

Matthew Ch2v1-23 - A New Exodus

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[0 : 00] In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Cyrenius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to their own town to register.

Yes, it is John. Sorry, it's Matthew chapter 2.

Page 966 instead, okay? 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?

We saw his star when it rose, and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together to call the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them, Where the Messiah would be born?

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet had written. But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judea.

[1 : 34] For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod called the Magi secretly, and found out from them the exact kind of star that appeared.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully 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 when it rose went ahead of them, until it stopped over the place where the child walked. 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 someone's gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

[2 : 41] Get up, he said. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord said through the prophet, Out of Egypt I called my son.

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.

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled, A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel.

[3 : 56] For those who were trying to take the child's life are dead. So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea, in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

So was fulfilled what was fed through the prophet, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Thanks Kirsty, sorry for the whoopsy daisy at the beginning. There we are. Yes, I do make mistakes, I know it's hard to believe, but we do.

Let's pray. Father again, we thank you for this account of the Lord Jesus Christ, written so many years ago, recorded for us, so that we can read and learn and come to understand more of who Jesus is, and the kind of response that is demanded of us.

[5 : 37] And so we pray that you would help us to listen carefully, to apply it to our life by your Spirit, and that indeed we would respond as you would have us respond.

So be our teacher, by your Spirit and through your word, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

So what did you think of him? Well, I really warmed to him. I thought he was very genuine. Seems to be great company.

Well, that's not the impression I got. I thought he was a bit weird. More interested in talking about himself. See, we make judgments about people all the time, don't we?

A new person joins our work team or somebody moves into our neighbourhood, and immediately we begin to form an opinion. We judge them on how they look, how they talk, what they're like, where they come from, and from all of this we decide whether we'd like to spend time with them or not.

[6 : 54] Well, at the very start of Matthew's Gospel, we've been introduced to Jesus, God's promised King who has come to bring about the new creation of our lives.

So what are your first impressions? What do you think about Jesus so far? Because in chapter 2 we are introduced to more people.

Two different people who both form very different opinions. For Herod, Jesus is a threat to be destroyed.

As for the Magi, Jesus is a king to be worshipped. Two very different judgments about the same person.

And the big question that we need to ask ourselves is, what's my impression? Is Jesus a threat or is he a king?

[7 : 58] Well, let's get into chapter 2 and see. First, is he a threat to be destroyed?

We're first introduced to Herod in verse 1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod. Herod had been made king of Judea, king of the Jewish people by the occupying Romans.

And of course, when you became king, it gave you a God-like status. But all of a sudden, Herod is faced with a threat. And so are we.

First, Jesus confronts our autonomy. Herod has a knock on the door. He has some guests.

Verse 1, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem. Now the Magi weren't just stargazers, but they were well-respected astrologers.

[9 : 05] They were people of great influence and great authority. And they came to Herod and asked, where is the one who's been born king of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Well, we can hear Herod's unspoken response, can't we? What? What do you mean, where is the one who's been born king of the Jews?

I'm the king of the Jews. It's like us going to Ars and Ucturon and having a private audience with Michael D.

and sitting down over a cup of tea with him and saying, excuse me, Michael, I wonder if you could tell me where I could find the president. At the very least, it's disrespectful and arrogant, isn't it?

And for Herod, for somebody to come into his town, into his palace, and ask where the king of the Jews was, well, that was equal to treason.

[10 : 11] Verse 3, when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. Herod was seething.

He was raging. Up from his seat, throwing papers in the air, chucking whatever was nearest at hand against the wall. Prominent officials coming from another country have come to worship the king, and it's not him.

This was not good news for anyone, especially for the people of Jerusalem. History tells us that Herod had killed wives of his, and knocked off some of his brothers, because he thought they were a threat and there was whispering going on in the corridors.

Well, if he could do that to his nearest and dearest, what do you think he could do to the people?

You see, the problem for Herod was, this was all very personal.

Herod has been confronted with the reality that though he's been appointed as king, though he's acting as ruling king, he is not the king, and he doesn't like it.

[11:28] Now, none of us may have the grand title of being king, but we sure do like to act as king, don't we?

We've all appointed self as king, and we rule our lives as if I am the king. This is my life, and I'm going to live it the way I please.

We've claimed a godlike status. You see, the coming of Jesus confronts not just Herod, but he confronts you and me.

