

# Finding Jesus in a World of Progress

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we thank you that you're so good. And Lord, as we sang this morning, that you are pleased to manifest your glory among us.

And Lord, we thank you for that. We thank you that you came down from heaven in the person of your son, Jesus, to make God known to us. And Lord, I pray that as we open your word this morning, that your word would bear much fruit and that your word would cause us to worship you and to love you more and more.

I ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So you may be seated. Now, some of you know me pretty well, and you know that I'm a fairly timid fellow.

I'm not naturally drawn to say hello to strangers at the grocery store or at the coffee shop or at the gym where I go. But it's not my natural bent.

But I try to make an effort because I want to be an evangelist. I want to open doors to have opportunities to share the gospel with people eventually. And so one of the things that I do is I try to intentionally start the conversation with people.

[ 1 : 15 ] And one of the things that you all know from meeting new people is that you eventually get to the topic of what do you do for a living? And as you know, I'm a pastoral intern here at the church.

And so I just tell them that that's what I do. I work for a church, and I'm a pastoral intern. And usually at that point, their faces kind of get a little bit, they kind of drop a bit, and the conversation goes to a halt.

And if I had the technology of like a very, very small microphone, I could put it next to their ear, I could hear their thoughts, and it would sound something like, don't you know that there are more worthwhile things to do, more worthwhile pursuits in this life, like science and achieving good government?

Like you would do much better to contribute to the progress of our society if you spent more time on these things, if you focused on this. Now it's a good question.

I mean, it's a good point. And really what the question is, is that why don't you Christians as myself, why don't Christians as myself devote themselves to the here and now, things that contribute to the progress of our society, or at least as defined by the average Canadian.

[ 2 : 29 ] So if you have your Bibles with you, the text that we're looking at today will actually help us engage with that question and hopefully provide an answer. So we're going to look at Matthew chapter 2, beginning at the first verse.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. Now just pausing here for a moment, this is our setting.

This is where the, this is the setting of the story where we're getting acquainted with the characters and the different places. So we start with Jesus, who's from a small town, and he has a bit of an awkward story.

If you read, if you take a minute after the service today, you read just the last part of the chapter before this chapter, you get a sense that, you know, if Jesus were in a playground with the other kids in Bethlehem and they asked, where are you from?

It would take a minute and then two, five minutes, he would start talking about the hypostatic union of God and man, and they would just go like, what is this kid all about?

[ 3 : 30 ] And so he has, he's a bit odd in the neighborhood. And then you have King Herod, who is the king of Judea, and he's part of one of the most, most advanced governments that the world, in that part of the world, has ever seen.

The most powerful governments and the most advanced forms of governments that the world has seen. And then you have the Magi that are from the East, and the Magi, so here it says that they were called the wise men, but the Greek word is Magi, and it's a bit different.

It's not that they were just more wise in the culture. They practiced things like, you know, divination and astrology. So in other words, they were the most technologically advanced in the society, in the culture, because they observed the stars and they could interpret the future based off of what they read.

So we get a few markers in this first verse that Matthew is trying to tell us a story, but he's also trying to tell us a true story. And before we get into the narrative of the story, the narrative of the text, you might be wondering, okay, so if you're familiar with the four Gospels, you might be wondering, like, there are the Magi in Matthew's Gospel, but not in the other Gospels.

Like, does that mean that, you know, this is just an invention? Can I really trust that the Magi, the story of the Magi really happened? And I'll just give a little bit of an analogy before we jump in.

[ 4 : 59 ] So when my parents and I moved to, and my siblings, when we moved to Orleans about almost 30 years ago, we got to meet some of our neighbors and they told us that the Trudeau kids used to play in the house where we moved, that they used to come and they used to, you know, play in the pool and all that because their nanny, that's where she lived.

She lived in the house where we lived. And so, like, how are we supposed to take their word for it? Well, you know, we could ask another neighbor and say, like, is it true that the Trudeau kids used to, like, come to our house and play?

And they would say, oh, of course. Like, you should have been there. Like, two hours before they came, the streets were full of black cars with tinted windows and, you know, they would just park in front of our yard and leave their engine running for about four hours before the kids were done and then they'd eventually leave.

And so it was a very remarkable event. You know, they don't just send the kids there on their own. They send security with them. And so with the Magi here, you have a story of these delegates who left Babylon and went to Jerusalem and they didn't go on their own.

There weren't three of them with three camels. There were a lot more and probably a lot more camels than there were people with equipment, with maybe armor and maybe some beautiful colors to show that they were from a royal, that they represent the royalty of where they came from and had food and drink and sandals and all that.

