The Christmas King

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[0:00] If you've been keeping up with the Langham Partnerships series of Advent devotionals, you'll know they're all about Jesus Christ, the newborn King.

We begin our sermon today by stating, Jesus Christ is the King at Christmas. Jesus Christ is the King at Christmas.
Christmas should be all about Him. In reality, it's not. For us as Christians, that's a real shame. Because in a society where there are so few opportunities given to Christians to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, Christmas, along with Easter, stand out.
These two holy days present us as Christians and the church with the opportunity to proclaim to the whole world that Jesus Christ is the King who rules in gospel righteousness and gospel love.
The King who, according to the hymn, was born to set us free from Satan's power. And the world needs to hear this message.
[1:10] The world needs to hear this message. Pandemics, wars, economic crises, environmental disasters, they've all dominated our headlines this year, and we're tired of only hearing bad news.

We need to hear this message that Jesus Christ is King every day, but especially on this one day of the year set apart for the church, which bears His name, the name Christ, to proclaim His royal credentials.
Matthew 2 verses 1 through 12 is a passage all about the kingship of Jesus Christ, the child who was and is and always will be king over all.
Guided by a star, wise men came from the east to offer their worship to the infant king, all the time being carefully watched by a jealous man called Herod. But despite all the obstacles, the kingship of Jesus Christ shines through.
It always does. The plea this passage is making to us all today is this. Amidst all the busyness and consumerism of a Western Christmas, remember, Jesus Christ is King.
[2:33] We need to make Him the central focus of our celebrations this Christmastime. There are three features of this passage upon which we are concentrating today.

First, a shining star. Secondly, a jealous king. And thirdly, a wise offering. First of all then, we have a shining star.
A shining star. Most of us put stars on top of our Christmas trees. We do this because of the long-held Christian tradition founded upon this passage in Matthew 2, that a shining star guided wise men from the east on their journey to Jesus.
Over the centuries, many people have tried to work out what this star was. Some have tried to suggest it was a comet. Others an asteroid.
Still others an optical illusion. The search really is very pointless because it assumes a breathtaking level of historical arrogance.
[3:45] These wise men from the east were astrologers. They knew their stars better than any of us in this room apart from Samuel does. And if they thought it was a star, it was a star.

The star was not historic appearance of Halley's Comet. It was not an asteroid. It was not an optical illusion.
It was a real star. As Christians who believe in a supernatural God, we really shouldn't be surprised that God's able to do supernatural things with planets and stars.
After all, according to the Bible, he created every one of them and gave them all names. In verse 9, we read these words. After listening to the king, they went on their way, and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose, behold, the star that they had seen when it rose, went before them until it came to rest over the place Jesus was.

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Going to get a bit technical here, okay? Expansive forces aside, stars don't move. The planets around them do.
[5:01] But stars are stationary objects. So here you have a star that's acting in a very unstar-like manner. Furthermore, as you will know, the stars that you see in the sky at night are not today's stars, but the stars as they were hundreds and thousands of light years ago because that's how long it takes for the light from that star to reach us.

We can easily read this passage about a star guiding the wise men from the east to where Jesus was and give it barely a second thought. But the more you know about astronomy and the way that stars and light works, the more amazingly miraculous it becomes.
Did God repurpose a star he had previously made to guide these men to the infant Jesus, in which case, according to modern astronomy, he did it thousands of years previous to the birth of Jesus because that's when we see the light from that star?
Or did he create a star especially for this purpose and then once it had served its purpose, he destroyed it? We don't know.
We never will know. But in the light of modern science, we know enough to know this. This was a miraculously amazing thing to happen, perhaps behind the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, the greatest miracle in universal history.
[6:36] We cannot even begin to calculate the forces involved in the production and movement of a star.

Walter is always talking about Brian Cox, the great astronomer. Think of the forces required to create and move a star and God did it.
It to him is no great thing. The God who created all the stars and gave them all their names is the God who created this star and set its purpose as to shine light on the place where his son was.
And the point is this. Absolutely everything in this universe, everything God has created, has been made by God with the express purpose of serving King Jesus.
Everything that's been made by him, through him, and for him. Everything that exists has a higher purpose than we think it does. It is all about Jesus Christ the King.
[7:45] So the fish which swim in the sea serve his purpose. The stars which shine in the sky, you can see them tonight, it'll be hopefully cloudless, look up into the sky and see the stars.

