

# Jesus - the baby king

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Date: 25 December 2017

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[0:00] We're going to think a little bit about the Bible account that we've read and first we'll pray. We marvel together at the Saviour's humility coming down from heaven's glory to such a world as this.

We ask you to teach us that we may listen and learn. Grant that we would not be distracted in our listening.

Grant that we would not miss the point in our listening. Grant that we would meet you as we hear what you are saying to us this morning. We pray that our lives would be changed by hearing your word. No less than their lives were changed by those events so long ago.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well ladies and gentlemen, I'm just going to carry on talking about this story as I have been for the last few days over Christmas.

And we're going to look together at these people, these magi. If you've got a Bible there, you might like to follow along what's being said. It's in Matthew chapter 2.

[1:20] Now, these magi. When Matthew is telling us the story of the birth of Jesus, the coming of Jesus, this is the next thing that he chooses to tell us.

And I think it's a rather peculiar choice. Because you notice from the songs that we sing, there's things about shepherds and angels. But Matthew doesn't tell us about that.

He tells us this instead about these, whoever they are, magi. And what's the purpose of telling us this? Well, I suppose one thing is if you skip to the end of the story, what this bit of the story means that Jesus ends up not in central Jerusalem.

So at the end of this story, he doesn't end up living in Jerusalem. And you would think, well, Jerusalem would be a pretty strategic place for Jesus to base himself.

It would, wouldn't it? It's like if you want to be anything in any, particularly they say the music industry, you go to London because that's where it's all happening.

[2:30] Now, why didn't Jesus end up in Jerusalem? Well, this story explains why that was impossible, why it didn't happen. He also didn't stay in Bethlehem. You'd think that would be a very strategic place for Jesus to base himself because as the song tells us, it's royal David's city.

So that would be a good place if you wanted to set up a trajectory, a career of being king of the Jews. Bethlehem would be an excellent place to base yourself.

But he doesn't. He ends up in skanky Nazareth. Now, I put skanky because I think if you were an Orthodox Jew, you would say, you know, up there in Nazareth, there's a proverb from the rabbis which makes fun of the Nazareth accent.

Of course, I can't remember the exact word, but they say it in such a way that the Jerusalem people say, well, what do you mean by that? Are you saying donkey or are you saying something else? I don't know what they might be saying.

Carrot, you know, two completely different things. But the accent in Nazareth was so peculiar that they couldn't work out what these people were saying. So I think Nazareth is a fairly skanky sort of place.

[3:38] It's like, well, you know, you imagine somewhere that you would prefer not to live, and that's where Jesus lived. Okay. But Matthew tells us, even in skanky Nazareth, there is a fulfillment.

And he says that at the end of the chapter, doesn't he? And so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets. He will be called a Nazarene. And Bible scholars have puzzled, now, which prophet

he's referring to?

And you need to do a little bit of work to work out what Matthew's thinking at that point. But he does say, even this strange course of events is in a way, in perhaps a rather unexpected way, a fulfillment of the plan that God had.

So that's where the story gets us. And I'd like us to think of four things about these magi. And we can work out whether they're positive or negative.

So first of all, you can help me with this. Can you tell me what the missing letters are on this? They are something.

[4:52] Well, there's an O in there somewhere. Yes? There's an I in there somewhere. E. Right. Arrange them into a well-known word. Foreign. The magi are foreign.

So when they come to Jerusalem, they probably, if you were to imagine it, they're speaking with an accent, a foreign accent. And they probably have to, somebody has to say, what did you just say? Where is the one that has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. Sorry, could you say that again? Didn't quite follow what you just said. Because they're foreign.

Now, I think this is an extraordinary turn of events in Matthew's gospel. Because those of you who have been following this through will realize it starts off completely, absolutely Jewish.

It starts off with Jesus' family tree. And he wants to establish he's thoroughly in the line of Abraham, David, all the great Solomon, all the great figures in Jewish history are in Jesus' family tree because he's Jewish.

