

Time Beyond the Present

Epiphany Matthew 2:1-12

Cast: Two Jews representing Jewish officials, two gentiles representing the Magi.

Production notes: Jewish officials in simple robes, Gentile royalty in fancy robes. Readers can be scripted and amplified, offset in couplets. Have scripts in black folders for visual uniformity. Try to avoid page turning.

Commentary notes: This script seeks to portray the paradox made so vivid in Matthew's gospel. Given its Jewish audience, Matthew repeatedly emphasizes the common New Testament theme of a gospel rejected by the Jews yet embraced by the Gentiles; an anxious Israel and great rejoicing in foreign lands.

Author's note: "Present" as it is used here has a double-meaning: present as in "gift", and "present" as it refers to time. "Time beyond the present" then refers to that which occurs after the Magi's visit (ie. slaughter of the innocents, Jesus' death and resurrection, etc) but also to the eschatological references of Jesus' return, a time beyond *our* present age.

SCENE I – THE JOURNEY

Jew 1: Our story begins in a time before the present ...

Jew 2: In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Royal Astrologers came to Jerusalem from the East.

Gentile 1: They came to ask, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"

Gentile 2: "We have come to pay him homage for we observed his star at its rising."

Jew 1: "*His*" star. It was believed that every member of the monarchy had a star assigned at birth. This was the time before the present. The present was yet to come and Herod knew it.

SCENE II – IN HEROD'S PALACE

Gentile 1: When he heard about the visitors, about the star King Herod was frightened.

Gentile 2: And not just Herod, but all of Jerusalem. They felt anxious and threatened.

Gentile 1: This should remind us of a time *beyond* the present.

Gentile 2: So Herod called together all the chief priests and scribes of the Jews. He inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. Quoting from a time *before* the present, the elders reply from the prophet Micah:

Jew 2: "He is born in Bethlehem of Judea. For you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Gentile 1: It was a threatening answer and a sinister meeting; one that should remind of us of many meetings like it in the years to come - time beyond the present.

SCENE III – A SECRET MEETING

Gentile 2: Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

Jew 1: The exact time would reveal his exact age which would indicate the exact time at (*punctuate each syllable*) which the threat must be eliminated.

Gentile 1: Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

SCENE IV - WORSHIP

Jew 2: And so they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

Jew 1: This would remind the Jews of a time before the present, a time when they too were led to their salvation by a moving object in the sky.

Jew 2: When they saw the star had stopped, the foreigners were overwhelmed with joy.

Gentile 2: Herod was threatened. Jerusalem was anxious. Religious and political officials were paranoid.

Gentile 1: But astrologers from a foreign country were overwhelmed with joy (*beat*) and they worshipped him.

Gentile 2: On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Jew 1: This would remind the Jews of a time before the present; a time when the queen mother sat enthroned next to the king.

Jew 2: They likely paid him homage, worshipped him with little more than earthly kingship in mind. But their actions, their *gifts* were a preview of a time yet to come.

SCENE V – GIFT GIVING

Gentile 1: They opened their treasure chests, offering him gifts of gold,

Gentile 2: because of his royalty;

Gentile 1: incense

Jew 1: because of his divinity.

Gentile 1: And they offered him myrrh.

Jew 2: Myrrh is a burial spice.

Gentile 2: Time beyond the present.

Gentile 1: A time would come when this child would face suffering and death.

EPILOGUE

Jew 1: And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Jew 2: Time beyond the present.