He claims an authority over us. He demands complete loyalty from us. Jesus' kingship disturbs us. It's a threat to our autonomy. But Jesus also, in his coming, reveals our worship, or who we worship.

[12:37] Look back at verse 2, the Magi had come with a very specific purpose. They declare, we have come to worship Jesus.

And now Herod wants to join in, doesn't he, verse 8. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, oh, go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.

But the truth is, it's not really the worship of Jesus that Herod is concerned about. He has other things that he likes to worship. You see, worship is not just reserved for the religious.

Worship is something we all do. Worship literally means to serve or to bow down to.

It comes from the word worth or worthy. In other words, it's giving value and honour to someone or to something.

[13:42] So whatever we consider to be of highest value, whatever we consider to be of greater honour, that's what we serve.

That's what we bow down to. That's what we will worship. And for Herod, the thing that was of greater worth to him was power and control.

And he would do whatever it takes to get it. Power is what he serves. Control is what he bows to. This is his worship.

The question for us is, what do you worship? Just think about that for a minute. Whatever you consider to be your highest value.

What is the thing that you treasure the most, that you can't bear to think that if it was taken away from me, I couldn't live. Whatever you consider to be your greatest honour.

[14:46] It could be a person, someone close to you. It could be your work, a dream, a desire. Whatever occupies your thinking when you're daydreaming, perhaps even right now.

That's what you worship. That's what you give your life to. Well, Psalm 95 reminds us, or as we read in Revelation earlier, that God alone is to be worshipped.

This is what Psalm 95 says, 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. And Jesus comes, doesn't he? As the God-man.

Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 23. Chapter 1, verse 23. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him, that's Jesus, will be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[16:08] Jesus isn't just another person who comes. Jesus is God. He is the great King. He is the one that deserves our worship.

He is the one we bow down to. We are to give our lives in service to him. We are to bow in submission to him. In other words, we are to let go of the things that we consider of most worth, and take hold with all our might, Jesus, who is to be our greatest worth.

You see, the coming of Jesus confronts us. And as he confronts us, he reveals what our hearts desire the most.

He reveals our worship. And sometimes we don't like what we see. Third, though, Jesus exposes our hearts.

Herod was clearly irate. That's an understatement. He was livid. Look at verse 16. When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and 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.

[17 : 42] It was brutal and horrific. Historians reckon, given on the size of Bethlehem and the population at that time, that roughly around 15 to 20 families would have lost a son to this mindless murder.

A small town. Yet all those families impacted. The grief. Yet behind it all was a desperate attempt by Herod to protect his autonomy and to secure his power.

Destroy the threat and all will be well. Get rid of this king. And I will now live my life in peace. This account is surely disturbing to read.

But perhaps what is even more disturbing is that I am Herod. And you are Herod. Because we do want to be king of our life, don't we?

We want to be the centre of our world. We want to get rid of the king and live my life in peace. In fact, every time we fight against the kingship of Jesus, every time we disobey his word, each day we just decide, I am not going to open the Bible, I am not going to listen to him today.

[19 : 16] We are standing with those who call for the death of an innocent man. Remember the trial of Jesus before Pilate? Follow on the screen.

What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Messiah, Pilate asked. They all answered, crucify him. Why? What crime has he committed, asked Pilate?

But they shouted all the louder, crucify him. Like Herod, and like the crowds, we too in our lives in different ways and in different times, have sought to get rid of Jesus, to silence him, to keep him at distance, to keep our autonomy, to secure our desires.

You see, like it or not, Jesus is a threat to our God-like status. We much prefer to sit on the throne and be boss.

And when challenged, we will eliminate him. So let me ask us all again, is Jesus a threat to you?

[20 : 36] When he claims total authority over you, demanding your loyalty and allegiance, is that a threat to you today?

A threat that you want to destroy? that you want to destroy? Or, is he a king to be worshipped?

We now look at the response of the Magi, verse 11. Verse 11. 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, frankincense, and myrrh. Although the Magi were very important people and had authority and power themselves, as they come to Jesus in his infancy, young as though he was, they see one who is greater than they are. Did you see their action? They bowed down. They took up a position of submission. They stooped lower. They are saying, you are king, and I am here to serve you.

[22 : 01] In fact, in a demonstration of their submission, they give of their treasures. They bring with them the things that they value the most, and they offer them to the king who is worth the most.

But why? Why would they worship Jesus? Why would they behave in such a way towards this child? Well, I think as we go through the rest of chapter 2, we are given three reasons as to why we should worship Jesus.

