

Our Response to Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12)

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[0 : 00] I think I've told you this before, but one of the things that we like to do with our kids every night around the dinner table is we do high, low, bet you don't know. Where the kids share something about their day that went really well, that they're excited about something that didn't go according to plan and something that we may not know.

Well, I feel like that's how this week has gone. I feel like it's been high, low, bet you don't know. There's been some highs. We've got to experience salvations. We've got to see God working some mighty ways.

There's been some lows not being able to meet last week, and there has been some bet you don't know that has taken place this week. But I am so thankful for our church.

I'm thankful for the way that you just rally around and respond to things like this. You know, so many times it's things like this that can come in and just kind of get everybody talking and frustrated about things.

And all of a sudden, one thing leads to another. But it's just been so wonderful to see the church come together. And it's been a real blessing. And it's been God has provided in so many ways.

[1 : 08] Just at the beginning of the week, we were getting ready to order porta potties. And then we were able to find out that, hey, these bathrooms right here, right outside the bridge work. And praise God for that.

And we are thankful for that. Now, it will be a little while before we can go back into the older part of the church and conduct business as usual. And I mean that in every way imaginable.

But we are thankful that we can be here at this time. We're thankful that we can come together, that we can just laugh about this and still praise God because God is good.

And we are so thankful that we can come together and celebrate Christmas and celebrate the fact that we serve a risen Savior. And so with so many things going on this week, I'm thankful to be here worshiping with my church family.

And that is an incredible blessing. One of the things that I like to collect, if you go into my office, you'll see I like to collect a lot of different things. But one of the things that I like to collect is nativity scenes.

[2 : 13] And every time I go on a mission trip or travel to somewhere, I love to collect nativity scenes. And so if you go in my office, you'll see nativity scenes from Central and South America.

You'll see one from Cuba. You'll see some of those from Africa. I even have one from Israel that someone brought back to me. One that's really special is one that probably the first one I ever had that my mom would give us every year at Christmas to put on our bedside table.

It's in my office. And so there's nativity scenes that are set up year-round in my office. But at home, we have some as well that are really special that we'll put out. And my girls love to play with them.

They love to take them and play with them and, you know, I guess reenact the story of Christmas. And this past week, I had one of those really proud dad moments.

I looked up on our mantle, and there was the nativity set, but the wise men weren't there. And then I looked further down the mantle, and there was three wise men over further down the mantle all facing the rest of the scene, the birth of Christ here.

[3 : 21] But they weren't there yet. And I was thinking, those girls have been listening. They, you know, the wise men probably, there's no way they were there at the same time as the shepherds were. It took a lot longer for them to get there.

Now, in full disclosure, it could have been that they were lazy, and that's where they put them back up. I didn't ask because I wanted to use that story this morning. And so I'll find out this afternoon if that's actually what it was or not.

But that's the story that we're going to be looking at today. We're going to be looking at that time when the wise men were making their way onto the scene to worship Jesus.

You heard Jannie read this story for us earlier this morning, but I want us to follow along with this story. Now, this is a familiar story. This is one of those stories that we hear every single year.

And I think sometimes there's a danger in those familiar stories where we can hear them, and we know how the story goes, and so we can just kind of tune out for the story. I want to encourage you not to do that this morning.

[4 : 22] I want you to listen to this story with fresh ears and be able to hopefully see what God is communicating to us through His Word. And so if you have a copy of God's Word, I want to invite you to follow along as I read Matthew 2, starting in verse 1 and making our way through verse 12.

It says this, 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 we have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all of Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And they told him, 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. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

[5 : 36] 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. And after listening to the king, they 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. And so in this familiar passage today, a passage that I've talked through a couple of times now, previous pastors have talked through, I want us to consider a few observations this morning. And the first thing that I want us to consider is the people that you see in this story. I want you to look with me for just a moment at the people that we see in this story. In verse 1, we're introduced to the wise men.

[6 : 50] In Matthew's account, we see an unlikely group of people coming to Jesus, the wise men or the magi. Now, there's a few things that we don't know about this group.

And a lot of times, we think we know some things about them just from the nativity sets and things that we have displayed. But first of all, we really don't know how many wise men there were.

You know, a lot of times we assume that there's three wise men because we see three gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. But if you think about it, if I told you that for my birthday this year, I got money, I got toys and I got clothes, that wouldn't tell you how many people were there.

It would just tell you there were three different types of gifts that I was given. In fact, it would have been incredibly rare for only three of these men to travel together. And so most likely, it was a larger group of wise men that were these magi that were traveling.

