

The search is over

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[0 : 00] Our first reading this morning is from Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 to 8. 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. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all 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.

They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so 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. 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, the Ty too may come and worship him. As someone said, my name is Andy.

[1 : 12] It's great to be here this morning. Happy Christmas. Who's excited? Who's opened their stocking already? I've opened my stocking. One thing I got, a pack of match attacks.

I'm looking forward to opening those later on. And I've got another exciting present. Now, it's a present from my brother. Now, I haven't opened it yet.

Actually, I need a child to come and open this for me. George, you're already here. Can you come up? Now, it's always very important to read the tag, isn't it? It's always very important to read the tag. So it says this, To Andy, I know you like books, so I bought one I think is your level.

From Tim. Okay, do you want to open this for me, George? Sure, everyone. Where's Wally?

Great. You've got that one, haven't you? Okay, you can sit down. It's for me, not you. Where's Wally? Uh, he shouldn't have.

[2 : 22] Really shouldn't have. But, has anyone heard of Where's Wally? We know what Wally is. He's the guy. He's a stripy, red and white jumper. And you have to look for him.

And there is, he's in lots of, I'll have fun this afternoon. He's in lots of pictures. Oh, there he is. I found him already. Look, there he is. Look at that. I'm a pro, obviously. All about searching for someone, isn't it?

Where's Wally? You know where to look. But you don't know where he is. And you're looking. Sorry, I was just getting distracted. Where's Wally?

You don't know where he is and you have to look for him. Well, this morning, in a bit of the Bible that's just read, was all about a search. All about people looking for someone.

They know who they're looking for, but they don't know exactly where to look. And it's the Magi that we're looking at. Maybe you've heard of the Magi.

[3 : 20] You may know them as wise men. They're searching for someone. And they're searching for the King of the Jews. That's who they're searching for, a person called the King of the Jews.

And where does a king normally live? Hands up. Where does a king normally live? Go on. A palace. A king normally lives in a palace.

Lots of expensive houses. Lots of expensive jewelry. And lots of gold. And so these Magi, they see the big star. They know a Messiah's been born.

And so where do they go? They go to Jerusalem. The big city. The big holy city. If a king was going to be born, this is where he's going to be.

And yet they get there. And what's the surprise? Well, he's not there. He's not there. We haven't heard of a king being born. And Herod is terrified.

[4 : 17] He's disturbed. Literally means terrified. And he grabs together all of the religious leaders. And they think, well, who is this king?

Who is this king who's been born? The wise men, the Magi, had to search for the King of the Jews. Now, it's time for us to do a little bit of searching.

Now, around the room. Around the room is hidden a crown. Not this one. Like this one. Okay? And it's got something attached to it.

So I wonder if you're maybe under eight. Okay, under ten. Okay. If you're under ten, why not first person to find this crown and bring it to me?

Go. Off you go. It could be anywhere. It could be anywhere. Okay. It's not near the hot drink. Oh, we found it. Oh, we found it. We've got it. We've got it.

[5 : 15] The search is over. You can come sit down now. The search is over. We've found it. We have found the crown. Thank you, boys.

It was, it was, where was it? At the back. At the back, under the table. Okay, thank you. You can sit down now, boys. Thank you. They were searching for a king.

They were searching for a king who wears a crown. There's a, there's a scroll attached to it. There's something here. What's it say?

Oh, it's, you might not be able to read this. It's the bit from our, that was read this morning. It says, it's from Micah, chapter five. But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel. That's exactly what I was read this morning. That's what the religious leaders told Herod.

[6 : 20] Where is this king going to be born? Well, not in Jerusalem, not in a big, powerful, holy city, but Bethlehem. Bethlehem. Bethlehem, it was about six miles outside of Jerusalem, so they were quite close.

And that's surprising, isn't it? Isn't that surprising that God's promised king that was promised from ages ago through the prophet Micah was not going to be born in a big, powerful city, but in Bethlehem and outside.

And we're told here of the special job that God's king was going to do. He was going to rule and he will shepherd my people, Israel.

Well, how's he going to do that? How is he going to do that? Well, the title that the Magi used for Jesus is the king of the Jews.

And that title is used for Jesus only four times in Matthew's gospel. Once here and the other three times are at his death. Well, that's quite striking, isn't it?

[7 : 31] Three times at his death. This king of the Jews, king of God's people came to die. And he rose again three days later and you may know the last words that Jesus spoke when he was on earth.