[ 6 : 21 ] So there was a big group of people traveling in the desert and they were arriving in Jerusalem. So it's a fairly remarkable event that you could ask someone in Jerusalem at that time and they would say, oh, of course I remember the Magi.

So with that in mind, let's look at the text again and then we'll move on to see what the story has to say. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Now just pausing here for another moment. So you can just imagine this large caravan coming into Jerusalem, going through the gates and making their way to the temple of Herod, go up the stairs, they get into the room where Herod is sitting on his throne and has all his advisors, the chief priests and all these different people who are around him and the Magi go and they address Herod and they say, Herod, we've come to make a trade from our country and we want to have a peace agreement and we give you these gifts to honor you.

No, that's not what happens. Let's read that again in verse 2. It says, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

And you can just imagine there's a really awkward silence, a cold silence. Now you might be wondering, hold on Jonathan, like isn't Herod the guy who killed his, you know, three of his sons, who killed his favorite wife.

[ 8 : 08 ] Wasn't that his reputation? Couldn't he just have said a word, snapped his fingers because he didn't like what they had to say? You know, the security come, they take the Magi away, clean the floor, nothing's ever happened, nothing ever happened here, let's move on.

Couldn't he have just done that? So why did he listen to them? So I mentioned a little bit briefly earlier that the Magi were the astrologers who had an authoritative voice in their culture, kind of like the scientists today, that, you know, they have an authoritative voice, they speak to politicians and people listen to them, we consult them.

These Magi who were astrologers, they were the voice of progress in that culture. When they spoke, people listened. And even though they weren't always actually right. So it's kind of like when you go to a party or you're at work and you have a conversation with someone and they tell you something and you're like, where is that coming from? Like, none of that is, like, logically coherent and you're about to speak and then they say, well, we know this because science says so.

And you're like, well, I'm not going to be the jerk now who's going to try to say, well, no, because science doesn't actually work that way. Like, it has authority in our culture and that's just kind of the way that we interact with one another.

[ 9 : 22 ] And so here the Magi are the voice of progress, the voice of cultural authority in that day. And they say, and they speak of their findings and Herod has their attention.

So what are they saying to Herod? Well, we see in the first part of what they say, well, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? Okay, Herod is king of Judea, he's king over the Jews.

What's going on here? But then it says, for we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. And basically what they're saying is, Herod, your time's up.

Where's the new king? Someone's been born. The stars have told us. The gods of the spiritual realm have spoken and the stars have aligned. Your time is up.

Where's the other king? A new emperor is about to come and will take over. And for the first time, since worshipping his own power and his own progress and his own reputation, Herod comes face to face with the expiration of this quest of becoming like God.

[ 10 : 31 ] So Andrew, can we have our first point at this time? At the root of sin is a desire to be like God. At the root of sin is a desire to be like God.

Now whether it's a desire to be powerful or a desire to manipulate events or people in our lives to have a result that we want or to receive praise and recognition from others, to be accepted, there's this underlying current that feeds all of these different dispositions that we have that is a desire to be like God.

And for the first time here, Herod is realizing his frailty that he is not the God that he thought that he was, the God that he imagined over and over in his mind that he could become, but that he is frail and that he's toast.

His last moment is about to come. So what does he do? Well, let's look at verse 4. So Herod, here's the news, or verse 3.

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him, and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

[ 11 : 51 ] So Herod is consulting the Jewish leaders of that time and to see, so he believes what the Magi are saying. They spoke of the king of the Jews, where is he to be born? And so here, the word Christ, which appears the first time, for some of us it might be unfamiliar.

It basically says the one empowered by God to do God's will among God's people. And so we get a sense of divine authority, this divine ruler who's to come and is going to take Herod's place.

And so what do the scribes and leaders tell Herod? Well, let's look at verse 5. They told him, in Bethlehem of Judea, for it is written by the prophet, and you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

So just like that, introducing Jesus into the conversation has put a solid halt to Herod's progress in this world of becoming a god and becoming this very powerful king who has his way all the time. And because here we're introduced with a prophecy that God spoke about 700 years before this very event, about 700 years before through the prophet Micah, he speaks this word that God made a promise to bring a king and a ruler and here Herod is confronted with the fact that God spoke and God is acting upon his promise.

[ 13 : 27 ] And who can fight against that? And so he realized that he created this illusion that he can control his life and his destiny. Andrew, can we have our next point, please?

So sinful pride removes me from the real world where the Lord is God and I am not. Sinful pride removes me from the real world where the Lord is God and I am not.

