

New Year Worshiper

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[0 : 00] Just as they're coming up to read, just to remind you of something else I forgot to say. One life, what's it all about?

Christianity Explored will be starting that in February. The details there of the course are on the back. There's flyers there. You can pick one of these up. Come if you can.

And if there's somebody who you would like to bring with you to that, even better. You might like to invite a friend or somebody who you work with who would be interested in coming along. So you can pick those up there.

So the first reading is from Psalm 95, which is on page 602. Psalm 95, page 602.

If anybody would like a Bible, if you haven't got one, just put your hand up and Jonathan will bring it to you. Psalm 95, verses 1 to 7, and Shane is going to read that.

[1 : 09] Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord.

Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extoll him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down and worship.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Our next reading is in Matthew chapter 2, which is page 966 in the Church Bibles.

Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 to 12. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

[2 : 31] We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written. But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and make a careful search for the child.

As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

[3 : 44] And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. So please keep your Bibles open at that passage from Matthew chapter 2, 1 to 12.

I'm not sure of the dates there. In verse 1 it talks about after Jesus was born. I'm not sure of the length of time.

We celebrated his birth last Sunday, so I think we're well on track by looking at a passage like this, whatever the actual date after it was.

We'll see what it has to say. Let's pray and ask for God's help. Amen. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. For he is our God.

[5 : 23] We are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Father, we come as your people under your care right now as we listen to your word, asking that your word would speak into our lives.

It would teach us more of who you are. And it would teach us of what it is to worship you correctly. How we should worship you with all of our lives. Teach us to be a people who worship you well. And we pray for your help.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, today starts the beginning of a new year. So a happy new year again to you all.

So I wonder for this new year, what do you hope to do? What are your plans? Maybe you've already talked about it with people.

[6 : 34] What would you like to achieve in 2012? What things would you like to be different? Or would you want to change? Well, I'm sure we all have dreams and desires for this coming new year.

Well, what we do and where we spend our time all depends on what or who we worship. Our worship shapes and directs our life.

In fact, our worship is going to set the agenda for the new year. Matthew's account that we had read to us in chapter 2 introduces us to the whole theme of worship.

And in this section, we meet two kinds of people. We have the Magi, who are well-educated people who've come from the East. And we also have Herod, a man of great influence and power.

Both these groups are worshippers. The difference is what or who they worship. The Magi, look at verse 2, say that they've seen his star, that's the star of Jesus in the East, and have come to worship Jesus.

[7 : 54] Herod also wants to know where Jesus is. Look at verse 8. He says, Go and make a careful search of the child.

As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. But as we'll discover, the worship of Herod is actually directed elsewhere.

The point is, they are both worshippers. And crucially, what or who they worship will shape and direct their life.

Their worship sets the agenda for the kind of people they will be. And our worship is going to set the agenda for the kind of people we're going to be for 2012.

You see, the truth is, whether we're religious people or irreligious people, we are all born to worship. The author, Richard Keyes, put it like this.

[8 : 57] I've got it up on the screen so you can follow through. He says this, When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing. We worship anything.

We do not just eliminate God. We erect God's substitutes in his place. A God's substitute can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero, anything, can substitute for God.

You see, in our hearts, we are always actively worshipping. We are always trusting, desiring, following, loving, serving, someone, or something else.

So when we are thinking about worship, don't just think about religious activity, or church services, or coming together on a Sunday morning, and think, this is worship.

Yes, it is a part of worship, but worship is so much bigger and broader than that. Worship is about where your heart is. What you give your life to, or who is most important to you, will become the object of your worship.

[10 : 21] Whatever you love the most, whatever you trust the most, will become what you serve. Because we are all born to worship, and we will all worship someone, or something.

Now, while we are born to worship, we are told that there is only one, who has been born to be worshipped. And that is the whole point of Matthew in chapter 2.

Look at verse 1. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.

Herod has been appointed king over all Judea, by the Roman Senate. They put their man in place, and his brief was simple.

