

ing that he spent the last forty days of his life at the hot baths near Jericho, the events of our lesson must have occurred immediately after the presentation in the temple. **Wise men from the East**—Oriental magi. These formed a sacerdotal class amongst the Persians. They devoted themselves to the study of science, especially astronomy, astrology and medicine. Daniel was at one time their president (Dan. 2: 48.) In the time of Christ many professed to have mastered their learning but practised sorcery along with it, so that their real science became degraded into "magical arts." See instances Acts 8: 9; (Simon Magus) 13: 6, 8, 10; Rev. 22: 15. From their three-fold gifts tradition has made them three in number, and from supposing that they fulfilled such prophecies as Ps. 68: 30, 32; 72: 10; Isa. 49: 7; 60: 3, 10, they have been called kings and their names even are given—Caspar, a ruddy youth, who brought the frankincense; Melchior, an aged man, who brought the gold; and Balthazar a swarthy, bearded man, who brought the myrrh. No doubt they were men of rank and wealth and travelled with a considerable retinue, for their visit and questions attracted the attention of Herod and he treated them with much show of respect, but there is not a shadow of a basis for such fables as these. Their visit is commemorated in the feast of Epiphany, or the "manifestation" of Christ, which falls on Jan. 6th, a date manifestly wrong, for if Mary had possessed the rich gifts that they brought she would not have made the offering of the poor on Feb. 2nd. **Jerusalem**—Here in the capital city they would expect to find the king.

2. **His Star**—The Jews expected that the birth of the Messiah would be heralded by a star, interpreting literally Num. 24: 17 and Isa. 60: 3. The statement that there was a general belief diffused throughout the East that there would soon arise a great prince, is based upon words of certain historians which refer to a time subsequent to the death of Christ and which are applied to the emperor Vespasian. These Wise Men may have possessed traditions from the time of Daniel, or may have got their knowledge from the Jews of the dispersion. Many commentators maintain very strenuously that the "star" was a brilliant conjunction, or apparent blending, of the two planets Jupiter and Saturn, afterwards joined by Mars. The objections to this view are, (1) these planets never came so close together as to blend their rays; (2) the calculations do not meet the date exactly; (3) the Greek word means a single star, not a "conjunction;" (4) if the planets pointed towards Bethlehem when the Magi set out from Jerusalem, they would be some distance to the East of it when they arrived there about two hours afterwards; (5) no heavenly bodies at an elevation of 57 degrees above the horizon could point out a spot near the spectators, yet this star indicated precisely the very house in which the Child was. **In the East**—i. e. when in Eastern lands, see verse 9. Some translate the words "in the

rising." They were not guided by the star all the way, but what the star meant was revealed to them. They then set out for Jerusalem using the ordinary means of information as to the way: Hence their joy in verse 9. Why did God apparently sanction the superstitions of astrology when he sent the star? Astronomy and astrology, the true and the false, were not as yet separated from each other. It was not unfitting that a star should be the sign to the astronomers that Jacob's Star had arisen. These men were not charlatans but earnest and devout students of God's wonders in the heavens. **To worship him**—To do him homage, religious adoration.

II. **THE CHILD FEARED.** 3. **Troubled**—Herod's family were not of the royal line. They were Idumeans of Philistine descent. He reigned by grace of the conqueror. A legitimate heir to the throne of David might dethrone him. He was well enough acquainted with the prophecies to know that such a Prince was promised. The people were afraid of the cruel measures which Herod would adopt in order to retain his power.

4. **Chief priests and scribes of the people**—The high priest and those who had filled that office, with the heads of the twenty-four courses (1 Chr. 24: 6-18) and scribes learned in the law. It may have been a full convocation of the Sanhedrim or great council of the Jews. (Mal. 2: 7.) Herod's question was a simple one and easily answered. It is not likely that he condescended to give them any reasons for asking.

5, 6. See Micah 5: 2. Read John 7: 42; 5: 39, 40. **Art in no wise the least** (R. V.)—a common rhetorical figure (litotes) for "art celebrated." Bethlehem is not even named in Josh. 15: 59. **Princes**—Micah says "thousands" i. e. the central towns where the heads of "thousands," or princes, resided. These were subordinate divisions of the tribes—"Chiliads." See Judges 6: 15 (margin). **Rule**—R. V. "be shepherd of." John 10: 11; Isa. 40: 11; 9: 7. This was the primitive idea of a ruler. Homer calls his chiefs "shepherds of the people." Compare 2 Sam. 5: 2; 7: 7; Jer. 23: 2.

7. **Privily**—i. e. privately. He did not wish any of the Jews to suspect what he was plotting, and he trusted to the guilelessness of these Eastern sages so far as they were concerned. **Inquired diligently**—lit. "ascertained accurately the time of the appearance of the star," i. e. how long since the star first appeared. He supposed, but erroneously; that this would fix the date of the birth.

8. **Search diligently for R. V.** "search out carefully concerning" the young child. He cannot say "king." Herod dissembles successfully before strangers. No Jew would have placed much faith in the sincerity of his pious professions. Compare Judas. He would make spies of these simple men to aid him in his murderous designs.