

The Worship of Our King

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[0:00] Well, Merry Christmas, everyone. I thought I would start with controversy. Let's talk politics. Now, regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum, you've got to admit that the field of Republican presidential candidates consists of some very unique personalities.

You've got to admit it. And so I'm not about to advocate one candidate over the other here, but let me, I mean, there is a significant contrast between one Donald Trump and one Jeb Bush. I mean, one is very brash. The other is quite reserved. Sharp contrast between the two. And when we get into the actual debates between the Republican nominee and the Democratic nominee, we'll have some more contrasts.

All vying for the top position in the land. This morning, as we prepare our hearts for this week, celebrating Christmas, we're going to look at this passage in Matthew 2, 1-12, a passage that brings out contrasts to help us see who is the one true king.

Matthew makes some contrasts between Herod and Jesus, and we're left asking, well, which one is the true king of the Jews?

[1:42] The Magi, who were Gentiles, point us to the real king.

And he's not just the king of the Jews, he's the king of all. And all are to bow down and worship him. And so this morning, here's how I'd like to move us forward.

We're going to walk through the story, verses 1-12, and I want you to see five contrasts. And those contrasts are going to help us to see who is the one true king.

I'll walk through the story, we'll make the point, and we'll ask the question, so what? What difference does this make for us now? So let's look at this story.

Five contrasts. And the first contrast begins in the very first verse. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, we already have our two candidates, so to speak.

[2:49] Jesus and Herod for king of the Jews. Which one? And where the gospel writer points us to is he's talking about birthplace.

There's a contrast in where each of these people were born. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. We know that. And Bethlehem was outside of Jerusalem in southern Israel.

But what you may not remember is that Jesus was also, he grew up in Nazareth, which is in northern Israel, around the Sea of Galilee.

And so one of the things Matthew's doing here is helping people understand why this Jesus of Nazareth was actually born in Bethlehem. And what we all know about Bethlehem is it's the hometown of David.

That's where King David was born. That's where he grew up. And so what Matthew is doing here is helping us link Jesus to the kingship of David.

[3:52] And he spent a lot of time in chapter 1 doing the very same thing. Today, Jesus is from the line of David. He has a birthright to the throne. Now Herod, on the other hand, he's not from Bethlehem.

He's an Edomite. He was born outside of Israel. Edom was south of Israel. In a little background on Herod, in 40 A.D., he was declared to be the king of Judea by the Roman Senate.

He was declared to be the king of the Jews by the Roman Senate. So he was not Jewish. And the Jews held that against him.

And so the throne was not his birthright. And he actually married into a very powerful Jewish family of the time. And so what we have here at the very outset is a contrast of birthplaces.

And we have to ask the question, well, which one points to the one true king? Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but not Herod.

[5:06] So that's contrast number one. Contrast number two, who the Magi sought. We see that at the second half of verse one and into verse two.

Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. Now, you've got to remember, these wise men from the east, east is most likely Babylon. And the perspective here is east of Israel, east of Jerusalem. So Babylon would have been to the right. Hundreds of miles away. And what is important to note is at that time in Babylon, there was a significant Jewish settlement.

And so these Magi's could very well, likely have been influenced by the Jews living in Babylon at the time. Now, Magi were Gentiles, non-Jews.

And these Magi were astrologers and dream interpreters. And so they studied the stars. They tried to make sense of dreams. And so isn't it interesting that God leads them by a star.

[6:14] He leads them by a dream at the end of this section. What you need to see about these Magi is that they're Magi on a mission. They've come to Jerusalem for something.

They're looking. And we see that in verse two. They come to Jerusalem. And they're saying, where is he who's been born King of the Jews?

Where is the one born King of the Jews? They're not saying, hey, where's the one who was voted in as King of Judea? They're not asking that. They're saying, where's the one who is by birthright King of the Jews right now?

That's what they're looking for. And they go on to say that we've been following His star.

His star. Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? Where we saw His star when it arose. His star. At that time, when there was a star that would appear that corresponded to someone's birth, it was a huge deal.

[7:26] And so somehow, these Magi, seeing this star appear, and somehow being influenced by Jewish thinking at the time, most likely in Babylon, they were putting two and two together.

And they were saying, okay, we're going to Jerusalem. We're going to find this one born King of the Jews. It kind of begs the question, did they know that this King of the Jews would be God with us? God in the flesh? Well, we don't know that. But we know what Matthew says now. That this baby that they're searching for is in fact God in the flesh.

So here we have these Magi on a mission. And at the end of verse 2, they say, for we saw His star and have come to worship Him.

Come to pay Him homage. Come to bring tribute. Come to recognize this one greater than us. We have Gentiles coming to worship a Jewish king.

[8:34] It's amazing. This word worship shows up three times in this passage alone. It's a significant theme. Worship. Worship.