[6:02] And if you were brave enough to come out to church last night, we had a little delve into the waters of fulfillment. Because Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

And you have to be not only a little bit aware of Jewish prophecy, but you have to be quite good at Jewish prophecy to understand what's being fulfilled.

So he's plunged us right into another culture and said to us who are English or Welsh or Chinese or Italian, you won't understand the story of Jesus unless you come into this culture with this book and this history of this nation, which is not your nation.

It's Jewish. Jewish. And then we have this extraordinary thing of foreigners turning up. They're foreign.

After all the deeply Jewish stuff, we get these weird foreign people turning up. And you ask the question, was Matthew...

[7:12] You can sort of imagine Matthew's editors. He doesn't have editors, but I'm asking you to imagine that his editor, who's going to publish his book, is saying, how are you getting on, Matthew?

And Matthew says, I'm getting on really, really well. And he says, what have you got to us? I've done chapter one. Yeah, what have you got in chapter one? We've got chapter one, I've got Jesus' lineage and his family tree.

And the editor says, yeah, that's good. That sounds really good. Our audience is really going to like that. And then he said, what are you doing next? I'm doing fulfillment of prophecy. He said, yeah, that's really going to go down well. So what are you going to do in chapter two?

He said, I'm thinking of bringing some foreigners in. Some weird guys, some astrologer guys from a distant country. I don't quite know where. And the editor says, are you sure you want to do that?

It's a bit of a turn off, really. And we ask the question, was he right? Obviously, he was right, because that's what he did. But it's a good question.

[8:11] Why does he go down this track? They are not Jews. They are, their culture is not Jewish culture. They don't understand the Jewish God.

They don't understand the proper way to live. They would have been looked on with deep suspicion. And yet, Matthew says, it's important you know that these people came.

And I suppose it gives a bit of encouragement to us, because very few of us would be orthodox, fully paid up Jewish lineage.

We're foreigners too. As I look around the room, we've got Italian people, we've got German people, we've got Chinese people, we've got people from the south of England, people from the north of England. And, oh, I beg your pardon, Ethiopians.

Thank you very much. But it's an encouragement to us that in this story, foreigners come. And I think he's making a point about this, which we'll come to in a moment.

[9:17] Second thing about whether this is a good thing to have in this is, anybody help us with this? Somebody said it?

Misguided. They are misguided. They are misguided. How did they get there? Well, it says, they say, we have seen his star in the east.

I want to tell you how Jewish people would look at stars. Do they have anything to do with stars with great suspicion? Stars, for us, might be astronomy.

And what's that astronomer guy who's on the television? Brian Cox. That's right, Brian Cox. He talks like that, doesn't he? Yeah. So they wouldn't think Brian Cox. They would think Eva Petrelengro. Eva Petrelengro does the...

[10:16] Is it Eva? Or is it her daughter? Claire Petrelengro. Yeah. Does the astrology section in the Argus. They would be thinking astrology?

Stars? Don't trust that idea at all. That's weird. The Jewish take on anything to do with stars. In the first book of the Bible, when the stars are mentioned, when creation is mentioned, the writer there is very careful to demote stars.

It says he made the lights in the sky, the sun to rule the day, the moon to rule the light, and he also made the stars. End of story. Stars. Just be careful. People, it's very misguided people worship stars and things like that.

And so there's a lot of suspicion. And I think, I mean, they've got here. They say it's to do with a star, but any Orthodox Jew, I think, reading this would say, that's pretty suspect.

You know, we've been told in our scriptures we don't worship stars, we don't follow stars. You know, this is all very dodgy and dubious. Now, God overruled that, obviously.

[11:39] But by and large, people following stars is not the sort of thing that we have in the Bible.

And of course, we notice that they couldn't follow the star all the way. They go to Jerusalem, which is the wrong place to go, and they have to ask advice, or at least Herod asks advice for them and says, I think rather than following any more stars, can we work out what it says in the Bible?

So they do come to a reliable source of guidance. They get it from the Bible in the end, but the star is still there. So I think, let's just have a look. Whoops. So they're foreign.