All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. God's promised king from years and years and years ago came to rule God's people forever.

And he has all authority. He has been put in charge by God over his creation. And so Jesus is God's promised king.

That's why Christmas is so special. And he reigns. He is in charge of the universe. Well, so then, what are the implications for us?

Well, we may feel that we know the Christmas story really well. You may be sitting here and you think, I know this. I know the story of the wise men. I know the shepherds.

[8 : 37] I know the baby in the manger. And when we know the story so much, it kind of lacks its punch. It washes over us.

And we miss the significance of Christmas. But if Jesus is God's king, if he has come to rule and be put in charge of God's creation, well then, he has relevance to us today.

You see, the Christmas story is not just a story told 2,000 years ago in a place miles away with nothing to do with us here and now. If Jesus has been placed in charge of the world, then he is relevant to us here.

So, often Jesus gets treated like a Brussels sprout by the world. sprouts. Now, who's looking forward to their sprouts later on? Who's not looking forward to their sprouts later on?

There you go. There we go. Well, did you know in December, the supermarket Morrison sells about 650 tons of sprouts each week?

[9 : 49] That's more than a take-off weight of an Air 380 Airbus. That's a pretty big plane. That's a lot of sprouts. That is a lot of sprouts. And the thing with sprouts is we feel obliged to have them at Christmas.

We feel that we kind of have to. It's the done thing. You get stared at if you don't eat one. You've got to. It's the done thing. But the rest of the year, do they get much of a look in?

Not much. Not much at all. And it's the same with Jesus. Society around us, we feel obliged to have Jesus at Christmas.

we feel obliged to come and sing carols and to have the little baby in a manger. But the rest of the year, does he really get a look in?

Life goes on, doesn't it? After today, tomorrow, it's all for the sales, heading over to Westfield. All the TV adverts for Christmas food get replaced by all the sales for beds.

[11 : 00] They're always in sales, aren't they? Beds and sofas. Beds and sofas. They're always in sales. Life goes on. And Jesus, well, does he get a look in? Does he get a look in for you year round?

And often, Jesus gets treated by the world and maybe by us like Peter Pan. We all know the story of Peter Pan. A little boy of fiction who never grew up.

And that's how we like Jesus. That's how the world likes Jesus. A little meek and mild Jesus in the manger who didn't grow up. But yet, the rest of Matthew's gospel tells the story of Jesus when he grew up.

The things he said and the things he did. He did not stay in the manger, but he came to make massive claims about this world and about us.

And so, he cannot be ignored. Jesus is God's promised king come to rule. And later in our service, we're going to see more about what we should do with that information.

[12 : 10] Let me pray. Father God, thank you that you sent Jesus as your promised king from long ago to rule over your creation.

We thank you for the significance of Christmas and what you have done in the world. Amen. The second reading is from Matthew chapter two, beginning at verse nine.

after listening to the king, the three wise men 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.

[13 : 24] Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.

And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Out of Egypt I called my son. Okay, I need two people to open a present. You're going to get a present each.

Let's have Callum and let's have William. Now we'll see what happens here. Now you've got a present each, okay? Don't open it yet.

And do you want to stand out the front so we can all see you? Okay, you may open your presents and hold them up for everyone to see. Open your present quickly, quickly. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

[14 : 30] Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. It's a jam of marmite. Is it a jam of marmite? Yes.

Do you like marmite, Cameron? You're not sure. He's not sure. William? Hate it. Oh. He hates it.

Okay. Okay. I'm with you.

I'm definitely with you. Jars of marmite. You can sit down. Thank you, boys. Thank you, boys. You can sit down. Jars of marmite. Marmite. Now, I nearly had to wear gloves when I was buying this.

It's horrible, vile stuff. But the tagline, isn't it, of marmite, you love it or you hate it. And it was a great reaction to opening it this morning.

Hands up if you love it. Hands up if you hate it. Interesting. More lovers than haters in the room here today.

[15 : 29] Well, marmite, throughout the years, splits opinion. It's divided people into two groups. It splits households.

It splits this room here this morning. And the same is true when it comes to Jesus. In our first talk this morning, the magi were looking for God's promised king.

And we found out that he was in charge and he rules. But Jesus' birth, in the bit that was read out just now, had two opposite reactions.

I wonder if you spotted them as it was being read. Jesus was either worshipped or rejected. And we're going to look at those in turn. Firstly, King Herod.

