

Flipping Tables Podcast



*Study of Philippians*

*The house church at Philippi  
and beyond  
with the women who led there.*

"Grace and peace to you from God our  
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

# Table 2

## Episode 4

# Season 4

Welcome to the table!

In the new episode of *Flipping Tables*, Twila and I travel to Bethlehem—at least in the story—to check in on the toddler King as we explore [Matthew 2](#). Our arrival intersects with the Magi caravan. Matthew is continuing to spotlight the outsiders coming near to behold the King of the Jews. You can listen to our conversation here: [Apple](#) or [Spotify](#).

This week I came across a news headline that genuinely filled my heart with joy—a rare occurrence these days. Bethlehem has put up its first Christmas tree since the war in Gaza began. I've been to Bethlehem twice, and both trips were emotional for me. The second visit, especially, broke my heart. The longer I follow the Table Flipper, the more my heart aches for the outsiders. Modern Bethlehem feels very bleak, despite being the birthplace of the Messiah. Let's pray for the True Light of Christmas to shine brightly in Bethlehem—bringing renewed faith to the small, shrinking Christian community there. And let's pray for both Palestinians and Jews to encounter Jesus in a real way this Christmas season.

**The Magi: A Caravan from the East**

I love thinking about the Magi! Who were they? Where did they come from? And how did they know to be looking for the King of the Jews? So many questions...

The Daniel theory is my favorite. I love imagining Daniel planting seeds in Babylon among the astrologers and magicians of both the Babylonian and Persian empires—seeds that began to flourish in the time of this group of Magi.

In Daniel 2, Daniel rose to the top of all of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men by interpreting the king's dream. In fact, he didn't just interpret it—God revealed the dream to Daniel, and then Daniel explained its meaning to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel continued to live in captivity, serving the leaders of the Persian Empire.

With the large number of Jews who remained in the Persian Empire and had access to the Hebrew Scriptures, it seems very plausible that the Magi were familiar with verses like Daniel 9:24–27, and maybe even Numbers 24:17:

*"I see him, but not now;  
I behold him, but not near.  
A star will come out of Jacob;  
a scepter will rise out of Israel."*

A 900-mile journey from Persia fits well with the timeline in Matthew. The Magi traveled a great distance, and it took them nearly two years to arrive. Their caravan's arrival in Jerusalem created quite a stir—especially for the paranoid Herod the Great.

*"We saw his star"*

The star seems to be supernatural. The Greek word translated as "star" in the text is *aster*, the standard word for a star or celestial body. It appears 24 times in the New Testament, usually referring to a literal star. In some cases, it can also be used to denote angels. A basic rule of biblical interpretation is to take the normal meaning of a word unless there's compelling evidence to interpret it differently.

Here's some evidence suggesting that the Star of Bethlehem was not a natural phenomenon, but something beyond science. First, the star appeared only to the Magi, indicating it was no ordinary star. Celestial bodies normally move from east to west due to the Earth's rotation, yet this star led the Magi from Jerusalem south to Bethlehem. Even more remarkable, it stopped directly over the place where Joseph and Mary were staying. My conclusion about the star is that it may have been an angel or the Shekinah Glory. Maybe both! The word *Shekinah* literally means "dwelling of God" and refers to the visible presence of the Lord. Let's consider the angelic light show that appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem's fields. [Luke 2:8-18](#)

*9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

A glory display that drew shepherds in from the fields and, two years later, a glory star brought the Magi from the East—this fits for me.

### Herod Was Disturbed... All Jerusalem With Him

*Even today, people are still disturbed by Jesus.* It seems like everyone celebrates Christmas, but not everyone who celebrates gives much thought to Jesus. Twila put it well when she said, *"The enemy has hijacked Christmas."* As we read about Herod being disturbed—and all of Jerusalem with him—it's a sober reminder of how easily the true meaning can be pushed aside.

Reflection: What might be threatening to hijack your Christmas this year?

I don't imagine Herod being very impressed with the prophecy from [Micah 5:2,4](#). I picture alarm bells going off in his head instead. Herod's reaction is predictable, but what breaks my heart is that none of Israel's religious leaders went to Bethlehem.

Reflection: Lord, search my heart and reveal any offensive way that may be within me.

## The Gifts

As Christians, we can see the symbolic meaning in the gifts.

*Gold- Royalty*

*Frankincense- Divinity*

*Myrrh- the Passion and Burial*

But from a practical standpoint, we also know these gifts would have helped this young, poor couple in many ways. These gifts are lavish, fitting, and rich with symbolic meaning. But the gift that stands out most to me is their *extravagant journey*—traveling such a great distance simply to worship the King of the Jews.

Reflection: What are you giving Jesus this Christmas?

Bonus: Yesterday, reading [Matthew 26:6-13](#) deeply enriched this passage for me. Near the end of His life, a woman brought Jesus a lavish, extravagant gift. When others

criticized her, Jesus responded with this jaw-dropping statement: *“Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”*

The majority of people who were close to the Kingdom of Heaven at His birth missed it. Near the end of His life, even His closest companions still struggled to recognize His worthiness of every extravagant gift. And today—in the USA and all around the world—the majority of people are still missing the Savior behind the global celebration of Christmas. In my own city, it’s easy to look at all the churches and forget that most of the people around me are still outside the Kingdom of Heaven.

Friends, no matter the time of the year, He is worthy of our lavish gifts of worship.