He was told to keep the peace, and to squash any revolt, made by the suppressed Jews. That was his job. Now we are told in verse 2, that these Magi have come, and they are asking the question, where is the one who has been born, king of the Jews?

[11:40] Well, they should know that. It is supposed to be Herod. But they say, we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him. So we have got a bit of a problem, haven't we?

In a couple of verses, we have been introduced to two kings, both claiming to be king over the same people, and both claiming the people's worship.

But there is a difference between these two people. Herod was made king by people. Jesus was born a king by God.

Because that is what Matthew has introduced us to already. If you go back to chapter 1, verse 1, we have a record of the genealogy, the whole line of Jesus.

And verse 1 simply reads this, a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David. Jesus comes from the line of David.

[12:39] David was the great king of Israel in the past, the greatest king they ever had, and Jesus comes straight from that pedigree. But as we read through chapter 1, we learn that Jesus is so much more than just a human king.

In verse 23, we read this, that the virgin will be with child, will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So Jesus is the God King, the eternal ruler over the entire universe. And nobody else can claim that title or position.

Kim Il Jung or Kim Il Ung, as he is now the new leader, nobody, whoever you are in this entire world, cannot claim that title. Therefore, Jesus is introduced to us here as one to be worshipped.

And we are born to worship him. In fact, Jesus makes it clear when he was tempted by Satan. If you just go across to chapter 4 of Matthew's Gospel, this is after Jesus has grown up and before his ministry starts, he finds himself out in the wilderness being tempted by Satan.

[14:02] And we pick it up in verse 8 of chapter 4. Verse 8 of chapter 4.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and all their splendour. All this I will give to you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me.

Just serve me. Just acknowledge who I am and I will give you all of this. It's all yours. Right now, if you bow down and worship me. Jesus said to him, Away from me, Satan.

For it is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Of course, the implication is Jesus is God and so we worship and serve Jesus only.

So we're introduced to the one who is born to be worshipped. So let's have a look at Herod and the Magi and see how their worship sets the agenda for their life.

[15:20] First we're going to look at Herod and false worship. Herod was doing so well, getting on with his job of being king and ruling the people.

Then these Magi arrive claiming that there's another king. Verse 3, chapter 2. So when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.

To Herod, this was not just a threat to his kingship and to his kingdom, but this was a threat to his own personal desire for control and power.

And something needed to be done. Verse 7. So King Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him.

[16:22] But, verse 12. Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the Magi returned to their country by another route.

Verse 16. When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Such was his desire for personal power and control that he would go to as extreme lengths as murdering little baby boys.

You see, the arrival of Jesus, the God King, confronts and challenges us all.

Not just Herod. His arrival into this world confronts us all. And it asks us the question, who or what will we worship this year?

[17:36] Will we worship the one born to be worshipped or will we erect our own God substitute? Will we put something or someone in place of Jesus and serve that?

For Herod, he chose to worship power and control. For him, his position and his status were the priority in his life.

He could not bear being knocked off his perch. So he worshipped his status and his position. But the problem of worshipping something or someone other than God is it will destroy you and break you.

Isn't that what happened to Herod? His personal desires began to control him and to consume him in the most terrible of ways.

[18 : 38] He became a very bitter and an angry man. Jealous and frightened. All because this little baby was born claiming to be king and it frightened him and he got angry and it all came out in the destruction and the murder of these little tiny babies.

You see like Herod we can erect our own God's substitutes. We worship and serve other things and other people and they can be all sorts of things.

We can make our work our God's substitute. We can make money the priority in our life. We can make our family our children the very centre of who we are.

They consume us they drive us. When we wake up in the morning time these things can be our immediate thought where our thoughts go to and this is what gives us meaning and purpose in life. We even look to money and family and work and hobbies for our pleasure and our happiness. We look to them to give us something. them to be but sooner or later rather than give to you what you want they begin to take from you.

[20 : 04] They begin to control you and to consume you. And when these things are challenged when we feel that like we're losing our grip on them or we begin to lose our hold on our family or our money or our work and we somehow don't have it together we become jealous and we get frightened because we're not in control anymore.