Worship this king. So here we have foreign diplomats paying homage to someone greater than they are, this baby born a king, king of the Jews.

We know Him as Emmanuel. We know Him as Emmanuel. Here's the contrast.

It's not explicitly stated, but it's there. These Magi come to Jerusalem where Herod would have been reigning. And they're asking around the city, hey, where is this one born king of the Jews? Where is he? Do you know who they're not asking for? They're not asking for Herod. They're looking for a child. They're looking for a child. A child marked by this star.

[9:46] And so there's a contrast in who the Magi sought. Which one is the true king of kings? The king of the Jews? The third contrast I want to help you see is the contrast of plans.

If you look at verse 3, we read this. When Herod the king heard this, he heard the mumbling. He heard that there were Magi in town.

He heard that they were looking for the one born king of the Jews. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled. What was he troubled about?

Was he troubled about a baby born under his reign? Was that what he was troubled about? Here's what he was troubled about. He was troubled that there was now a rival claim to his throne.

That's what troubled him. There's someone else in the kingdom who is being said is the king of the Jews by birthright.

[10:53] Born king of the Jews. It represented a threat. Herod dealt with threats in a most disturbing way.

By this point in his reign, Herod the great was greatly paranoid. And he was a killer.

I read something this week that I want to read with you. This is one of the people who help kind of like the four Tauruses like me see things that I normally don't see.

And so one of the commentators wrote this, speaking of Herod. He was wealthy and politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors.

His famine relief was superb and his building projects, including the temple, admired even by his foes, but he loved power, inflicted incredible, incredible heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper.

[12:13] In his last years, which would be at the point of this story, in his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Miriam, and at least two of his sons.

This man, this Herod the Great, is troubled and his troubledness runs deep.

He sees this announcement, this potential king as a threat to him. We notice too that all Jerusalem was troubled with him.

The best way to understand that is this. If Herod ain't happy, nobody else in Jerusalem is happy. I mean, think about it. You're someone living in Jerusalem and these foreign dignitaries come into the city and they're asking, where is this king of the Jews, this one born king of the Jews?

And you're thinking, oh, this isn't going to be good. This isn't going to be good because freak show, Herod, in the throne right now, is not going to like this.

[13:40] And so, in verse 4, we see what Herod does. This guy, this guy's a rascal. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So, he gets word, he's troubled, and then he goes into political Simonizing. Do you know what Simonizing is? My father-in-law uses Simonize. It's you start planning.

You get the political kind of wheels turning. You're like, okay, we've got a potential threat here. How are we going to handle this? We've got to figure out kind of the scope of this in order how to handle it.

And so, being very politically savvy, Herod calls in kind of the religious elite in Jerusalem at the time. And he asks them the question, where is the Christ to be born?

He's setting a plan in motion. We don't know it quite yet. He'll come out in a second. But he does not have something good in mind.

[14:54] So, he brings these kind of religious elite together and he asks them, where is the Christ to be born? Now, there is a really subtle point to be made. The Magi come in asking, where is this one born king of the Jews?

And now, we see Herod asking these religious elite, where is the Christ to be born? And so, we see this connection between king of the Jews and the Christ.

They're one and the same. The long-awaited one. The promised one of God. Where is he to be born? And so, these religious elite answer Herod very quickly.

They know right off the top of their head where he's going to be born. They say in verse 5, they told him, in Bethlehem of Judea. The second time that phrase is used. For so it is written by the prophet. Written through the prophet. God spoke through the prophet. God has a plan. And this baby fulfilled that plan. It's not a Simonizing plan of a tyrant king.

[15:54] It's God's plan for the salvation of the world. And so, what they do is they quote Micah 5.2.

But it's a combined quote. It's more than Micah 5.2. It's Micah 5.2 and 2 Samuel 5.2. So they're kind of squished together. And what it functions as is a prophetic stamp saying, this is legit.

This is God's plan. We've already seen Matthew do this in the section before where he quotes Isaiah 7.14. This baby born of a virgin is Emmanuel. It's Jesus.

And next week we're going to see him do this three more times where he says that this baby and his life fulfill what God had said beforehand in the Old Testament.

It's all about God's plan. And so this quote, the Micah 5.2 part is the first part. And you, O Bethlehem and the land of Judah and by no means least among the rulers.

[16:53] What he's doing there is yes, it was God's plan for the Christ to be born in Bethlehem. That location is legit. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

And then he goes on to talk about in the second half, for from you, this is the 2 Samuel 5.2 part, for from you shall come a ruler who shall shepherd my people Israel.

The significance is ruler and shepherd. What's being talked about is kingship. And when you hear the words shepherd king, who comes to your mind but David?

