

The King of Kings - Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, it's Communion Sunday today and that means we'll be putting our full focus on the life of Christ as recorded for us in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 through 12. But before we get started, I want to briefly review what we've already learned about who Jesus is through our previous studies in the gospels, which have only gotten us through day 40 of Jesus' life! And yet, I think you'll be pretty amazed about what has already been revealed about the true identity of this 40-day old Child. Are you ready?

We've learned that Jesus is the eternal Word...having no beginning and no end and telling us through his life and words what our Three-in-One God is like in human terms we can all understand. We've learned that Jesus is the agent of creation, through whom all things in the universe came into being. Jesus is the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the God the Father. Jesus is the true Light, the Sunrise from on high who brings light into a very dark world. We've learned that he is the Lord of the universe and that his very name, Jesus, means "Yahweh is salvation." We've learned that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. He is the One who would accomplish redemption, paying the purchase price to free human beings from slavery to sin and darkness. He's the One who saves people from their sins. Jesus is the One who guides our feet into the way of peace. He is Immanuel...God with Us! He is the Savior, the Messiah, the Christ, God's Anointed One. He is a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of God's people, Israel! I'd say Jesus is no ordinary child, wouldn't you? And we're just getting started!

Well, today we're going to learn even more about who Jesus is and how God the Father continued to tell the world about him. We're also going to learn something about the importance of seeking God and paying attention to what he's doing. Let's begin by reading the whole passage and then we'll start working

our way through it together. Will you stand with me as we read God's Word in Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 through 12?

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "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." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

***6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"***

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word. You may be seated.

II. THE ARRIVAL OF THE STAR-FOLLOWING MAGI AND THEIR CITY-WIDE SEARCH FOR THE KING OF THE JEWS (vs. 1-2)

Well, our study begins today with a group of star-following magi or wise men from the east (very likely the Babylon area) arriving in Jerusalem in search of the

King of the Jews. And contrary to popular opinion and most of the nativity sets we put up at Christmas, there were not necessarily 3 of these wise men and they didn't arrive at the stable on the day of Jesus' birth. More likely, based on what King Herod does in verse 16 of Matthew chapter 2, Jesus was between 1 and 2 years old by the time the magi arrived and he was living in a house in Bethlehem with his parents. In looking at the context, it seems that after Jesus was presented in the temple at 40 days old, Mary and Joseph briefly returned with him to Nazareth but then moved themselves and their belongings to Bethlehem to raise Jesus in the City of David.

Now we don't know much about these magi and who they were, but we can conclude a couple things about them from the text. First, they clearly had some knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and were aware from those Scriptures of a coming King of the Jews who would be worthy of worship. Secondly, they were evidently men who were paying attention to the stars and constellations and had seen a unique star that they associated with the birth of this King of the Jews. They were so certain of this in fact that they dropped everything and traveled a great distance to see this King, worship him and offer him costly gifts. Throughout the history of the Old Testament period, it seems that people "from the east" were associated with great learning and wisdom. In describing Solomon's great wisdom from God in 1 Kings, chapter 4, verses 29 to 30, the writer of 1 Kings says this:

29 Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. 30 Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.

So as far as human wisdom goes, people from the east and from Egypt were recognized as possessing the most. However, people from the east were also well known for astrology and divination and fortune telling based on the stars, practices which were clearly identified by God in Scripture as unacceptable for God's people. Trying to use the stars to predict the future and determine the destinies of people and to serve as objects of worship is demonic and another twisting by the devil of something God had intended as good into something that leads people away from worshiping and trusting the one true God.

In Genesis we're told that one of the original purposes of stars was to serve as signs or markers. In Genesis 1, verses 14 through 16, God said:

14 ... "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; 15 and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. 16 God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also.

Stars apparently were put in place to mark the passage of time, to communicate truths about God and what he's doing, and to give light on the earth. Psalm 19, verses 1 through 4, describe it this way:

***1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.
4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.***

God himself also talks about the constellations by name in his conversation with Job. God says in Job, chapter 38, verses 31 to 33:

***31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
Or loose the cords of Orion?
32 "Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
And guide the Bear with her satellites?
33 "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
Or fix their rule over the earth?"***

There definitely seems to be a God-honoring purpose for the stars where we can see God's glory and learn something about him and what he's doing. This is a much different thing than worshiping the stars, trying to foretell the future through them, living in fear of them, or trying to use them to control or figure out

a person's destiny. That would be astrology which is always condemned in Scripture as demonic and actually carried the death penalty under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. Listen to what the Lord says in Jeremiah 10, verses 2 and 3, about this type of use of the stars, which in its essence is idolatry, or worship of a false god:

***2 Thus says the Lord,
"Do not learn the way of the nations,
And do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens
Although the nations are terrified by them;
3 For the customs of the peoples are delusion;***

Trying to live your life by the stars is a delusion and amounts to worshipping a false god.

