

Bible Studies for Life: January 9

The Ruler Who Cares for His People • Micah 5:2-5a; Matthew 2:1-6, 9-11

By Paula Smith



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“You do what? Put out your shoes?” I had a lot of questions the first time I celebrated *Día de Los Reyes Magos* (Day of the Kings or Magi) in my beloved adopted country of Uruguay.

That first year, I had not celebrated December 25 with exchange of gifts but felt the excitement building for January 6. I saw that the children added the Wise Men to the manger scene on January 5 and put out their shoes before they went to bed that night.

Some of the children put out hay for the Wise Men’s camels. The next morning, there were treats that the Wise Men had left them. (Like children in the U.S. hang up a stocking and leave milk and cookies for Santa.)

It was on this day that people exchanged gifts. Needless to say, I have a whole new perspective when reading in Matthew the Biblical account that Micah prophesied: *Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea. After Jesus’ birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1 NIrV).*

There is so much significance in this one verse. Matthew confirms what Micah had foretold so many years earlier. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient day. (Micah 5:2 ESV).

Research from many commentaries indicates that Bethlehem means, "House of Bread," while Ephrathah means "Fruitfulness." The word, "Ephrathah," seems to be derived from the region where Bethlehem was located. The name could have originated in one of the clans of the tribe of Judah.

Matthew writes "Bethlehem, land of Judah" rather than Bethlehem in the land of Ephrathah as written in Micah. This also makes a connection with King David. 1 Samuel 17:12 speaks of David as "the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse..."

Again, this one verse gives so much information. These men are called Wise Men, meaning they were involved in the study of astronomy. In their study, they had found a rising star that seemed to have worldwide significance. At that time it was thought that the birth or death of great men was accompanied by heavenly signs.

The rising of the sun in the east suggests the imagery of light, as in Isaiah 60:1 (ESV) – *Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

What was their intent in following this star and searching for "the King of the Jews?" *...For we saw His star when it rose and **have come to worship Him** (Matthew 2:2 ESV, bold emphasis mine).*

Some believe it is probable that the Wise Men were from Persia (Iran today). If that were the case, they would be

knowledgeable of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah through Jews who had been forced to settle there centuries before. They would have known of Isaiah's words: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder (Isaiah 9:6 ESV).*

What is certain is God revealed to them that the long-awaited Messiah had now been born, and they were determined to find Him and honor Him. They followed the star and discovered Jesus. Immediately, *they bowed down and **worshipped Him** (Matthew 2:11 NIV, bold emphasis mine).*

So what kind of king was it for which these Wise Men were searching? The Scripture tells us plainly: *and you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come in **a ruler who will shepherd** my people Israel (Matthew 2:6 ESV, bold emphasis mine), and **He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord**, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God (Micah 5:4 ESV, bold emphasis mine).*

Jesus called Himself the "Good Shepherd," and tells what a Good Shepherd does: *I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11 ESV).*

Truly, we have a Ruler who cares for His people and *is our peace (Micah 5:5a ESV).*

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