And when they don't deliver or give to us everything that we want we get bitter and we become angry because we don't have it what we want.

And eventually those feelings and emotions of jealousy and fear and anger and bitterness they don't just become feelings and emotions they become actions in uncontrollable ways.

Just what happened to Herod. This fear this jealousy this anger that he was feeling inside just broke out in uncontrollable ways when he went out and killed all those people.

We are born to worship and Jesus was born to be worshipped. But when we worship someone else or something else it will break us and it will destroy us and we will begin to live in ways that we thought we would never live.

[21 : 37] So false worship will destroy you and break you. But then there's true worship and we see this with the Magi.

The Magi were not particularly religious people in fact they were astronomers. They were people who studied the stars and they looked for direction and guidance from creation.

And like Herod God also confronted and challenged the Magi. Were they going to continue to worship creation or would they turn and worship the Creator?

You see in ways we're not told God led them to Jesus Christ. Look at verse 9. After they had heard the King they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star they were overjoyed. these guys didn't have a Bible they didn't go to prayer meetings or they didn't go to church but when they were confronted with the truth by God in the way that God communicated to them that Jesus was born to be worshipped look at their response verse 11 on coming to the house when they saw the child with his mother Mary they bowed down and worshipped him.

[23 : 08] their whole life and livelihood was caught up in the practice of magic and astrology this is what they looked to for meaning and purpose this is where they sought their pleasure and their happiness from but when they were confronted with the claims and the truth of Jesus they let go of their God substitutes and they made Jesus Christ the sole object of their worship Jesus became their priority Jesus became their greatest desire they went on the search until they found him because Jesus was of most value to them this is what true worship is all about rather than break you and destroy you as a person it will save you and it will satisfy you that's what true worship will do it will save you and satisfy you when Herod tried to find out about the king who was to be born he consulted his religious advisors look at verse 4 when he had called together all the people's chief priests and the teachers of the law he asked them where the

Christ where this king was to be born well they looked up their bibles they knew their bibles and they said in Bethlehem in Judea they replied for this is what was written in the prophets but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judea for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel this new king that was promised in the past through the prophets this king was going to be a shepherd king not just of sheep but of people and we get a wonderful picture of what this shepherd king will be like you can turn back to Ezekiel keep your finger in Matthew's gospel and go back to Ezekiel and I haven't got a page number so the first one there could help us all by finding it it's not too far back Ezekiel chapter 34 thank you it's on page 865

Ezekiel chapter 34 so the prophets tell us that he would be a shepherd of the people and here we get a bigger picture of what this shepherd king will be like it's a wonderful passage a great description Ezekiel 34 and we'll start at verse 11 for this is what the sovereign lord says I myself will search for my sheep and look after him as a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them so will I look after my sheep I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on the day of the clouds and darkness verse 14 I will tend them in a good pasture and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land there they will lie down in good grazing land and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel

I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down declares the sovereign lord I will search for the lost and bring back the strays I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak but the sleek and the strong I will destroy I will shepherd the flock with justice and in case we're unsure as to who this shepherd is well we're told in verse 23 he says I will place over them one shepherd my servant David and he will tend them and he will tend them and be their shepherd of course we know that that David Jesus is the true David he is the ultimate David the true king Jesus is the God king who comes born into the world to be the true shepherd and he is the one who's entered into our world to save us to do everything that shepherd is being said he would do he's going to rescue us he's going to tend to us to care for us to provide for us he's the one who's going to save us from the emptiness of all our

God substitutes he is the one who's going to satisfy us with all that is good and beautiful everything that we need and desire is found in the shepherd king the Lord Jesus so when we begin to look at things and people the things that we worship how many of those things and people are like this shepherd how many of those things and people that we worship and give our time to search for the lost and bind up the injured and strengthen the weak and care and tend and provide who are faithful all those other things will destroy you and break you but Jesus the shepherd has come to save you and to satisfy you and to fill you with everything that is good and beautiful and all that we long for and desire is found in him in fact

