

Matthew Ch2v1-12 - Responding To Jesus

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[0 : 00] Over this season we've been using Matthew to help us think about and reflect on the coming of Christ.

So Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 2. Last week we looked at the birth.

And in Chapter 2 we're going to be thinking about responses. So as I read the text, maybe that's something you can be doing is thinking about what are the different responses I see or hear in the text.

Well let's read 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's 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.

[1 : 23] When he had called together all the people's chief priests and the teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah 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 Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. 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 time the star had 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 was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshipped him.

[2 : 35] Then they opened their treasures and presented him with 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.

Well, let's pray and ask for God's help. Father, thank you for this account, for this record around the birth of Christ.

we believe that this is your word to us today, speaking into our lives. And we pray that as we reflect on this together, that your word would travel deeply into our hearts and it would cause us to respond in a way that honours you and is good for us.

So help us now, we pray. Amen. Brussels sprouts. What do you think of these festive green veggies that appear in our shops at this time of year?

Well, one thing is for sure, they're not neutral, are they? You either love them or you loathe them. You either pile them high on your plate or you feed them to the dog under the table.

[4 : 12] The humble Brussels can be quite divisive, can't it? Well, there's another festive ingredient that produces an even stronger opinion.

The birth of Christ. And one thing for sure is this account is not neutral. In fact, it seems that everybody has a view, not just then, but today.

If you were to ask people or to mention Jesus, what you think, does he fit into Christmas? You will be sure to get a response. And in our text, and maybe you can discuss this with me afterwards over tea and coffee, I think we see at least three different people who give three different responses to the birth of Christ.

In fact, their responses are a reflection of the way in which we might respond of the way in which we might respond to Jesus Christ. So at the very outset, I have this question for us all.

What is my response? What is your response today to the person of Jesus Christ? What's your response? How does it affect your life?

[5 : 29] Well, here's the first response that I think we see. Disturbed. Look at verse 3. When King Herod heard this, when he heard about the birth of Jesus, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.

Why is Herod disturbed? Why is he so upset? Well, look back at verse 1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod.

Herod had been made king by the occupying Romans. And of course, if you are king, well, you do happen to have a kind of God-like status.

But now all of a sudden, he's been confronted with some very disturbing news. Herod had some guests who've come knocking at his door.

Look at the rest of verse 1. Magi from the east came to Jerusalem. Now the Magi, from what you may have heard, are not just stargazers.

[6 : 37] They're not just there looking out of their telescope, wondering what's happening up in the skies. They're well-respected astrologers. They were people of great influence, wealthy. They had a certain amount of authority and would give advice to leaders and to rulers.

And they've come and found their way to Herod. They knock on his door and they have a question. Where is the one who's been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and we've come to worship him.

Well, you could hear Herod's unspoken response. What? What do you mean where's the king who's been born king of the Jews?

I'm the king of the Jews. What the Magi did would be like us going off to Moscow and having a private audience with Putin and saying, excuse me, Mr. Putin, could you tell me where I might find the president of Russia?

My goodness me, it's not the sort of thing you go asking, is it? And for Herod to be asking him that kind of question, well, it was equal to treason.

[7 : 54] Look at verse 3 again. When King Herod heard this, that they were looking for a king, he was disturbed. literally means he was seething.

He is raging. Prominent officials coming from another country and they've come to worship a king and it's not him.

The problem for Herod is this is all too personal. Herod is confronted with the reality that though he's been appointed as a king, though he's ruling as a king, he's not the king and he doesn't like it. You see, Jesus confronts our autonomy. He confronts us head on. Now, we mightn't have grand titles as King Herod did, but we surely do act as king, don't we?

We appoint ourselves as king. We rule as if I am king. Well, this is my life and I'm going to live it the way I want to.

[9 : 10] I want to express myself. I want to be the real, authentic me and, well, that's just doing things the way I want to do it.

We've all claimed a God-like status. You see, the coming of Jesus confronts not just Herod back in Matthew's day, but he is confronting us again through these words.

He's claiming an authority over us. He's saying, I made you, I own you, you belong to me. He demands an allegiance from us.

In fact, with any king, there's only one throne, isn't there? And there's room for only one person to sit on it. Either I'm going to sit on the throne, or God is going to sit on the throne.

Well, Herod was so resistant, he took extreme action, didn't he? Just jump ahead to chapter 2, verse 16. Chapter 2, verse 16.

[10 : 17] When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and in its vicinity who were two years and under.

I'm getting rid of this king. Now, we're rightfully horrified with Herod's actions, yet at the same time, let's face reality.

There's a little Herod sitting on the throne of our own hearts, isn't there? any challenge to self-rule and we tend to push Jesus out.