They serve his purpose. The plants which fill the land serve his purpose. And we as human beings made by God and upon whom his image rests have been created to serve his purpose to worship the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.
Have you ever laid back on a clear night, looked up at the sky, look up at the sky. I used to do this in the golf course in Baroda. I'd just look up at the sky and see the stars at night.
The more you look, the more stars you see. And ask yourself, what is the purpose and meaning of my life? You know, it's really a very good place to look at the stars.
It brings us straight back to Matthew 2 where we learn the purpose of these stars at which we are gazing on a clear night in Scotland is to shine for the glory of God.
[8:51] to serve his purpose and in so doing to find fulfillment and meaning. Just like that star in Matthew 2 shone its light upon Christ the King, so we as human beings will only ever find our highest fulfillment in shining light upon Christ the King.

A life without Jesus at the center is unfulfilled and it lacks meaning and purpose.
But a life with Jesus at the center is the highest expression of what it means to be truly human. A life lived toward King Jesus is well lived.
This star served God's purpose. its example asks us the most serious of questions this Christmas. Is Jesus Christ my King?
Is he at the center of my life? Well by all means I encourage you to do this. Look up into the sky this evening and see the stars, the millions of stars but then ask yourself the questions.
[10:06] These stars may well be serving the purpose God gave them to shine light on King Jesus. But am I? Am I?

Second thing we want to look at is a jealous king. A jealous king. You know if the story of Christ's birth was ever made into a pantomime King Herod would be the villain at whom we'd all shout boo he's behind you.
The universe rejoices at the birth of its king but one man doesn't and his name is Herod. Herod cuts a power hungry paranoid figure in the Bible.

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For all that he was king for all that he was the greatest man in Judea he was also the weakest. History knows him as Herod the Great but the truth is that he was a slave to his passion and his hunger for power and authority.
Today we call him a control freak. Every generation has them we have them today in our nation and in our world. They'll do anything to hold on to position and to power.
[11:23] Anything. They'll sacrifice anyone. They'll sacrifice their own mothers their own family on the altar of their own success. These wise men guided from the east arrive at Jerusalem they immediately inquire in the city as to the birth of the Jewish king.

Having heard of their questions Herod summons them to the palace and he's deeply troubled. The word that Luke uses here means unsettled, anxious, disturbed. Although Herod was only a client king of the Romans he was a king nonetheless.
He was left in peace to get on with governing the Roman province of Judea any way he saw fit. The thought that a new king had been born threatened his power.
We also read the people of Jerusalem were troubled by the news of a new Jewish king being born. For years they'd lived at peace with the Romans. They liked it that way. They didn't want anyone to disturb that peace.
Herod playing desperate to hold on to power plays a political game with these wise men. He lulls them into a false sense of security by saying to them go and search diligently for this child and when you've found him bring me word that I too may come and worship him.
[12:47] You know the phenomenon of politicians saying something publicly and doing another thing privately is nothing new. We see it everywhere today but it was living and active back then as well.

The only difference is in Herod's day there were no checks and balances to hold leaders and rulers accountable. You see he had no intention of handing over power to anyone other than himself.
He was a power hungry jealous man whose paranoia knew no limits. He had inquired from his own experts as to where the Messiah the Jewish king was to be born and look in verse 5 they go and tell him it's to be in Bethlehem and this makes Herod all the more the villain because he didn't sin ignorance Herod.
What he'd go on to do by killing all the infant boys in Bethlehem under the age of 3 years old was not a sin of ignorance it was a sin against the truth and against the light.
He was no longer fighting against an infant newborn he was fighting against God himself and against God's word. Herod was a very jealous man he was jealous for power and control.
[14:04] Every generation has people like Herod we have them today who will do anything to hold on to power and position.