Now, King Herod was ruling, he was on the throne, and he began plotting to get rid of Jesus. You remember what he said to the magi? Hmm, go and search for him and let me know where he is so I can go and worship him.

[16 : 40] Okay? Wink. He didn't really want to worship him. He wanted to kill him. And we're told in verse 15 that the angel appeared to Joseph to warn him to get out because Herod was coming for the child and he wanted to destroy him.

He wanted to get rid of Jesus. Now, that is quite an extreme reaction to a birth of a baby, isn't it? Why? Why is such an extreme reaction?

Well, it's because King Herod's reign on the throne has been threatened. He doesn't want to give up his crown and he doesn't want Jesus to be king. Now, that is an extreme reaction to the birth of Jesus.

Probably none of us here in this room have plotted to kill a child, plotted not to kill Jesus. But when Jesus grew up, he taught that the same root attitude is in everyone's hearts, the whole world.

that when it comes to God, the attitude that the world has is don't take my crown away from me.

The world doesn't want God in charge.

[18 : 05] Now, imagine later on you're opening your presents, maybe you've opened some already, and you open your presents later and it gets to lunchtime and you've opened all your presents and then you say, right, mum and dad, thanks for the presents, thanks for the food that you've cooked me, now you can naff off, alright, now you can go over there and you can go, you can disappear.

Now, that is quite bad, wouldn't it? Maybe you wouldn't dream of saying that, you can go away. But that's exactly how the world has treated God.

God, thank you for the good gifts you've given creation, thank you for that, now you can disappear, now you can go and leave us with our stuff. Parents, you probably wouldn't be best pleased if your child said that to you, and God's not pleased either.

In Herod, we see a reaction to Jesus that is in the world. Don't take my crown away from me. We might not go as far as wanting to kill and destroy Jesus, but it's basically how we function, how the world functions, that Jesus is pushed aside like a Brussels sprout on a plate.

He's neglected, he's not at the forefront. Well, that's the one extreme reaction to a baby, rejection. I don't want you to take my crown away from me.

[19 : 38] And yet wonderfully, we see another amazing reaction to King Jesus being born, this time from the Magi. The wise men. Now the Magi means, it means court astrologer.

They were advisors to kings, they were making forecasts and predictions based on their studies of the stars. They are outsiders, they're literally outsiders because they're from the east far away and they had to travel, but they're spiritually outsiders too because God did not approve of star study.

In fact, in his word, the Bible, he tells them that they shouldn't do it. He tells them, well, don't predict the future by using the stars. So these are literally outsiders and they're spiritual outsiders too.

Yet God drew them to Jesus. He drew them, he used his creation to announce the birth of his promised king. And they came and how did they react?

Anyone know? How did they react when they found Jesus? They got to where Jesus was. Did anyone know? Anyone? What did they do? What did they do? They worshipped him and they gave him presence.

[20 : 53] They bowed down to king Jesus. They were overjoyed and they bowed down and worshipped him. And that's the response that God wants to his king.

Worship. So then what about us? What about us here this morning? Well, like Marmite, Jesus divides opinion.

He divides opinion in the world. He divides opinion maybe in your household. He divides opinion in this room here this morning. And so I wonder how you will react to him.

Maybe you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. you're an outsider to the Christian faith as it were. Well, maybe at some point at the Christmas break, why not think about who Jesus really is?

We'd love you to investigate further. On your service sheets you'll see a tear-off for Christianity Explored, a three-week course starting on January the 10th here on a Sunday morning looking into the person of Jesus.

[22 : 04] And more details later. Or you can read a gospel. You can read an account of Jesus' life. Jesus who didn't stay like Peter Pan as a child but grew up. And there's some gospels for you to read on the way out.

The response that God wants the spiritual outsiders to be like the Magi. To search for him and to worship him. And if you're a Christian here this morning, see again the significance of this reaction to Jesus.

Of worship. Of worship and devotion. That Jesus is king of the world and so if he's king of the world he's king of your life when you submit to him.

He's king of the whole area of your life. When you're at work, when you're at home with your parents, when you're at school, Jesus is king.

There's no area of our life that Jesus is not king over when we put ourselves to him. And so devote your whole life to worshipping him.

[23 : 13] Who came, the king who came to die for you. Jesus is God's promised king and the reaction is one of worship or rejection.

I wonder how will you react to him. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for Jesus.

We thank you that he came to die. That he came and grew up to die so we can be forgiven. Father, please help us this Christmas to meditate more on who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Amen.