

Carol Service

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[0 : 00] The first reading is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2, verses 1 to 6. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, For this is what the prophet has written, 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. My name is Andy Meadows. I'm a children's and youth pastor here. And it's so exciting to be here on Christmas Day.

Now, as a special treat, I thought, and because I'm doing the talk, I'm allowed to open a present that I should save for later on. Very exciting. This is from my brother.

[1 : 17] My brother. Here's the tag. It's always important to read the tag, isn't it? Always important to read the tag. To Andy, happy Christmas. I think this is about your level. Love from your favourite brother, Tim.

That's exciting. What my level is. It is... Where's Wally? Yes! I told him I wanted that.

I don't know. Yeah, where's Wally? Where's Wally? We all know what Where's Wally is about. He's a person that you have to look for on every page. But you don't know where he is.

And so you spend time looking. I'm just doing one now. There he is there. I'm impressed. There he is. He's there. You have to look. You don't know where to look. And then you find him.

Well, actually, where's Wally? That's a bit like the start of the Christmas story that we're looking at today. See, people were looking for someone. The Magi, the wise men, were looking for someone.

[2 : 19] But they didn't quite know where to look. They knew who to look for. They didn't know where. Have a look down. Turn back to the reading that was read earlier.

And have a look at verse 1. That first sentence. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who's been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. These people, these wise men, they're searching for someone. They're searching for a king. But they don't know where to look. But why are they looking for a king in the first place? Why bother? Well, to get that answer, what we need to do is do our own searching for a king here this morning.

Now, somewhere hidden around the room is a crown. That looks a lot like this one. With a bit of paper attached to it. What you need to do, first you need to have a look for it and find it.

[3 : 27] And if you find it, bring it up to the front. Okay? Ready? Go. Who got it? Who got it? Who got it? Oh, Bella. Well done.

Well done, Bella. We found it. Oh, it's a bit of a scroll attached. We found the king. Get rid of the ribbon. What's on here?

It says, Micah chapter 5 verse 2. Micah chapter 5 verse 2. Now, Micah was an Old Testament prophet who made promises about God's king.

You see, the wise men, they knew what God had promised hundreds of years before Jesus was born. And it's there in verse 6 of our reading.

Have a look down. 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.

[4 : 32] Here we see who the baby in the manger is. He's God's special ruler. No? No one? Okay, fine. Not my audience.

He's a ruler. That's better. He's a ruler. Someone who will reign over God's kingdom forever. Now, they're looking for a ruler.

Here is my poster. All the kings and queens of England. There's been lots, hasn't there? There's been lots. But the problem is, no king or queen lasts forever.

You see, we'll watch the queen later on for the speech, maybe. You might do, you might not. But really, she's keeping the throne warm for Prince Charles. And Prince Charles is keeping the throne warm for William.

And he's keeping the throne warm for Prince George. It's like a massive game of royal musical chairs. You see, no king or queen lasts forever.

[5 : 39] That's the big problem we have nowadays. But God's king is different that we remember at the Christmas story. He is a ruler who will reign forever, everlasting over God's kingdom.

He is the one who will gather God's people together like a shepherd gathers sheep. That's the amazing message of Christmas. And then you've got to think, well, how is he going to do that? How is God's king, God's ruler, going to shepherd his people? Well, here in the reading, Jesus is called king of the Jews.

And in Matthew's gospel, he's not called that again until Easter, until he dies. You see, when Jesus died, a sign was put on the cross.

And it said, Jesus, king of the Jews. You see, even at his birth, we get a glimpse of who this king is and what he has come to do.

[6 : 48] And how he will shepherd his people together. How will he gather his sheep? By dying on a cross for us. And three days later, his parting words to the disciples after he triumphantly risen from the dead.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. God's king has all authority. He rules the universe now.

You see, we may feel we know the Christmas story. We hear the Christmas story. We might go, it's not very fresh, is it?

Not very fresh. It can wash over us. But when we take a minute to stop and think, we see how this is just such amazing news.

And we see the significance of what happened 2,000 years ago. God's promised king has come and has been placed in charge. So this is not just a 2,000 year old story from another part of the world.

[7 : 54] It has no relevance to here and now. Because Jesus reigns. The Bible says he is in charge now over the universe. All because his birth points to his death and resurrection for us.

You see, 2018 has been an uncertain year. What's been repeated for me, I've heard, is the markets don't like uncertainty. We don't like uncertainty, do we?

What will happen in 2019? More uncertainty in our lives, in politics, with our health. We don't know. We don't know. But the Christmas story gives us certainty. It gives us confidence that Jesus is king. That he is ruling even when it feels weak to be his followers.

Even when nobody else sees that. Christmas reminds us that God has placed his son Jesus in charge. So that's the first thing to remember this Christmas.

[9 : 00] Jesus is God's everlasting king. Who has come to reign and gather his people together. By dying and rising again for us. Now this monumental news brought different reactions.

And we'll think about that a bit more later on in the service. The second reading is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2, verses 7 to 13.

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child.

As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. After they had heard the king, they went on their way. And the star they had seen when it rose ahead of them, went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. And they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

[10 : 18] And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

Get up, he said. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Great, thanks Alice.

First, Donald Trump is like Jesus Christ. Let's pray together. No, no, no. I'm sure Mr. Trump won't mind me comparing him to Jesus.

