour – Jesus.

3. Bowing and worshipping

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The magi bowed down and worshipped a toddler! – because they knew he was God and King and Saviour.

Find time today to bow down and worship your God and King and Saviour.

God has done great things for us – the greatest was coming in Jesus.

The next part of our Jesse Tree will be on Friday 25th December