And then they would have people that traveled along with them and probably some families. And so it was probably a good sized group that was traveling with them. But another thing, another misconception that a lot of times we have is that these were kings that were coming.

[8 : 00] You know, after all, we sing we three kings. But that's something that the passage doesn't tell us. Nowhere in scripture are we told that these were kings. But we are told that they're magi, which I'm sure that you can guess the words that we get in our English language today that come from this.

Magic and magician. Now, when we say this, I don't want you to think of David Blaine or David Copperfield and that type of magician. That is not who these men were.

But D.A. Carson, he mentions that he says, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books about books thought to contain mysterious

references to the future and the like.

He says, some magi honestly inquired after truth, but many were rogues or charlatans. And so these men seem to have an interest in astrology because they were told that the star brought them to Jesus.

And so the ESV that I'm reading from here and many other English translations, it uses wise men to describe them. However, we are never told that they were kings from this text.

[9 : 09] And this idea is something that came about far later on. But what I do find interesting is the direction that these men were coming to Bethlehem from.

They were coming and traveling from the direction of Babylon. Now, many scholars, and we're not told from this passage here, but I think we can easily put some things together.

They were this word that was used for magi here in the Septuagint. It was the same word that was used in Daniel where it was talking about the magi or those that Daniel was talking with and associated with in the book of Daniel.

And so there's no doubt in my mind that Daniel, living on mission for God in Babylon, living on mission for him with where God had placed him, would have told many of those that he was closely associated with about the coming king, about the coming Messiah.

He would have shared his faith with those that he was with. And so that would be something that would get passed down and further and further. And so now these magi coming from that same direction see this star and they begin to travel.

[10 : 19] And it would have taken a significant amount of time for them to make their way to Bethlehem. And so this message would have been passed down and it would have been from a, there would be a group of magi looking for the coming king.

Now, some of these things we don't know, but whoever they were, however many of them there were, we do know that these were important men who had access to great wealth. They, the gifts they brought were expensive, not to mention the long journey it would have taken them to get to Bethlehem.

We know that Herod, after he asked them about the timing of this and after they didn't return, he said that to go and... ..

Pagan special.

Magic and divination, blatant violators of Old Testament law. And these sinners, these blatant violators of the Old Testament law are coming to worship Jesus.

[11 : 37] And so we should be really aware and beware of having a narrower vision of who can come to Jesus than God does. We can be so prone to write people off like this.

We can be so prone to say, you know what, God would never work in this person's life. Look at all the things that they've been involved with in their past. They can never come to faith in Christ. May we not have a narrower view of people who've never heard the gospel.

May we not have a narrower view of people who may come from a different background than we do. Who maybe were raised in a different religion than we are.

May we never write them off as people who can't come to Jesus. Because God can and does change hearts as only He can. And so may we never look at people that we come in contact with and think, Well, they're a lost cause.

Because that's not how God sees people. He certainly doesn't see this. The next person that we're introduced to in this passage is King Herod. Now there are several Herods that are significant in Scripture.

[12 : 44] And all of the Herods that are mentioned in Scripture are related to this Herod. And in some way, either directly or indirectly, were against Jesus and against Christianity.

This Herod was known to be ruthless. He killed sons. In fact, the emperor, he says, It would be better to be one of Herod's sows than one of his sons. He says it would be better to be a pig owned by Herod than one of his actual sons, one of his actual children, because he was prone to killing him.

He even killed wife. He would dress up as a commoner, go out into the streets, and ask people what they thought about King Herod. And then if they thought negatively of him or spoke negatively about him, he would go back and have people go and take care of that situation.

And so this person, this king, was ruthless. And so he was actively opposed to Jesus and all of this idea about this coming king.

After all, in his mind, if this really is the king of the Jews, then he would be out of a job. This response to Jesus comes because he feels threatened by Jesus.

[13:52] Jesus poses a threat to his way of life. And this is something that I think we all have in common with Herod. Jesus poses a threat to our way of life.

Jesus poses a threat to how we live our lives. We are told over and over again in Scripture that following Jesus is not a tack on.

It's not something that we just sprinkle onto our life to give it a little bit of flavor here and there. No, it changes everything. It is a complete change of your life.

In fact, it is impossible to enter a life-changing relationship with Jesus and your life not change. It's impossible. This is something that we all have in common with Herod here, that Jesus is a threat to our way of life.

Douglas O'Donnell, he makes this accurate and profound statement. He says this, Jesus is a real threat to anyone and everyone who thinks seriously about him.