What's your response to Jesus today? This is my life and I'm going to live as I please? Are you disturbed with Jesus' claim over you?

So, disturbed is one response. Here's the second response. Unmoved.

[11 : 29] Who's unmoved? Well, we'll find out. Have a look at verse four. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and the teachers of the law, Herod asked them, where's this Messiah to be born?

Now, we know he's got ulterior motives. He's wanting to find out where he is so that he can kill him. So, he brings in all the most respected religious scholars of the day.

After all, he was in Jewish territory and, well, the experts, they knew their scriptures, they knew their Bible and they were going to be the best interpreters and they were going to tell him where Jesus was going to be born.

And, sure enough, they don't disappoint. Verse five, Bethlehem in Judea. Well, how do they know that? Well, because, verse five, this is what the prophet has written and they quote the prophet Micah.

Verse six, but you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. Bethlehem being an insignificant, tiny little outcrop of a few houses and a few buildings.

[12 : 44] Kind of Ballyhonas territory. For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Now, this is a prophecy, isn't it, about the coming of Jesus, God's promised king.

And, these magi have heard about this promised king and they're seeking out this very king and the religious authorities have just quoted, understood, this is where he's coming from.

So, we would expect, wouldn't we, the religious leaders to go and join in the search because surely they too want to worship the promised king.

king. But, no, these religious folk are completely unmoved. There's nothing in the text whatsoever indicating that they were in the slightest bit interested.

Imagine, after all the years and all the waiting and all the history and all the promises, all building up, the Messiah is coming, the Messiah is coming, the expectation of a rescuer.

[13 : 54] Quick, come on, he's here, let's go find the king. But, they're completely disinterested, indifferent.

They are totally unmoved. Of all the people you would expect to be interested and excited, it must be the religious leaders.

Well, it seems being religious and knowing your Bible and going to church and doing all the right kind of stuff doesn't actually mean that you love Jesus.

Well, how could this be? Well, Jesus reveals our pride. It seems the religious leaders saw no need of Jesus personally.

After all, they were the leaders, they were top of their field. Others might need Jesus, but not us. Look again at the quote, the end of verse six.

[15 : 04] It says, out of Bethlehem will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Jesus, we're told, is coming as a shepherd.

But hang on a minute, isn't that what the religious rulers were? Weren't they meant to be the shepherds and the carers of God's people?

Who's this shepherd that's coming? Well, we get an insight into what this shepherd would be like if we just jump on a couple of pages to Matthew chapter 9.

Have a look over there with me. Chapter 9 verse 36. Just one verse helping us to see what this shepherd Jesus would be like.

Verse 36, when he, when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

[16 : 22] When Jesus looks out and as he went walking about the towns, he saw wandering sheep. That's what people were like to him.

Sheep get lost by themselves, don't they? And they get into trouble and they can't help themselves. And Jesus is looking out and he's saying, well, that's what people are like.

In fact, he describes them as being harassed and helpless. To be harassed is to be overcome with anxiety and fears.

It's a consequence of living without God, constantly overwhelmed and frantically trying to control our future. Never at peace. Always searching, never finding.

harassed with the pressures of life. But as he also looked at the crowds, he says, well, we're not just harassed, but we're helpless.

[17 : 22] We're helpless to see how serious our situation is, helpless to do anything about it. And the problem is, we can't even see it. We're in danger, living a life on our own without God.

A helpless situation. That's what Jesus saw as he wandered the streets. Not just people, but the religious leaders too.

So how would you feel about God's assessment of you and me that, well, he sees people who are harassed and helpless.

It knocks our pride a little bit, doesn't it? Especially religious folk. You see, we can be all doing the right religious things, but never actually seeing our desperate need of Jesus.

Well, my life is in good shape. I have it together. I know the Bible story. I get church. I understand what that's all about. But when it comes to seeing our need of him and living for him and experiencing him in our life, well, maybe sometimes we can be just completely unmoved.

[18 : 48] Oh, I know the story. I know the Christmas story. I've heard it. Our hearts remain disinterested and indifferent.

Is that your response today? It's not me who needs Jesus. Other people might, but not me.

So, maybe it's a case of being disturbed. Maybe it's a case of being unmoved. Or there's a third response.

Overjoyed. Look at how the magi responded. Look at verse 10 with me. Chapter 2, verse 10. Go back to where we were. Chapter 2, verse 10.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. Rather than disturbed like Herod, instead of being unmoved like the religious leaders, these magi are overjoyed.

[19 : 58] They're overwhelmed. Why are they so joyful? Well, consider two things with me. First, the star.