Well, we don't have much information about how these magi arriving in Jerusalem were using the stars, but based on the way God was communicating with them and the fact that they wanted to worship the King of the Jews rather than the star itself, I'm going to conclude that they were involved in a godly use of the stars...simply seeing God's glory in them and paying attention to what God was communicating through them about his eternal plan to bring the great King of Kings, the Messiah, to rescue the enslaved children of mankind. These magi also seemed to have been studying the Hebrew Scriptures and had been keeping their eyes open with expectation for the coming of this promised King of Kings. And when God wrote in the sky that the King had been born, these magi left it all to go worship him! Is your attention to God and what he's doing and your willingness to follow his lead wherever it takes you as central in your life as it was for these magi?

Well, it seems that when the magi arrived in Jerusalem they assumed that the Jewish people, who knew the Hebrew Scriptures better than anyone else, would have noticed that very unique star they had noticed way back in their own country. The magi seem to have fully expected that the Jews had already noticed the star and identified their King. As they arrived in Jerusalem they started asking around: ***"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."*** On finding out that no one seemed to know anything about the King or his star, I imagine them saying or thinking:

Are you serious? You really didn't notice that amazing star we've been watching for over a year? You have no idea about a King who's been born? Have you forgotten about that passage spoken by Balaam in the book of Numbers describing your coming Messiah as a star?

You see, way back before the Israelites even entered the Promised Land, Balaam had spoken these prophetic words recorded in Numbers, chapter 24, verse 16 and 17:

16 The oracle of him who hears the words of God, And knows the knowledge of the Most High, Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered. 17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.

This passage was widely recognized as Messianic by the Jewish people of the time and described Messiah as a star coming forth from Jacob, a ruler rising from Israel. The magi must have been dumbfounded when they arrived in Jerusalem and found that the people were clueless about the star and the birth of their King.

III. A TROUBLED KING AND CITY MAKING A CONNECTION TO MESSIAH (v. 3)

Well, word quickly spread to King Herod that an entourage of wise men had arrived in Jerusalem looking for the King of the Jews whose birth they claimed had been announced by a unique star in the sky. The text tells us that this news was deeply troubling to King Herod and also to the rest of the people living in Jerusalem. And interestingly we see that King Herod quickly comes to the conclusion that this King must be none other than the promised Messiah the Jews were always talking about. And in his actions that follow, we observe that he clearly believes and takes seriously this news about Messiah's arrival. In other words, he believes the Hebrew Scriptures. And yet, his belief is not a belief in Messiah that would save him, because his heart intention was not to worship and align himself with the Savior, but rather to destroy him and prevent any challenge to his own Kingship. He wanted to remain on the throne and had no interest in giving it up to the King of Kings...much like most of humanity!

IV. A LOOK INTO PROPHECY FOR THE BIRTHPLACE OF MESSIAH (vs. 4-6)

Well, Herod doesn't waste any time trying to locate this King of the Jews. He calls together all the chief priests and scribes to find out what the Hebrew Scriptures say about where Messiah was to be born. In response the religious leaders uniformly declare, based on Micah 5, verses 2 through 5, that Messiah will come out of Bethlehem. In that Old Testament passage, the prophet Micah declared this:

2 But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity."
3 Therefore He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.
4 And He will arise and shepherd His flock
In the strength of the Lord,
In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.
5 This One will be our peace.

Based on this passage the Jewish leaders had identified, Herod had good reason to feel that his kingship was threatened. This promised ruler of Israel would be One whose goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. He would arise from the tribe of Judah and shepherd his flock, and he would be great to the ends of the earth.

Well at least Herod could now narrow down the city where this King had been born and he was determined to do whatever was necessary to snuff out his life. Never mind that it would involve fighting against God himself. A hunger for power can bring great blindness, delusional thinking and tremendous errors in judgment as we'll see in Herod's future actions.