And so this quote has David-ness all about it. Kingship. But why it's being quoted is to help us to see that this is God's plan.

And might I add, God's loving plan. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. This is His plan for our good, for the salvation of all.

[18:02] It fulfills God's forever plan. And so what we see going on in this section is a contrast. Herod's political Simonizing.

The wheels are turning. Jesus, the fulfillment of God's plan. See the contrast? The next contrast I want you to see is a contrast in character.

We see this come out in verse 7 and 8. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

Okay, so this is the first time we see Herod talking to the Magi and it's a hush-hush meeting. He calls the men in secret. He wants to get some information from them.

He's still Simonizing. He's still enacting a plan. But what you need to understand is that it's a murderous plan. Do you see Him ascertaining when the time the star had appeared?

[19:08] Do you know why He's asking that question? Here's why. He knows it corresponds to the birth of the Christ.

And so do you know what He's doing? He's narrowing the field of possible threats. He's trying to find an age range of how old this boy is.

Later on in this passage, God appears to a dream to the wise men. They don't go back to Herod. And then in the next verse, if you want to look ahead to verse 16, Herod flips out.

He's furious. And look what he does. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and all that region who were two years old or under according to the time he had ascertained from the wise men.

Do you see why He's asking this question? He's trying to remove His threat. This is not a good man.

[20:22] verse 8. Verse 8. He continues the con job. He sends them to Bethlehem saying, Go and search diligently for the child and when you found him, bring me word that I too may worship him.

This is the second time that word worship is used in this passage. The word worship is used 13 times in Matthew. Nine of the 13 times are about worshipping Jesus. One of them is this time.

But it is tongue-in-cheek at best. He has no intention of worshipping Jesus. The reason why he wants to know where Jesus is is not to worship him.

It's to kill him. He's a threat. So he cons the magi.

He sends them to Bethlehem with the expert information he's learned from the religious elite. Yeah, I learned that they're in Bethlehem. Go. Go find him. Let me know the house address and I'll come worship him.

[21:32] That's not what's going on. He's conning them. He's deceiving them. So the contrast going on here is this self-serving tyrant, this con man killer with the shepherd king who's a baby.

And what we know about the shepherd king is that he's going to give his life as a ransom for many. Herod is self-serving.

Jesus is self-sacrificial. One is a killer. The other is the Savior. This contrast points to who is the real king of the Jews.

The last contrast I want you to see is a contrast of worship. In verses 9 through 12, Jesus is worshipped. In verse 9, the magi listen to the king and they go.

They go on their way five or six miles to Bethlehem from Jerusalem. The star reappears. Remember, it's his star. Verse 2. The star of the Christ child, Jesus.

[22:49] It's God leading them. God wants these Gentile magi to find the king of the Jews so that they can worship Him. And He's not just king of the Jews.

He's king of all. This is the Savior of the world that's been born. God is salvation. Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. That's who this is. Jesus came not just for Jews, but for all people. And just as a side note, you know what?

Here are the religious elite. They know exactly where the Christ is to be born, but they don't go. These Gentiles are the ones that are sent.

Well, the star went before them. It literally led them. And then the star came to rest. It literally stopped moving over the place where Jesus was residing in Bethlehem.

[23:51] It had an address. We don't know the address, but it was a specific place. And there are all sorts of theories that want to explain, try to explain the star.

And so maybe it was the alignment of planets. Maybe it was a comet. Maybe it was a huge explosion, a supernova, just at the right time. They're all means.

God could have used any of those. But what you can't miss is that this was supernatural. God was making it clear.

God was using these kind of natural means for His supernatural purposes. God was leading the Magi to the King of Jews.

His birth was that important. Now in verses 10 and 11, you see these Magi, they are thrilled.

[25:02] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. One commentator said they were delirious with joy. I mean, they get to the house. They've journeyed from Babylon.

It's been a long time. They've wanted to see this baby. And so now they're at the house. Can you believe it? I'm reminded of, Jenny and I adopted our youngest from China.

And it was a four and a half year process capped by a huge trip. And we were counting down the days. We were counting down the days to gotcha day when we gotcha'd Mary.

It was awesome. And I'll never forget. We have video of this being in our hotel room in Nanchung. And we are literally counting down the minutes.

We're so thrilled. We can't believe it. The time has come. And I'll never forget being down in this hotel and being on the other side of the door of our baby.

[26:05] It's palpable. We are so excited. We're surrounded by people who are just as excited. Exceeding joy at the prospect of seeing a baby.

A child. And this is no ordinary child. This is Emmanuel. Well, God with us. The offspring of Abraham who would bring salvation to all the peoples of the world.

So you can see why they're a little geeked about this. So the star leads them to the house and they walk in and they find this baby Jesus chilling with his mama.