Now I'm qualifying pride here because there are times when we're proud of a kid or a neighbor or whatnot and that's okay, that's fine. Here, pride is the idea of being rebellious against God which removes us from the real world where God is the Lord where the Lord is God and I am not.

And part of the Lord being God is his ability to oversee the events in life. We think that we can oversee things, that we can manipulate things behind the scenes but ultimately God is God. God is the one who has vengeance for evil and Herod as we see in the next verse is going to want to have his own vengeance. So we'll look at verse 7 here and to get a sense of his sinful pride which removes him from the real world.

[14:47] So verse 7, Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared and he sent them to Bethlehem saying, Go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

So you can imagine Herod hears the news, he's troubled, all Jerusalem with them, he takes a Snickers or pops a Tic Tac and he collects his thoughts and his emotions and then he decides, he makes a decision, okay, I'm going to manipulate the events.

So we see here God's word was not enough. God's word that was spoken 700 years prior to the event about a promise that would happen that is being fulfilled at that very moment before his very eyes was not enough for him.

So he tries to manipulate the events. He tries to go behind the scenes and have his way still. And what's really fascinating about this, as I was reading this this week, as I was coming to grips with this truth that Herod is not accepting God's word and he's going against God's word even though God's word is huge.

It was written 700 years before the event and it's so precise. And as Christians, we have the benefit of having God's word written.

[16:13] And as we read this, what we're reading is not just like any other novel, any other story or piece of history. This is essentially the perspective of eternity written down from God's interventions in real life and teaching us his way, God revealing us his way for life.

And as Christians, we have the benefit of that, that we can know God truly because his son has revealed God and through his word written, we can know him.

And how lightly do I take his word in my daily life and how lightly do I take setting apart time to read his word? So that's a bit of an aside, but what's really striking is also how the Magi received God's word with gladness.

We see that in verse 9 and on. So after Herod makes a deal with the Magi, after listening to the king, the Magi went on their way and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. This, I think is, I didn't see it in the commentaries, but I think this is where Happy Camper comes from, where they were exceedingly, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

[17:35] That's very, very, very happy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. And so what we see here is a moment of eternity.

We sang this earlier on in the songs that in eternity, people are bowed down before God, worshipping God. And we see a glimpse of eternity being acted out in time and space in this life that we experience when the Magi are finally arrived to Jesus to worship him and bow down.

Now some of you got really distracted with the cool star and want to know more. And so there, just as we get into that, we'll just spend a couple minutes just to look at the star.

There are things in the Bible that are open-handed, things that are not super, super clear, that we should have our, we shouldn't have a tight grip on them and have Christian freedom to believe these things.

And we can, you know, argue but not split over these things. And there are things that we hold on that are close-handed, that we hold on because they are absolutely true and very, very clear in the Word.

[18:46] And this part of the star, this part of the story with the star is not a place where we hold on very, very tightly because it's not very clear. Matthew, in a way, veils it in the way that he writes.

So it's, so yeah, some people believe that it's a comet. Some people believe that the stars aligned within a certain constellation and, you know, through science we can find out.

Other people believe it's just simply a vision from God that he gave them and that God worked sovereignly through this vision so that they could encounter him. But the point here is that since Matthew is veiling it in the way that he's writing, he's not putting too much attention towards it.

Just to give an analogy, another analogy, in this, in these paintings here, it would be like saying in this painting in the middle with Jesus, it would be like saying this painting is about Jerusalem in the back.

Everyone would say, no, it's about Jesus. Everyone's kind of looking towards Jesus, the focus is in Jesus. And so, in this story, if we look, if we focus on the star and we make it a deal breaker for us, we're missing the point.

[ 19 : 57 ] And the point is this. Andrew, can I have the next slide? The point is this. God draws unfit people in unlikely ways to worship him.

God draws unfit people in unlikely ways to worship him. Now, this isn't an absolute rule, but this happens.

God will sovereignly work through events in the natural world, in supernatural events as well, to draw people who aren't fit to worship him.

And at the heart of Christian worship, at the heart of people practicing the Christian faith is an awe of God where we constantly ask the question, why me?

Why me, God? Like, how is it that you reveal yourself to me? Like, I didn't do anything to deserve this, and yet you've shown your love to me. That's how the core of Christian worship is awe of God that he would do such a thing.

[ 21 : 08 ] Now, you might be wondering, what makes me unfit? Like, why am I not fit to be a Christian, not fit to worship God? Well, we see in this story the Magi worshipped different gods.