[29 : 21] Matthew's gospel will go on to tell us that this shepherd the Lord Jesus will be slaughtered on a cross he will die for you he's going to give his life for you he will take the blame for all the wrong that you've done so that you can have true eternal life a satisfied life a full life a complete life that is only found in Christ you see we are born to worship and Jesus was born to be worshipped and when we worship Jesus he will save you and he will satisfy you and give to you all that you long for and all that you desire so what is our worship going to look like in this new year how can we reorientate our lives to be a people who are going to worship correctly well look at verse 11 because

I think this is a way in which we can worship and the way we should worship look at verse 11 it says on coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him and they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh the first thing they do as they come is they bowed down they saw the child and they bowed down and worshipped him it's an act of submission to one who is supreme it's this outward expression if you bow down to someone it's an outward expression of an inward reality that you are saying that Jesus Christ has complete authority over my life he rules my work he rules my family he rules my children he rules my money he rules my heart he is number one he is the priority he is the one who deserves first of everything it is nothing less than a genuine repentance for the magi were worshipping other things and in other ways but now they come to Jesus and they bow down and worship him they turn from loving and following and serving other things and instead they now love and serve Jesus it's an act of repentance bowing down in worship

is repentance it's turning from our own plans our own priorities our own desires for this year and no doubt we've all thought of what we want to do and what we want to happen for this year what do what do I want to happen in my life we need to turn from our own plans and priorities and make Jesus our goal and our aim bow down in worship to him surrender to him all of our plans all of our ambitions and make him supreme ruler over everything that is the first step in what true worship looks like the second step of true worship is the other half of repentance which is faith they presented their gifts look at the rest of verse 11 they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh these gifts were not buy two get one free nothing like that these gifts were of great value and great cost gold frankincense and myrrh were of great value not everybody had these they were tremendous costs in other words they symbolised that Jesus the God King deserves everything that they had not just their possessions but it's symbolically saying you deserve my whole life everything that I have all that I am it belongs to you I think it's nothing less than genuine faith because here they were giving of all that they had of their wealth to King Jesus in other words they were putting aside something else to say that in Jesus we find everything that we desire more precious than gold much better than anything else we could ever find or have we find everything we need in Jesus it's an act of faith knowing that trusting and desiring and loving Jesus above all else is going to truly satisfy you and save you is what faith is about and that's what true worship is it's not just something we do once in our life but we do it continually and we will need to do it throughout 2012 continually repenting of the God substitutes that we erect and put them to one side and bow down to Christ and present to him our lives and to find in him that he will satisfy us and he will fill us with all that we ever need as we step out into 2012 we're all going to be worshipping people we were born to worship and we're all going to worship someone or something whether we go to church or whether we don't we will all worship and whether our worship is true or if our worship is true we will experience joy and peace and love and hope and satisfaction in the deepest of ways even in the most difficult of circumstances and I do not know what is going to happen to us in 2012 but if our worship is true even in the most difficult of times we will experience joy and peace and hope and love but if our worship is false the things that we desire the things that we want and we fill our lives with it will just lead to anger to bitterness to fear to jealousy and it will lead to uncontrollable actions where we will say things and do things we never thought possible direct our worship to Jesus he alone was born to be worshipped so let's together individually and as a church worship him for 2012 and make him our desire and our priority let's pray together in the quietness let's just use those two images of repentance and faith think of the things that we do worship the things and the people let us repent and to turn from them right now the things that consume us and control us and let us turn and bow and submit to the

[37 : 39] Lord Jesus and let us turn in faith offering our lives and all that we have trusting that in Jesus we find our deepest needs are met in Jesus we are completely filled and satisfied in Jesus we will lack nothing but we will have all that we want and all that we need Lord please will you reorientate our lives around you help us to worship you for this year help us to worship you with our lives pinpoint the areas that we need to change give us the grace be that kind gentle and caring shepherd rescue us help us in our weakness come to us and restore us and gently lead us in your paths for your ways are always good and they're always beautiful and they're always right help us to worship you and you alone we pray this in

Jesus name Amen amen good how a man has