And going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his mother. And they fell down and worshipped him. Joy to the world.

The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. They fell down and worshipped him. This is the third time that word worship is used.

[27:24] This passage is all about worship. It's all about the worship of the one true king. And Jesus is the one true king. Notice, they gave him gifts.

They gave him gifts. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There's no need to kind of overly complicate these gifts. There's no need to super spiritualize them, to go deep into symbolism of them.

Here's what you can know. There's no other resident in the town of Bethlehem that would have received gifts like these. Because these are gifts fit for a king.

These are for a king. Turns out, Isaiah chapter 60, verse 6, a messianic passage, points to people, Gentiles, coming to the Messiah and offering him golden frankincense.

These Gentiles were worshiping the king of the Jews. And if there had been any other question up to this point, Matthew's making it clear that salvation is for all people.

[28:42] The focus of these magi's worship is Jesus, and Jesus is the focus of God's plan of salvation. He's a Jewish king for all people.

Bow down and worship him. Bow down and worship him. Verse 12, we're not told how. We don't know how long the magi stayed, but it must have been at least one night because they had a dream, and in that dream they were told, by God, inferred, but told, don't go back to Herod.

So they go another way. Don't go back to that con man. Go home another way. So here's the contrast. It's a contrast of who is worshiped.

The magi worship King Jesus, Emmanuel, the long-anticipated one. But the magi avoid King Herod. They keep away from him. They draw near to Jesus, but steer clear of Herod. So what is this passage all about?

[29:53] Well, these contrasts point to the one true king. Jesus. He's the king of the Jews.

He's the king of all. And so this Christmas, we worship him. We bow down and worship him. We give him the most valuable gift we can, our lives.

We live for him. He's worthy. He's the real king. He's Emmanuel. You know, it's not in this text, this passage, but there is one other contrast.

Herod died and stayed dead. It's said that the day that Herod died, he had prisoners executed to ensure there was mourning in Jerusalem on the day he died.

He was a tyrant. But King Jesus, he died. He gave his life as a ransom for many, right? Amen. But he didn't stay dead. He was raised on the third day.

[31:03] Amen. And he's reigning right now at the right hand of the Father. Amen. And he's going to come back and when he comes back as a warrior, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus the Christ is Lord.

He's King of all. Amen. Amen. Two so what's. So what number one.

If you're not a follower of King Jesus, bow your knee by faith. Become a follower of the King. Come under His glorious reign.

Don't rebel against it. Come under it. And find life and joy inexpressible. The Gospels, Matthew as well, are designed to introduce King Jesus to people who don't know Him.

Do you know King Emmanuel? Have you come under His reign? Have you bowed your knee by faith? Have you recognized that you are a sinner who has been a rebellion against Him and that you need to turn from that and come under His glorious reign?

[32:26] Have you seen that? Do you know that? Bow your knee today. Become a Christian today. Here's what you need to do. You just need to admit it. King Jesus, I've been rebelling against you and trying to reign over my own life.

But I see that. I'll praise to you. And I bow my knee under your reign and I will follow you all the days of my life because you're that awesome.

If you're not a Christian, become a Christian today. It's by faith alone. Bow your knee to King Jesus. The second so what is this. Now, Christmas is much more than one day of the year. We all get that, right? We live every day in light of our King Jesus.

We get that. But this week provides a unique opportunity for us as Christians to reflect upon and bow down and worship our King.

[33:38] So I have a couple suggestions for you this week. In light of it being Christmas, in light of our Emmanuel, first is this.

Pray. Pray that God would use the Christmas Eve outreach to introduce people to King Jesus, that people would bow to me. Second, come to the Christmas Eve service.

come, let's worship Him together. Come, let's sing Christmas carols to our one true King. Let's do that together. What it's going to be on Christmas Eve is a bunch of Gentiles coming together to worship our Jewish King who's King of all.

Oh, come, let us adore Him. And then, this Friday, before you exchange gifts, maybe it's one gift, maybe it's five gifts, but before the wrapping paper starts flying, take a moment, pull out your Bible, read Matthew 2, 1-12, read Luke 2, 1-21, read Isaiah 7, 14, Isaiah 9, 2-7, Micah 5, take your pick, and call to mind why we are exchanging gifts.

Call to mind our great King Jesus, our Emmanuel. The Magi gave gifts out of reverence for Jesus. Let's give gifts to one another out of reverence for Jesus.

[35:21] This is about Him. It's about Him. This passage provided some contrasts so that we can see that Jesus is the Christ, our one great King.

Come all you faithful. Let's adore Him. God in Heaven, we of all people know the significance of this season, and we choose to rejoice and bow down and worship our King.

God, we won't be distracted from that. And so God, would You make our hearts ring all week long praises to Emmanuel.

In Jesus' name, Amen.