Positive or negative? Well, in some ways that's negative. But in a rather surprising, quiet way, that's positive. They're misguided. I think that's, in some ways, a negative.

Because they came probably on the basis of their astrology. But God overruled that, and used even that, and brought them to the right place. Third thing.

[12:51] Now then, I don't know whether even I can remember what I meant by this. They are unknowingly, so there's two spaces before the G. I'm not going on until anybody gets this right, so you've got to think I'm dangerous.

Is that what I said? Well done. Gold star. They are dangerous. They're dangerous. Just D-A-N-G-E-R-O-U-S.

There were two spaces before the G. I wrote dangerous and then crossed it out and put the letters. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. They're dangerous.

Did you listen to the story? Just think how it would have been if they'd never turned up. Just think what the effects of their turning up was.

Because of them coming along, well, the Magi decide to, now what do they decide to do in the end? They go to find Jesus.

[13:57] They're successful in that. They worship him. They're successful in that. But then what do they do? They go home another way. So the Magi, their plans have to be changed.

They were thinking, we've come to worship the Christ. I mean, what can possibly go wrong? But it does go wrong, doesn't it? They find themselves embroiled in something. And they have to change their plans.

But that's the least of it. Joseph has to. What does Joseph have to do as a result of this input from the Magi? What does Joseph have to do?

Sorry? He has to go all the way to Egypt. And with a young child, what time does he have to get up? That's what it says, isn't it?

Doesn't it? It says that. Verse 14, he took the child and his mother during the night. Now, ladies and gentlemen, with small children, it's bad enough. Ordinarily, isn't it?

[15:05] Without having to move house in the middle of the night. And this is what they have to do. And it's because of these Magi. Now, they didn't know they were going to cause all these problems. But they have caused problems.

And why does Joseph have to get up in the middle of the night? What's the problem? Because Herod is after Jesus. It's a life-threatening situation.

And the reason for it is for these Magi. If they hadn't come, if they hadn't gone to Jerusalem, if they hadn't said to Herod, we've come to worship the king of the Jews, Herod would never have got angry and would never have said, right, we're going to kill anybody that's likely to be a threat to me. Just think, wouldn't it have been nice if there weren't any wise men? Things would have been so much simpler. Well, they would, wouldn't they? But you see how God sometimes makes things complicated.

He has his plan. And he sees it all through. It gets to the right place. But it's not quite so simple. These Magi, they're dangerous.

[16:20] They've caused a dangerous situation. And what happens to the families, the poor families in Bethlehem and its vicinity? Well, let's say it quietly.

But it's a terrible thing for them because Herod sends his secret police or his stormtroopers or whatever they are. And any child in the target age and working back, it must have taken a while for them to make the journey across the desert or whatever.

So we've got a two-year time period. They're killed. It's a very unpleasant thing, isn't it? But it's there. You can't get away from that.

Jesus doesn't just bring peace and coziness. The coming of Jesus also brings conflict and actually violence.

Families suffer. If those wise men hadn't turned up, that wouldn't have happened. Their input, unknowingly, if I can put it this way, is dangerous.

[17:34] And other events take a turn. Herod takes it upon himself to kill the baby boys of the Israelite nation.

And if you know your Bible, you can think of another person who, motivated by fear and hatred, killed the baby boys of a generation of the Israelite people.

That was Pharaoh. And this is a most peculiar turn of events because in the coming of the Christ, precipitated by the visit of the Magi, the king of the Jews, says he's the king of the Jews, Herod, actually turns into the king of Egypt.

The one who's supposed to be protecting his people turns into their enemy. The coming of Jesus truly turns things on their head. And not always in a way that is palatable.

So that was the third thing. They're dangerous. And here's the fourth thing. A very positive thing about the wise men. So we've just got one word to work out there.

[19:00] I'll show you how you work it. Work out that one. Worship is right. Well done. And this is the heart of the excellent good thing about the wise men.

