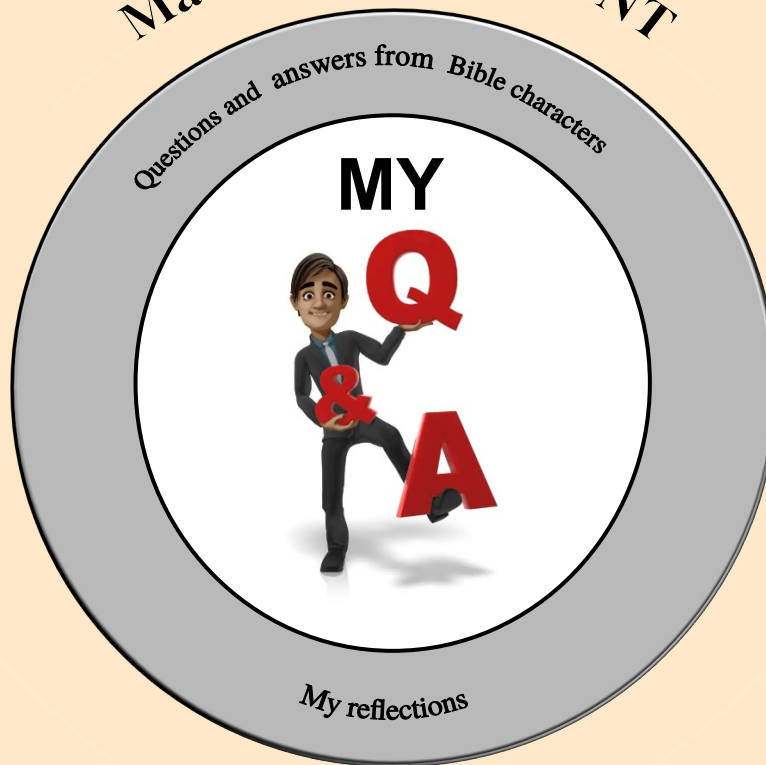


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## Man's first question NT



Where is He?



## Introduction

Following the first question asked by God of man in the Hebrew Bible, this Q&A paper investigates the very first question recorded in the New Testament, which is asked by men of God. It is:

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “**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” (Matthew 2:1–2).*

There are five items in this text to unpack - the place of Christ’s birth, the timing, the magi, ‘king of the Jews’, the star, and their seeking the King to worship Him.

## Bethlehem

Why isn’t the identifier just ‘Bethlehem’ instead of *Bethlehem of Judea*? Simply because there were two Bethlehems in the land of Israel at the time, one in Judea and the other in Galilee, identified in red on the map.

### Bethlehem of Zebulun

This Bethlehem is mentioned in Joshua 19:10-16.

It is also known as “Bethlehem of Galilee,” “the Galilean Bethlehem,” and “Beth Lehem Zoria.” It eventually became a Christian community, and much later became a ruined village called Beit-Lahm. It is located about 10 kilometers northwest of Nazareth and is now an Israeli moshav, a community for cooperative agriculture. The 10th judge of Israel named Ibzan came from this Bethlehem and later died there with his large family.



### Bethlehem of Judea

Situated in the hill country, it was originally called Ephratah/Ephrath, meaning “fruitful” (Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7; Ruth 4:11), and its citizens were called Ephrathites. It was also called Bethlehem-Ephratah (Micah 5:2), Bethlehem-Judah (1 Samuel 17:12), and “the city of David” (Luke 2:4).

*Bethlehem of Judea* is first mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as the place where Jacob’s wife Rachel died and was buried “by the wayside,” directly to the north of the city (Genesis 48:7). You can visit her tomb today.

Two famous names are linked to *Bethlehem of Judea* before Christ. There is Ruth the moabites, the great grandmother of king David, and king David himself. This Bethlehem was David’s birthplace, and

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## The Magi

The magi, Parthians, were members of the Persian priestly-political class from which we get our word "magician." They first appeared in history in the seventh century B.C., and they may have been Semites, descendants of Shem. Possibly, like Abraham, the magi came from ancient Ur in Chaldea as Abram did.

During the Persian part of Israel's exile, the Jews, such as Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Zerubbabel became prominent in the government, and many stayed after the decree of Cyrus. Indeed, from history we learn that a condition for a Persian to become king was mastery of the scientific and religious disciplines of the magi, who largely controlled judicial appointments (Esther 1:13). Quite possibly, the magi who came to Jerusalem may have been influenced by Judaism, even by some of Daniel's prophetic writings. If so, their understanding of their being a divine 'King of the Jews' is understandable.

### Parthian empire

Various nations east of Judaea such as Persia, Babylonia, and Assyria, were not part of the Roman empire, but of the powerful Parthian empire, which was a serious rival to Rome and had defeated several attempts by the Roman legions to subjugate her. The Magi visiting Jerusalem were representatives of the powerful Parthian empire, and did not travel on camels but on strong horses as all Persian nobles did, with a military escort and many servants. No wonder Herod and all of Jerusalem were troubled by what they may have interpreted as an imminent invasion, or an attempt to install this new King of the Jews on the throne of Judaea to replace Herod, the Rome-appointed King of the Jews.

### The Star

Neither modern nor ancient science can adequately explain 'His star'. A star cannot be seen in daytime, nor move and mark out the exact house where Jesus was. More likely, just as the God of glory appeared to Abraham some 2000 years earlier where the magi lived, (Acts 7:2), that this is the the best interpretation of the word 'star'. Also, the Messiah was foretold to be the "star that shall come from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17), and He is "the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

### Seeking the King

Of Jews and Greeks who are all under sin there is none who seeks God (Romans 3:9-18). And, yet, He still seeks us and wants us to seek the Lord while He allows himself to be found, and to call upon Him while He is near (Isaiah 55:6).

And, the magi did just that. God had sought them and they responded by travelling some 1200kms across the desert to seek His son, the King of the Jews. Their journey showed their eagerness. If they were guided by the Star, they were driven by their ambition to find Him.

When they finally saw Him, they worshipped (*proskuneo*) Him. 'Proskuneo' means to meet, greet, get to know and ultimately fully merge with. There's no real English synonym for this awesome Greek verb, but a remnant of the idea exists perhaps in the idiomatic phrasal verb "to make advances".

It describes the entire spectrum of actions between initially noticing an interesting person in a far foggy distance, and ultimately becoming one with that person. That sounds very complicated but it's basically why your steamy cup of coffee cools off to room temperature, while your room temperature increases slightly because of your cup of coffee. Both room and coffee will exchange energy and ultimately settle in a shared temperature ([Abarim Publications](#)).

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So, too with the Magi. They prostrated themselves, and kissed the feet and the garment of the babe they honoured. And so should we!

Or, like Herod and all of Jerusalem are you ‘troubled’ by Him (Matthew 2:3). ‘Troubled’ (*tarasso*) is the opposite of being calm and at peace, and means to be stirred, both in a physical sense (of water, armies, political situations) and a mental sense (agitated, disturbed). Herod also wanted to know ‘where’ He was born in order that he might destroy Him.

### Conclusion

So, what are you asking? Is it *“Where is He?”* from a heart filled with devotion, or is it from a heart agitated to destroy Him?

### Reference

Abarim Publications: <https://www.abarim-publications.com/DictionaryG/p/p-r-o-s-k-u-n-e-om.html>.