They will even sin against the truth and everything they know to be right. They would rather sink the Titanic than go down with it. Here's the good news of the gospel for us.
Nobody in our day respects or worships Herod the Great of Judea. But the infant boy of whom he was so jealous and who he tried to kill has become the object of the worship of billions and billions of people.
Stars don't serve King Herod but we do. Wise men don't serve King Herod but we do.
John Buchan our great national author once asked the question in his famous book Courts of the Morning what is the glory of man when it all ends in six feet of dirt?
[15:14] What is the glory of man when it all ends in six feet of dirt? Herod is dead and gone. But the son of Mary and Joseph lives and he reigns today in unspeakable power and infinite glory.

The hatred and jealousy of kings like Herod ensconced in their fine palaces playing their petty power games is so very limited. It's rather like the games toddlers play you know this to try and assert their dominance over each other in Cresce.
He stole my toy but the love and compassion of Jesus worshipped today in Medellin and Colombia and in Myanmar and in all those places where our Advent devotionals from Langham come from and here in our building his glory is infinite.
Here is the good news of Christmas for us. True power isn't found in the petty political games our politicians play with each other.
It's found in the Lord Jesus Christ. For all the news channels and they do report the infantile behaviour of our leaders and it is infantile.

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[16:38] Our minds and hearts are to focus rather on the King who loves us and came for us at Christmas. The King whose cradle was a cross whose swaddling clothes were grave clothes and whose crown was made of thorns.

What comfort this should bring us to know that ultimately it's not the headings of this world who are in control it's Jesus Christ our risen and reigning saviour.
but the comfort also brings a challenge. Who is in control of our lives?
Who is in control of our lives? Is it the soft power of social media? Is it the harder power of social acceptance or economic prosperity?
Are we all playing our part in the Truman Show of 21st Century Glasgow? What is in control of our lives or who is in control of our lives? Are we so jealous for power and personal autonomy that we're willing to do anything to sacrifice it?
[17:47] Anything to hold on to it rather? To sacrifice others? To stand on other people's heads to get to where we want to go? To sin against all we know to be true and to be right?

Is it not time that we gave our lives over to King Jesus? The Jesus who loves us and gave himself for us? We will never find a king so gentle and lowly.
We will never find a king who cares for at every need and listens to at every prayer. This Christian high time provides every one of us here with another opportunity to ask ourselves whether like the stars in the sky and the wise men from the east were serving the right master in life.
for thousands of years Christians have found Jesus to be the king so tender and wise, so loving and compassionate that they could wish for no more.
It's only in serving him that we learn what true freedom and humanity is. And so again we need to ask ourselves the question, in whom am I placing my trust today?
[19:04] The headings of this world or the only king, King Jesus? Well lastly this morning we want to look at the wise offering, a wise offering.

These wise men or literally the magi were a group of special advisors to one of the great kings of the east. It's not the first time they appeared in the Bible.
In all probability Daniel from the Old Testament was one of these wise men. They offered a variety of advice to their king. Some were political advisors, others were religious advisors, and still others like these particular wise men, astrologers who read the stars.
Our newspapers have astrology pages, and in all likelihood these wise men were ancient equivalents of today's astrologers. The emphasis here is not that these men were wise, right?
But more importantly they came from a class of royal advisors. So they're royal advisors in the court of an eastern king. And this is important because in all probability it means that their journey to Judea from their land in the east was sanctioned by their king.
[20:30] The wise men came from the east with the approval of their king. We're to think of them not so much as wise men in terms of smart, but as ambassadors of their king in the east.

Their magi. It's very paradoxical, isn't it, that the wise men came from a foreign land with the approval of their king to worship Jesus.
The king of Judea was hell-bent on killing Jesus. Their mission had royal approval. It's an early sign, is it not, that the newborn king of the Jews, Jesus Christ, isn't just for the Jew but for the Gentile also.
He's not just king of Israel, the whole world he's king of, king of kings, lord of lords. So the wise men came from the east as ambassadors from their king.
As astrologers, they knew the meaning of this star which had risen in their land. It was leading them to the land of Judea. Having received royal sanction for their journey, they took gifts from the east.
[21:42] These gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh had probably been given to them by their king in whose court they served. So they went from their own personal, personal, what do you call it, property.