They're foreigners, but they come and they worship the king. They bring him their riches. The word worship in the original language can mean quite a spectrum of things.

It means to give respect to, and it depends on the context what sort of respect it is. And I guess they thought they were respecting a king. And that's the right thing to do, to fall down, to honor, give respect to the king.

And they brought rich things. The three things that are mentioned are, let me just try and find where they are. They're in verse 11.

Gold, very precious thing, incense, and myrrh. And there are three things named from which people guess that there were three magi, but it doesn't say that.

[20:13] I don't know how many of them there were. But they brought these gifts. And although Matthew doesn't use the word fulfill here, I think

he's got an eye on this, that the Old Testament looks forward to the day when the nations, the unruly, ignorant, scruffy nations, will actually turn to Israel's king and come to worship him and bring the riches of the nations into his treasury.

And although it's only done in a little, sort of a microcosm, a little version of it, I think Matthew is inviting us to say this is where it's actually all headed. And even though you might think it's a bit of a weird story, it's actually got a profound truth in it that this is God's plan for all the nations. That includes us. And of course the worship that we understand is correctly due to the Christ is not just the respect to an earthly king, but the worship of the creator.

We worship the creator with glory and honor and praise and the son sits upon the same throne and we worship him with the same honor because he is one with the father.

They probably wouldn't have known that, but we can see the fulfillment of that and be part of that ourselves. So what do we learn from this? Well, it's a curious old turn of events, isn't it?

[21:59] But we learn that God turns it all to his purposes. And as we were thinking yesterday, our lives can take curious turns and we might think, you know, if only this hadn't happened, life would be so much simpler.

But God can take all these things into his purposes as he does here. He can use unusual, certainly unusual, odd, it was actually odd, not just something that doesn't happen very often, but something you wouldn't expect to happen, something that at first thought, you think, well, that can't be right. He can use unusual, odd, and contrary things. So these are things that go against what you would have thought are God's purposes.

He can use unusual, odd, contrary things for his glory. And I think that's a wonderful encouragement for us, isn't it?

Life contains unusual, odd, and sometimes contrary things. Things that go against what we think God ought to be doing.

[23:17] But here it shows us that he's always capable of using those things for his glory. And he's interested in unusual, odd, and contrary people.

Because, let's remember, the magi are not just a feature in a story, they're people. And God called them and brought them and accepted their worship and has even recorded it so that we can say, oh, look at them.

There's an example there for us to understand and to follow. And I don't know what you think about yourself, but I'm sure in the world, maybe in this room, there are unusual people.

And I'm sure in this world and maybe in this room, there are odd people. And I'm sure in this world and maybe even in this room, there are contrary people.

You might think of yourself, I'm a contrary person. Contrary meaning I go the opposite to what I even know I should do.

[24:23] There are things in my life where I've done the opposite of what I know I should have done. I've gone the wrong way. And I'm not going to tell people about it because I'm rather ashamed of it, but I know I'm a contrary person.

And the good news is that God says, I'm interested in you. I'm interested in you. I'm interested in people.

The thing that I want them is to come and worship my son. And I welcome people from all different nations. I welcome people with all different capacities.

I welcome people who have got big qualifications. I welcome people who find it a bit difficult to read.

I welcome people who nobody else welcomes. I welcome people who've been against me and against other people. And I say, lay down your contrariness and come to me just as you are.

[25:25] And the good news is this God welcomes them. At the center of this story and at the center of everything is Jesus.

And it's fantastic, isn't it? In this story, Jesus has, in effect, brought wise men hundreds, if not thousands of miles across the desert.

he's upskittled Jerusalem and they've been troubled. He's precipitated this anger. He's turned Herod into Pharaoh.

He's gone to live in a skanky place which was actually a fulfillment of prophecy. And all this, we presume, before he's even old enough to say a word. That's the magnitude of the person of Jesus, whose birth we celebrate today, our Savior who has come into the world for us, out of love for us, to call us to be his worshippers.

[26:34] Let's close by singing a song together. We're going to sing O come all ye faithful.