And these three reasons all relate to a phrase that appears in the rest of chapter 2, which relates to scripture being fulfilled by Jesus.

Three times we are told that this is fulfilling what God had said through the prophets. So let's look at each one in turn. First, the reason to worship him is Jesus offers a new exodus for us.

Being told of, in a dream, Joseph was told in a dream of Herod's plans, Mary and Joseph escaped down to Egypt with their son, Jesus.

[23 : 23] It was about a 120-kilometer walk, quite a distance to get away. Verse 15, And there they stayed until the death of Herod.

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, Out of Egypt I called my son. Now that's a really important phrase.

Out of Egypt I called my son. It's a quote that comes from the prophet Hosea. And if you were to look up Hosea, you will see that Hosea is talking about the time of the Exodus.

He's bringing the people back to the time of their slavery. When Israel had been taken as slaves down into Egypt under the brutal regime of Pharaoh. And God had confronted Pharaoh. And God had confronted Pharaoh.

Like another king, like Herod was. And this is what God said to Pharaoh. Israel is my firstborn son.

[24 : 27] And I told you, let my son go that he may worship me. And that's what God did. He came down to the people and he rescued his son, his child, Israel, these people from slavery and from

under the brutal regime of Pharaoh.

And he brought them out so that they might worship God. They made their Exodus from Egypt. God delivered them.

Now that's what we need to be thinking about when Matthew tells us that Jesus went down into Egypt and came up out of Egypt.

He's telling us that someone new has come. Jesus is the one who has come to bring about a new kind of Exodus for all people. He has come to deliver us and free us from an even greater slavery. Scripture reminds us what that slavery is. The Apostle Paul put it like this, Thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you have been freed from sin and now have become slaves to righteousness.

[25 : 50] Jesus has come to free us from a life that is enslaved from doing things and making choices that we don't want to do but we keep on doing and that just ruin our life.

He delivers us from sinful patterns and habits that destroy us and break us. He offers a new kind of Exodus, a way out.

He gives us a new way to live, a life of righteousness. The chains of our past, the sins that weigh us down that people will not let us forget and keep reminding us of, that continually trip us off and cut us up.

He releases us from those chains and he sets us free. Isn't that what we all need? A way out from our past?

To be delivered from the mess of our own choices and decisions? To be freed from a life that we cannot change ourself?

[27 : 05] Well, Jesus is saying, come to me, because I am that way out. I am the one who offers a new Exodus. So come, worship me.

So Jesus offers a new Exodus. The second, Jesus also ends the exile for us. While Jesus managed to escape with his parents to Egypt, Herod went on his raging rampage.

We could imagine that horrific scene. Infants being dragged and forced from their parents as they were slaughtered in the streets by his soldiers. We could only imagine the heartache and the pain that those families must have felt.

We don't even want to go there. And to help us grasp the devastation, Matthew quotes from the prophet Jeremiah. Look at verse 17.

So keeping in mind the slaughter, verse 17, then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled. A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning.

[28 : 29] Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more. That was the weeping in the morning going on in Bethlehem as families grieved over their young son being taken from them.

You see, it's right to mourn such loss, isn't it? It's right to grieve over the injustices we see plastered across our screens every week.

Just as our nation mourns once again over the loss of Aisling Murphy, a young woman brutally murdered at the age of 23. No, God is not immune to the hurts.

He grieves with us. He comforts us. He sees, he knows and understands. But yet there is something deeper that Matthew wants us to see.

This quote from Jeremiah that we've just read is taken from when Israel had ended up in exile.

[29 : 40] It was a horrific time for that time in history. The people taken away into captivity, torn from their land, carried away as slaves once again.

Children separated from parents, parents from their children. There was great weeping and mourning. But into the midst of this tragedy, there is a spark of hope.

Go with me back to Jeremiah chapter 31. You can keep a finger in Matthew 1. Go back to Jeremiah chapter 31.

If you're using a church Bible, maybe you could just call out the page number if somebody has it. Jeremiah 31. 7-9-1. So the quote in Matthew, this is what we have to have in mind, is the exile, the time when Israel were taken off by Babylon.

[30 : 54] And we pick it up in verse 15. And here is a description of the tragedy and the awfulness of it. This is what we've just read in Matthew chapter 31, verse 15.

This is what the Lord says. A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more.

It's telling us the awfulness of the exile. But it doesn't stop there. Because God promises something better to come. Read on, verse 16. This is what the Lord says.

Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears. For your work will be rewarded, declares the Lord. They will return from the land of the enemy.

So there is hope for your descendants, declares the Lord. Your children will return to their own land. You see, God had promised to end the exile.

[32 : 10] He promised to come and end the weeping and the mourning. To bring them back to a place of safety. To wipe away their tears. To bring them back to a home of peace and security.

To bring them back to a home of peace and security. Let's go back to Matthew. Now I think that's what Matthew wants us to see. That this is what Jesus has come to do for us.

You see, to some extent we can all say that we are all living in exile. If we are trusting God, we are living away from our true home, heaven itself.

We live in a world where we experience pain and heartache. Tears and weeping. Lives are ruined. Our relationships break.

Death robs us of our loved ones. Terrible murders happen. Acts of great injustice. And we grieve and we mourn. And sometimes the pain is so deep that there is nothing and no one who can comfort us.

[33 : 22] But that's precisely why Jesus has come. Jesus enters into a world broken by sin. And he says, I have come to end your exile here on this earth.

I have come to bring you home. I will bring you to your ultimate place of peace and safety. As Revelation reminds us.

That God will wipe every tear from their eyes. And there will be no more death. Or mourning or crying or pain.

For the old order of things has passed away. And he who was seated on the throne. The King. The Lord of all. Said I am making everything new.

Jesus has come. To end the exile. To bring us home to a place of safety and security. It is in him we put our trust.

[34 : 31] To end the exile. To end the exile. So Jesus is the new exodus. He ends the exile. But how will all this be achieved? How will this actually all happen?

Well third, Jesus humbles himself for us. After the return from Egypt. After the return from Egypt. Joseph and Mary and Jesus come back. We pick it up in verse 23. And they went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

Called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets. That he would be called a Nazarene. Now this is much more than just an interesting detail about the place where Jesus lived. Nazareth helps us see the humility of Jesus. Nazareth is a bit like, and I hope there is nobody here from this place, Ballyhones.

[35 : 39] Nobody goes to Ballyhones apart from the guy in the advert. Spins the globe and puts his finger on the map. Well in a similar way, everybody looked down on Nazareth.

It was a nothing kind of town. It was a useless place in the eyes of everybody else. In fact, when John, one of Jesus' first disciples, heard that Jesus came from Nazareth, came from Nazareth, he was so shocked, he said, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

But this is where Jesus the King grew up. The God-man who deserves our worship, humbles himself and goes not to a palace in the capital, but to a backward town like Nazareth.

You see, that's what Jesus has come to do. Rather than come demanding to be served, he humbles himself and comes to serve us.

He comes in humility. But his humility goes lower than going to just a town like Nazareth. Jesus goes even lower and goes to the cross and dies for you and for me.

[37 : 01] Because when Jesus went to the cross, he humbly became like one of us. He was treated as a slave to sin so that we might be set free from our sin.

He was exiled from God, shut out so that we might be welcomed in and brought close to God forever. You see, this is what makes Jesus the King to be worshipped.

Rather than earn our way or work our way towards him, he is the King who comes to us. He provides the way for a new exodus, delivering us from our past, ending the exile and giving us a future.

That's why the Magi came and bowed down in worship, stooping lower, looking up to the King, giving of their treasures because they saw in Jesus one of greater worth and one who is worth greater honour.

So what are your first impressions? Is Jesus a threat to you today?

[38 : 25] Does he expose what you worship? Is he a threat to your autonomy? Or is he your King? The one who demands our loyalty and allegiance?

The King who gave his life for you and says, walk with me and trust me. For I have your future secured, your past dealt with.

You can trust me today. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's just take a moment to reflect on what we heard and thought about.

Maybe there's things where the Lord by his Spirit has pressed upon our life and exposed where we feel Jesus is a threat to us.

Father, we confess that there are many times in this past week and in many ways we have once again pushed you off the throne and demanded our rights, wanting to do our own thing.

[40 : 04] Please forgive us. Please forgive us. We turn from that and we turn in faith and look to you, the Lord Jesus, the King, who humbly came to die for us, to give us a new way out, to end all the brokenness and the hurts, to end the mourning and the suffering.

You are King. We bring our lives, our greatest treasure that we have is ourself and we bow before you today.

We submit to you. We honour you. We worship you. Help us with the power of your Spirit that we might serve your good and your glory and not our own.

In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing. We're going to sing.