V. THE SINISTER PLAN OF A THREATENED EARTHLY KING WHO BELIEVES IN BUT REJECTS MESSIAH (vs. 7-8)

Well, after determining the birthplace of the Messiah with help from the chief priests and scribes, Herod concocts a sinister plan to do away with the young King. He secretly calls back the magi and finds out the exact time the star had first appeared, which must have been up to 2 years earlier based on what Herod does in verse 16. Then Herod instructs the magi to go to Bethlehem and carefully look for the Child. When they find him, they were to report back to Herod, so he too could come worship him.

Sounds like a convenient plan for Herod, doesn't it? The wise men can go do the legwork of searching through Bethlehem to locate the child and then Herod can just send his henchmen to do the dirty deed. It sounds very efficient and airtight and I'm sure Herod used his best acting skills to convince the magi that he simply wanted to worship the King too. The only problem was, Herod seems to have forgotten that the one true God was involved and had a very high interest in preserving the life of his little King of Kings. Even the best of human plans don't stand a chance against the all-knowing, all-powerful, Lord of the universe!

VI. THE GUIDING STAR LEADS THE MAGI TO THE KING RESULTING IN GREAT JOY! (vs 9-10)

Well, after their secret meeting with Herod, the wise men set out in a southerly direction from Jerusalem to the little town of Bethlehem and the star continued to guide them until it seemed to stop right over the house where Jesus was living with Joseph and Mary. And notice it was a house, not a stable!

Now throughout history there have been enormous debates about the star that guided the wise men...whether it was a conjunction of planets, a comet, a guiding angel, a special star or light created by God for the occasion, and I'm sure many other theories. Many of you have seen the movie, *The Star of Bethlehem*, and I think it has some compelling evidence that it may have been a conjunction of planets that caused what appeared to be an extremely bright star. But God who created everything out of nothing by the word of his power, would have had no problem creating a special phenomenon for the occasion if he so desired. There's not need to come up with a natural explanation of how it occurred. In fact, the

Bible is full of miraculous works of God that have no natural explanation. And in reality, nothing we see in the universe is the result of random natural forces, but instead all things and all living beings are creative works of God that are even now being held together by the word of his power. Do you believe that today? According to Hebrews 1, verse 3, the entire universe and every living being is right now being upheld by the active power of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

What I think we can conclude about the star, is that whatever it was, it's guidance was clear enough to give the wise men confidence that they had arrived at the exact house where the King of the Jews was living. We see this in how they responded when the star stopped over the house where Jesus lived. We're told that when they saw it stop over the house, "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!" I don't know if you could come up with a more intense description of the joy they felt at that moment. They not only rejoiced...they rejoiced **exceedingly** and with **great** joy! The star had somehow made it clear to them that they had arrived at their destination and were about to meet the King of Kings!

VII. THE HOLY KING OF KINGS WORTHY OF WORSHIP AND COSTLY OFFERINGS (v. 11)

Their confidence that they had found the right house is also displayed in what happened when they went in. Rather than trying to figure out if this really was the right boy, they simply fell to the ground and worshiped him and Mary did nothing to stop them. She too knew that Jesus was the King of Kings and worthy of all worship and adoration! God was continuing to show her as well that Jesus is the One.

The magi then opened up the costly treasures they had brought with them all the way from their homeland in the east and offered gold, frankincense and myrrh as gifts to Jesus. We don't know from the text whether the magi themselves attached special significance to the gifts they brought or if they were just costly gifts they thought appropriate for the occasion. However, God may very well have ordained some significance to these gifts that were brought to Jesus. As I considered what that might be, one thing I noticed is that they all have a significant place in the Jewish temple, the place set apart as holy for the presence of God himself. Gold, of course, covered nearly everything in the temple. Frankincense is a resin that was used to make the only incense permitted on the

altar in the temple. Myrrh was used to make holy anointing oil used to set things apart for God. These gifts, whether intended to be so by the magi or not, seem to be more indicators of who this child is...the Holy One of God...God himself dwelling with us...perfect and holy and set apart...worthy of our humble worship and the offering of our very lives!

In our study of the gospels so far, we've twice seen Jesus referred to as the Light of the World...the Sunrise from on high...God's Light shining into our darkness. Well, I want you to listen to one more passage from Isaiah 60, verses 1 through 7, which speaks prophetically of this Light of the World and how people from the east will bring gold and frankincense to him. I think we see a partial fulfillment of this prophecy in what we've looked at today, but it will be fully fulfilled in all its glory when the King of Kings finally sets up his kingly rule on earth in the future. I just love the joy and gladness it describes for those who will come into the light of the Light of the World. Listen carefully as I read it and imagine what it will be like when this is fully fulfilled:

1 "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2 "For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the Lord will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. 3 "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 "Lift up your eyes round about and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 "Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 "A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the Lord. 7 "All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you, The rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; They will go up with acceptance on My altar, And I shall glorify My glorious house.