They were given to them by their king to offer to this newborn king in Judea because that's what kings did. They gave tribute to one another. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were ushered into the presence of Herod.
But wise men aren't always very wise when confronted by the politics of devious men like Herod.
And so having found the infant Jesus, they in all likelihood would have gone back to Herod to divulge his location unless God had warned them in a dream to go back to their own country another way.

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Scientists in our own day may be very clever, but intelligence is not the same as wisdom. wisdom. You might smile at this for those of you who know me.
Some of the smartest people we know are also those who have the least common sense. If God had not warned them in this dream not to return to Herod, they would have gallibly been happily sucked in by his political deviousness.
[23:08] Our society preces a premium upon intelligence, but wisdom is more important than intelligence. Most important of all, God places a premium upon not intelligence but wisdom.

We'll come back to that in a future sermon. Well, these wise men showed their wisdom in verse 12. When having arrived at the house where Mary and the child were staying, they fell down and worshipped him.
They offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In our service on Christmas Day we'll examine what each of these gifts mean. But there they are, they are ambassadors, royal ambassadors of an eastern Gentile king, and they're bowing down and they're worshipping the infant child Jesus.
The thing about these gifts is this, they were all eastern offerings, eastern offerings. They all came from their homeland. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are not native to Judea.
They all came from the east. These wise men brought things from their own land to offer to Jesus. It would be like a Scottish man offering a tartan kilt, a barrel of oil, and a bottle of whiskey.
[24:29] They're distinctively eastern gifts. They brought their own things to give to Jesus, or rather things probably their own king had given them to give to Jesus.

And this is a very important lesson and a great place for us to close up this sermon. What offerings are we bringing to Christ this Christmas? If he is our king and the central focus of our celebrations at this time of year, what shall someone who was wise offer him?
Over 300 years ago, an English Bible scholar called Matthew Henry, wrote a commentary on the whole Bible. And when it comes to this passage, he says two things.
He says, first of all, we must give up all we have to Jesus Christ. Nor are our gifts accepted until we first present ourselves to him as living sacrifices.
We must give up all we are, all we have to Jesus Christ, nor are our gifts accepted until we first present ourselves to him as living sacrifices.
[25:49] Matthew Henry is teaching us this. First and foremost, we need to give ourselves to Jesus. We dare not mock him with our pounds and pennies if we're not willing to give him our hearts.

first of all. The Christmas king deserves our wholehearted faith and trust, for in him and him alone are our hearts loved and our hearts safe.
From far beyond the grave, Matthew Henry is urging us all today to follow the stars and to follow the wise men in bowing before King Jesus and offering him our all.
But then Matthew Henry also writes these words, what God favors us with, we must favor him. What God favors us with, we must favor him.
Remember, these wise men were ambassadors. Their gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense had probably been given to them by their king back east to give to that newborn king of the Jews.
[26:55] all that we will ever give to King Jesus is what we have received from him in the first place. All that we will ever give to King Jesus is what we have received from him in the first place.

He's not asking us to give him anything that he did not first give us. When our kids are small, every parent here knows this, when our kids are small, they will ask us, their parents, to give them money so that they can go and buy Christmas presents for us.
The presents we receive from our children have been bought with our money that we gave them and we love our kids for it. In the same way, what God has given us, we give back to him, our hearts.
What then shall we give to our Christmas king? We'll give him our hearts, we'll believe and trust not in this world's headings, but in him. But then we'll also ask, what else can I give him?
Can I give him my time? Can I give him my talents? Can I give him my tithe? Can I give him my energy? Can I give him my ambition? No sacrifice that we ever make for him will ever be bigger than the sacrifice that he's made for us on the cross.
[28:15] For this child so worshipped by the Magi will in 33 years time be crucified by sun on a small hill outside Jerusalem. He died to take away our sins and give us new life.

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What then shall we give our king? His gospel is the greatest of all good news. What then shall we do to make this good news known to a hopeless and darkened world?
God, you know, we'll give him our hearts. I know what else. If we had the whole world to give to Jesus, we'd give him that also.

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