The star is all over the text, isn't it, that we've read? It's no ordinary star. Have a look at verse 2. 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. Now, it's fascinating, it's extraordinary. It was moving, this star in the sky was moving in such a way that they could follow it. Theologians and historians reckon that these magi had travelled up to a thousand miles following this star. This strange event in the skies.

And they're concerned to find out what's this star all about? What does it mean? Well, the star led them secondly to a person.

[21 : 07] Again, look at verse 2. Did you read it carefully? Look at the end of verse 2. We saw his star. Well, whose star?

Jesus' star. This was a star pointing to King Jesus. But think about it. How did they know it was his star? Who told them it was Jesus' star?

Well, being educated people, they would have had access to writings of other nations and books and prophecies of other people. Writings, I'm going to suggest to you like the book of Isaiah.

Have a look with me in Isaiah chapter 60. Isaiah chapter 60.

So they've seen this star in the sky. They've even given it a name and saying it's his star, as in it's the king of the Jews.

[22 : 21] It's his star, we're following this star. But how did they know? Like, what gave them that impression? Well, let's have a read of Isaiah 60.

Here God is talking about the coming of Jesus, but look how he describes his coming. Verse 1, Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples. But the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come to your light, and the kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes, look about you, all assemble, come to you.

Your sons come from afar, and your daughters who are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy, the wealth and the seeds will be brought to you, to the riches of the nations will come.

[23 : 37] Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah, and all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense, and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

A fascinating text, isn't it? This star, this light that rises, that goes before you is directing them to someone who is going to be the hope of the world, a light that's going to remove the darkness, a light that was going to attract nations, one who was worthy of people's praise, whether they were young or old.

Let's go back to Matthew chapter 2. Now I'm not saying the Magi knew everything about who Jesus was and what he was coming to do, but I think we can be very clear that they did know that this Jesus was sent by creator God and was going to be the hope of the world.

Yes, the star was of interest, but it was where the star came to, verse 11, verse 10, that, sorry, where it is, end of verse 9, it stopped over the place where the child was.

It was bringing them and pointing them to the person of Christ. They were overjoyed because the promises that they had read and heard about had now been fulfilled.

[25 : 26] In fact, their joy had led to worship. You see, Jesus deserves our worship.

Look at verse 11. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him.

Now, worship isn't just confined to a religious building. Worship is something all of us do all of the time. It simply means to serve or to bow down to.

It comes from the words worth or worthy. It's giving something or someone value and honour.

It's something that we consider to be of our highest value and whatever we consider to be of greatest value to us in our life, that's what we serve.

[26 : 26] That's what we bow down to. That's what we worship. it. So, what is the highest honour in your life? What do you give greatest value to?

Is it your own physical body and how you look? Is it getting grades and certain careers and being successful in your job?

Is it your children? or sport or some team? What is it that is of greatest value to you?

Well, look at the magi. They had come to see that Jesus was of greatest value to them. Look at how they responded, verse 11. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary.

They bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They bowed down to this child.

[27 : 35] Fancy doing that? It's a position of submission. It's saying, I am high and you are, or I am low and you are high.

I'm at your service. And they also presented him with gifts, gifts that were of great value, treasures. They are saying, you, this child, are of infinite worth.

My life is yours. So let's come back to the question again. Who is it that we worship in our life?

Whatever we consider to be of highest value, whatever we consider to be of greatest honour, that's who we worship.

That's what we give our life to. The coming of Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago was certainly not a silent night, nor was it all calm and bright.

[28 : 45] The coming of God's promised king caused a stir amongst the people. Everyone had an opinion. So what is our response to Jesus?

Does his claim disturb you? That he's king of your life and you're answerable to him? Or perhaps the whole account leaves you just completely and utterly unmoved.

I'm all right, Jack. I don't need Jesus. I'm not helpless. I can do life alone. Well, some people were overjoyed.

Why? Well, because like the Magi, they've come to see that Jesus was the one who was bringing light in the darkness. He was a shepherd full of compassion who helped those who were helpless, who gave life to those who were harassed, a shepherd who would actually lay down his life for the sheep so that they could have ultimate joy and life.

What's our response going to be to this Jesus? He deserves our worship. We can be overjoyed because in him is life in all its fullness.

[30 : 18] Let's pray together. Amen. Father, as we just reflect and think of the coming of Jesus Christ, the God-man into this world, we either push him away or we welcome him in.

We're either disturbed, unmoved, or overjoyed. Father, help us to be clear about that.

And would you give us a heart that is moved like the Magi, and that we learn to bow down before you, to live our life in service to you, to the one who has given us life today, and life for all eternity, in your good and perfect kingdom.

Thank you that you are king, and that you are Lord. Help us to follow you as we should.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the Magi were overjoyed.

[32 : 08] They bowed in worship. Did they sing? I don't know. Maybe they did.