[14:53] If Jesus is king, it means that you're not. It means your dethronement. It means your submission. It means that you can't lead your life any longer.

If Jesus is who he says he is, either you love him or you hate him. But there's another group that I want to briefly mention this morning as well.

And that's the chief priests and scribes. A lot of times they get left out of this story because it's just a brief mention of them in there. But I think one of the most shocking parts of this story is the group of people who responded to the coming Messiah by doing absolutely nothing.

In this passage, we see the chief priests and scribes answer Herod. And the passage says, And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

And they told him, In Bethlehem of Judea. For as 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.

[16:02] The chief priests and the scribes could ace a test about the coming Messiah. No one knew the scriptures better than them. They were meticulous about copying down the scriptures.

No one understood and knew the scriptures better than the chief priests and the scribes. And so they know all of the stories about the coming Messiah. They didn't have to go and look it up when Harry comes and say, Hey, where's this baby to be born?

They would have known it immediately. Oh, Bethlehem. It's written. It's foretold. It's in scripture. It's there. They would have known the answer immediately. And yet, they do nothing with this.

These were the experts. They had all the answers to the questions. And may we not get caught up in knowledge so much so that we miss what the knowledge is pointing us to.

May we never miss the forest for the trees that are right in front of our face. And so what we see here is three distinct people or groups of people, all of which are responding differently to the same information about Jesus.

[17:10] And the question that we must ask ourselves is, how are we going to respond to Jesus? How are we going to respond to this information? In this passage, we are given several examples of how people responded to Jesus at the time of his birth.

And I don't think that it's too far of a stretch to say that we today respond very similarly to this same information. That how they responded 2,000 years ago is very similar to the way people respond today.

And so what I want us to spend the remainder time on is answering this question. How do these individuals respond to the birth of Christ? And we just mentioned it, but the chief priests and the scribes, they respond by doing absolutely nothing.

And this is confusing to me. This is one of the most confusing parts of the story. The very people who knew the most about the coming Messiah respond by doing absolutely nothing.

Now, I don't know if it was out of fear of Herod or whatever the case may have been, but for some reason, they knew all of the answers and they knew that something significant was happening in Bethlehem where this was to take place, and yet they do nothing with it.

[18:29] John Piper notes, he says, the sheer silence and inactivity of the leaders is overwhelming in view of the magnitude of what is happening. Think with me for just a moment about the significance of what is happening.

The chief priests and the scribes spent their life copying and studying the Old Testament. They knew what the Scripture said about the Messiah. They knew that he was supposed to be born in Bethlehem, but yet they did nothing with it.

One commentator, he described the situation. He said it this way. He says, These religious experts pushed their buzzer, won their prize, and went back to bury their heads in the Word of God.

And as Paul put it, they were always learning and never able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth. Now, while we can easily look at this passage and say of the chief priests and the scribes, how can you respond by doing nothing?

We can look at this and say, how could you possibly respond by doing nothing? But before we do that, may we first look at our own lives. How are we responding to this news?

[19 : 41] How are we responding to the gospel? But because claiming a relationship with Jesus while not letting Jesus be Lord of our lives looks a lot like having this information and doing nothing with it.

May we take this information and may we not be like these chief priests and scribes and do nothing with it. The next person we see in this passage is King Herod. What does King Herod do with this? He responds by being actively opposed to Jesus. It says, When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all of Jerusalem with him.

Herod's response was about as far from doing nothing as you could possibly be. As we mentioned, if Jesus is who the wise men claim him to be, then this is going to turn Herod's world upside down. And this to me, while more harmful in practice, makes more sense. It's not as surprising as the indifference of the chief priests and scribes. Because a person attacks what they see as a threat to their way of life.

[20 : 49] They will attack what they see as a threat to their thinking, to their way of living. And Jesus is such a threat. If Herod didn't think that Jesus was actually born, if He didn't think that Jesus might indeed be a king, the king, if He didn't think that this new king, though now just a child, could in fact dethrone Him, rule over Him, take allegiance from Him, He would not have done the things that He did.

And so as we seek to share the gospel with a lost and dying world, may we not be surprised when we see people respond negatively to what we're saying.

May we not be surprised when we see people who are actively opposed to what we're saying. May we not be surprised when people respond negatively.

But Jesus will be Lord of their lives. And so as we seek to share this gospel message, may we not be surprised when people respond against this message.

But the final group we see in this passage, the wise men. And the wise men respond by worshiping the true king. The wise men respond by worshiping the true king.

[22 : 25] It says, after listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose before them 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. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshipped him.

Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What I find interesting and surprising in this story is who worships Jesus.

Herod, the earthly king of the Jews, doesn't worship Jesus. The chief priests and scribes who would recognize the Messiah, given their knowledge, they don't worship.

It seems that all of Jerusalem knew that something was going on because it says that all of Jerusalem was troubled with him. They knew something was going on. Yet we don't see people traveling from Jerusalem to come down and worship.

[23 : 28] The ones we see worshiping in this story are not Jewish at all and have come from far off to worship King Jesus. J.C. Ryle, he said, we read of no greater faith than this in the whole volume of the Bible.

Now that could be an overstatement, but it does speak to the significance of what is taking place in this story. These men were willing to give everything in their worship of Jesus.

They bow down and worship, recognizing Jesus is a far greater treasure than anything else in this world. These wise men also worshiped by giving gifts.

There has been much made about the types of gifts that were given and the significance in relation to who Jesus is. For example, gold representing him as a king, frankincense his divinity, myrrh, the passion and the burial, and that may or may not be the case, but we do know that these were expensive gifts but not uncommon gifts.

By giving these gifts, they were boldly declaring that I value Jesus more than anything else in this world. By giving Jesus these gifts, what they're claiming, what they're boldly proclaiming with their actions is that Jesus is a far greater treasure than earthly treasures.

[24 : 54] I love how one commentator put it. He says, the joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from you. I have not come to you for your things but for yourself.

And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things in the hope of enjoying you more. Not the things, by giving to you what you do not need and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically that you are my treasure and not these things.

And so the question that we must ask ourselves this morning is this. How are we going to respond to Jesus? How are we going to respond to Jesus?

By doing nothing? You may think, well Brett, you're talking to a church here. Yes, and there are many in churches all over the country today who can ace a test about the true meaning of Christmas, who can tell you all kinds of facts about who Jesus is and can answer all the questions correctly on a test and yet they do nothing with that information.

May we not fall into that category. May we not just have this knowledge in our minds but may it sink into our hearts and affect everything that we say and do. Or are we going to respond by being actively opposed to Jesus?

[26 : 27] And I don't mean by the ordering and the killing of babies but are we going to value our sin, our way of life, our preferences more than we value what God is calling us to do?

Are we going to be actively opposed to following Jesus because we value our lives and how things affect us more than we value who Jesus is and what He came to do?

Finally, and hopefully, we're going to respond to Jesus by worshiping the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. By saying, God, I value You more than anything else in this world.

This can be difficult at times but this is what produces joy in our lives like nothing else can. This is what gives our lives meaning.

And so the question that we must ask is how are you responding to Jesus today? For some of you it may be that you've never done anything with this information. You've had this information for a very long time but you've never done anything with it.

[27 : 31] You've come to church, you've done all of these things and you know all the right answers but you've never given your life to Jesus. You know all the right things to say and all the right things to do but you've never gone all in with it.

You've never said I'm going to follow You with my life and so maybe today the way that you respond to this wonderful Christmas message is by giving your life to Him and saying God, here's my life. It's yours. Take it and use it. I'm going to stop just having this knowledge and do something with it. I'm going to give my life to you. Maybe for some of us it means that we're going to stop being actively opposed to it.

Where we've given part of our lives to Jesus, we can put on a good show in front of other people especially on Sunday mornings but yet we've continued to be actively opposed to Jesus by living our lives however we wanted to live them.

May we stop that today. Or are we going to be like the wise men in this story and fall down and say Jesus, you're king.

[28 : 37] I'm not. I'm worshiping you with my life. I'm giving everything to you. I value you more than any earthly treasures. I value you.

And so that's what I want today is to say God, here's my life. Take it and use it for your honor and for your glory. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so very much for this very familiar story.

A story we love to read especially this time of year. And Lord, may we see it in it what it is that you're calling us to see today. May we see the different ways that people respond to the birth of Jesus.

And Lord, may we see that oftentimes that's how people still respond today. And so Lord, as a church, as a group of individuals who are following you, may we give our lives to you.

May we not just hear this message. May we not just have the knowledge and do nothing with it. May we not have the knowledge and be actively opposed to it. But may we have this knowledge, Lord, and say you're worthy of our worship.

[29 : 45] That you're worthy of everything. And so Lord, help us to experience that wonderful gift of joy today by giving our lives to you. Not just parts of it, but all of it.

And so God, we thank you for everything and most of all for Jesus. And it's in his name we pray. Amen. I want to encourage you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation this morning. And if God is speaking to you, won't you respond as we stand together and sing? Amen. Amen.