They worshipped the natural world. They worshipped different spirits in the invisible world, practicing divination. Before I was a Christian, I worshipped music.

That's what I worshipped. And I ascribed immense value and power to music over my life. It had the, had such authority over who I was and how I felt and how I thought of the world.

And that was my God. And I believed it. I actually uttered those words, music is my God. And so, what makes me, as someone who worshipped music, worthy of, you know, what makes me fit to worship God?

Well, I'm unfit to worship God. And yet, God draws us in unlikely ways sometimes. And we see in the story here with the Magi that he draws the Magi through a star.

[ 22 : 10 ] Through a star that moved and found Jesus. And so, they made their way to Jesus in that way. And, just a bit of my story, God spoke to me in a musical concert at the National Arts Center just a few blocks away from here, probably a year before my conversion.

And if I were to share that experience with the Jonathan of today, I would probably be cringing at what I was saying because it was so unclear.

But all I knew is that I experienced God. That's what I knew for sure. But my experience wasn't too clear. And if this is true, if God really does draw people who are unfit in unlikely ways, if God really does that, then that means that God is already having conversations with those people that we meet at the Starbucks or at the gym or at work or our neighbors.

That God is already having these conversations, these divine moments with these people. And whether they understand what is happening or not, these things are happening. Creation is actually a witness of God to the common person.

And so our job as Christians who want to share the good news of Jesus is actually sometimes more simple than we think. Sometimes it's just as simple as chiming into a conversation that God is already having with people.

[ 23 : 35 ] And even before we even got there and were able to share the gospel message. And so our job is to simply give a little bit more detail, give the revealed specific word of God which he has revealed through Christ and in his church.

And so here's the next point. Andrew, if I could have the next slide. True and good progress is only true and good when it leads to Jesus.

True and good progress is only true and good when it leads to Jesus. Now progress isn't a bad thing. And by the way, like, I totally support God's word.

And I would encourage anyone, any Christian who wants to be a mathematician or a scientist, I'm like, I would say go into that world and be the best Christian that you can or in law or in government, go for it.

I would say that this is where Jesus is calling you, you should go for it and be faithful and be the best Christian that you can in that environment. But it would have really been a disaster, it would

have been a sad story if the Magi would have followed the star, continued in their ways, and all the way till it stopped on the house where Jesus was and they would have gazed at the star and they would have gone back home and that they wouldn't have encountered Jesus.

[ 24 : 49 ] It would have been a tragedy if that were the case. But we see that all their activity in this world, their search for meaning, their search for transcendence actually had an end point that their progress in life, their search for greater technology and all that actually had a point of reference which was in Jesus.

And Herod's story, on the other hand, is quite sad, yet he was thought as the leader of progress by the Romans. He saw his progress and he wasn't able to achieve it because he was working against the Lord's will.

There is an ultimate ruler and shepherd that has come into the world who is Jesus. And so with all this talk about progress in our culture, I would just like to invite you, if you haven't considered Jesus yet, that Jesus is the one whom all truth and goodness point to.

Now whether it is our search for meaning or transcendence through science and spirituality, these different activities that we can try to find this higher meaning to life, this purpose of life, or whether it is finding peace in our society through good government.

And these things are only truly satisfied in the person of Jesus who has come to make God known. And that is why we have a cross here because Jesus, when he came to earth, was not just to live a good life, he lived a good life and he lived the perfect life.

[ 26 : 30 ] And that was part of his mission. And the other part of his mission was to die on the cross so that we could receive God's forgiveness, that we could be made right with God. And I'll invite you to stand and we'll come to a time of conclusion here.

If I can have my next slide, please, as well. So true and good progress begins when I live my life to honor Jesus as Lord.

True and good progress begins when I live my life to honor Jesus as Lord. See, our only progress, our only hope for progress is when we humble ourselves before God one by one.

When we put our hands in the hand of Jesus and say, Jesus, here's my life. I want to live for you. And that we lay our hopes before Jesus and our fears and our joys to him so that he sends us out into the world and live in the real world where the Lord is God and that we are not.

Let us pray. Lord God, we thank you that you indeed came down from heaven and that you became incarnate by the Holy Ghost in the person of Jesus and we thank you that, Lord, we can know you, we can know eternal life even now and we thank you that, Lord, you've accomplished everything for that, for us to have eternal life, that we can trust you and we can trust your perfect life and that you died on the cross for our sins and that is actually true and actually happened in history so that for all eternity we will be made right with you and we will dwell with you.

[ 28 : 04 ] Lord, I pray that these things would be made more real to us today and on this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.