Come, Lord Jesus! Amen?! What a beautiful picture of what awaits when Jesus returns!

VIII. THE DEPARTURE OF THE MAGI (v. 12)

Well, after falling down in worship of Jesus and offering their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, the magi returned to their homeland with hearts full of joy. And God thwarted the sinister plan of Herod the King by revealing Herod's true intentions to the magi in a dream. With that knowledge given to them miraculously by God they returned home by a different route to avoid discovery by Herod.

IX. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Well as we wrap up today and tie together what God is communicating to us through this passage, I would sum it up in one sentence this way: **Jesus Christ is the eternal King of Kings, the Messiah, worthy of all worship and honor and set apart as holy, and God announced his arrival to the world right on schedule through a unique star and a group of unlikely wise men from the east who had been paying attention to Scripture and keeping their eyes open with expectation.** And we can add to our understanding of who Jesus is the following: He's the King of the Jews; He's a ruler who shepherds God's people; He's holy and set apart and worthy of all the worship we can offer; He's God in human flesh.

There are quite a few applications we can make to our lives from this account of the wise men and their encounter with the King of Kings. Hopefully you've already made some. First of all and what really stood out to me, was the contrast between the wise men and the Jewish religious leaders. The wise men show us that studying Scripture with belief and expectation is extremely important and we need to be sober and alert in order to recognize what God is doing, what he's communicating to us and where he wants to lead us. The wise men were paying attention to Scripture and to what God was doing in the world; they were believing the prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures; and they were ready to drop everything to pursue the King of Kings when they saw the sign of his birth. This was in sharp contrast to the chief priests and scribes who were supposed to know the Hebrew Scriptures better than anyone else and yet were total blind to what God was doing. Apparently they were just reading and studying the Scriptures as a religious duty and weren't approaching them with humility, a listening ear, and a willingness to follow God's direction.

What this tells us is that it's possible to know and study Scripture as a religious duty or obligation and miss the obvious things God is trying to show us. How can we keep from being like the chief priests and scribes? Well, we need to be careful to approach Scripture with belief that it really is living and active and true to its core; we need to be alert and attentive as read it, expecting God to communicate with us; and we need to have a willingness to follow the direction God gives us and put into practice the principles he shares with us. God communicates with those who are seeking him and have ears to hear and are willing to obey!

A second application is that God is not limited by what we think is scientifically or naturally possible. Miracles happen! All of life is in fact a miracle, and the sooner we recognize that our every breath and the continued existence of the universe is dependent on the sustaining power of Jesus Christ, the better. Are you living as if that's true right now or do you kind of feel like you only need Jesus occasionally when things get hard? Jesus is intimately and actively involved in every aspect of your existence and the existence of every person on the planet. As such he is worthy of our worship and the offering of all we have to him. This is the only sure path to joy and fulfillment of the purpose for which we were created: to glorify God and live in joy-filled relationship with him!

Thirdly, Jesus is our shepherd and our peace. If you know anything about sheep, you know they desperately need a shepherd! We should never try to live life or find our way without him. Instead, let's trust ourselves to the Good Shepherd and follow his lead. How do we do this? We talk to him continually, diligently seek his guidance through God's Word and prayer, and we stay with the flock...seeking him together with other sheep of his fold in the church.

And a final application is this: Belief that Jesus exists and is the Messiah is not enough to save us. We need to accept him as our Lord and Savior. Herod believed that Jesus is the Messiah, but he rejected him as Lord and Savior and missed out on salvation and new life. The Jewish religious leaders and a large majority of the Jewish people also rejected their King. Instead of paying attention to the clues provided for them by the magi to lead them to their King, they missed out on his salvation and ended up crucifying their King instead of crowning him as he deserved.

We're going to close today by remembering what Jesus Christ ended up doing for us on the cross as he was crucified instead of crowned. And yet in this terrible injustice, he accomplished salvation for all who will repent of their sin, believe in his death and resurrection, and invite him to be their personal Savior and Lord! Let's remember him together and proclaim this good news!