What do they have in common? They're divisive. They're divisive. You see, Donald Trump is either rejected or worshipped.

People love wearing the hat and love wearing it or people love burning the hat. He is rejected or worshipped. Well, I want us to see that the Christmas story is a lot like that when it comes to Jesus.

[11:24] Did you spot the reactions to him in what we just read? He was rejected or worshipped. You see, we learned about the significance of the first Christmas, didn't we?

That God's king came to rule over God's kingdom forever. But the reactions to him were divisive. First, there's King Herod. Charles Dickens brought us Ebenezer Scrooge. Dr. Zeus brought us the Grinch. They didn't reject Christmas because of Jesus.

But Herod did. You see, he kind of skirts around the issue a bit at the start. But verse 13, he shows his true colours. Have a look at that last verse that was read.

When they had gone, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you.

[12:22] For Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Not very Christmassy, is it? But Herod knew exactly what Jesus' birth meant.

Jesus was born as God's king. Come to rule would mean that Herod would have to move. He would have to budge aside to get off his throne. But he didn't want to.

Now, it's the school holidays. Imagine in the school holidays, you're thinking you're at your wits end. What to do with the kids? Last resort, you go to Buckingham Palace. And you take them on. Might be your first resort.

You go there. But they get a bit bored. They can't compete with an iPad. They're looking at old chairs and paintings. And they get a bit bored. Until one of your children spots the throne room out the corner of their eye.

They know it's roped off, but that doesn't deter them. They go and they sneak under the rope. No one's looking. You're looking everywhere. And they see the throne. And they see the throne.

[13:21] And they think, oh, this looks great. And so they sit on the throne. And they sit on the throne. And then they just pretend they're king. No one else in the room. Pretend they're king.

So they think, oh, parents, make me some hot chocolate. They give out orders to their teachers. Teachers, give me no homework. And they make orders.

And they pretend they're in charge. But then what happens? Queen Elizabeth walks in. Walks in the throne room. You'd think that would be a good opportunity, a good moment to then get off the throne.

When the real queen is there. But your child doesn't want to. They stay there. Still giving orders. Still thinking they are in charge. When the queen is standing there in front of them.

You see, they didn't want to move. They were enjoying being the ruler too much. Even though the real ruler arrived, they didn't want to move. This was King Herod's position in the Christmas story.

[14:23] The real king. God's real king turns up. But Herod doesn't budge. He doesn't want someone else in charge over him. But rather than being just one person's reaction to Jesus.

The shock is that this is so much the reaction of our world today to Jesus. God's king has arrived. But we enjoy being on the throne of our lives too much.

We don't want to budge aside. We don't want to make room. Now if we are Christians here this morning. Well then this is our attitude before Jesus saved us.

This is what Jesus has saved us from. And this reaction to Jesus now. Doesn't stop Jesus being in charge. It doesn't stop him being king.

Because if we carried on reading Matthew 2. We'd see that everything happened according to God's plan. To fulfill even more prophecies. Even leading up to his death.

[15:31] God's king is still in charge and still in control. So we can have confidence. Jesus is God's king. In charge. Even when he is rejected.

And may I ask this reaction to Jesus. Where we like to be king of our own lives. Is that you? Is that what we think? Day by day.

But there's another reaction to Jesus in Matthew 2. From the Magi. The wise men. You see look how they reacted to God's king. It's in verse 11.

On coming to the house. They saw the child with his mother Mary. And they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures.

And presented him with gifts of gold. Frankincense. And myrrh. It seems foolish. For these really important adults.

[16:31] To bow down and worship a child. But this is actually the right reaction. To God's king. Not to worship him like you might worship a sports star.

Or a celebrity. But worship means to devote our whole lives. To him. Living under his rule. Now. Around the room. There are little yellow crowns. Like this one. If you'd like to find a crown. And then come up onto the stage.

Find a crown. Come up onto the stage. Now. We're going to reenact. What the wise men did to Jesus. Okay. We're going to reenact that.

So. Step back. Step back. I've got God's king Jesus here. I want you to put the crown on top of your head. Take the crown.

[17:30] Put the crown on your head. Now. Let me just demonstrate. A good bow. Is. In front. And then all the way down like this. Okay. Now. I want you.

To bow. To king Jesus. Off you go. Bow down. Bow down. Now. That's a little picture. Of what it means.

To turn to Jesus. And to follow him. You see. When we bow to Jesus. And worship him. As king. Our own crowns.

Fall off. The crown that King Herod had. That so often. We have. Falls off. And Jesus. Is placed. In charge. Perhaps. You're here this morning. And you've not reacted. To Jesus like this. Well. This Christmas. Is a great day. And a great chance.

[18:27] To do just that. To recognize Jesus. As God's king. And to recognize. That he is in charge. Rightfully. And to receive.

The forgiveness. That comes. From bowing down. And worshiping him. Now. Sometimes. We like to. Do. A bit like. Maybe some of the children. Would like to do.

We want to bow to Jesus. But keep our own crown. On our heads. A bit like this. We want this. We want to do both. But the Christmas story.

Reminds us. That when we. Worship Jesus. That he is God's king. Then our crown. Is completely off. That he is in charge. Over every area.

Of our lives. Of our work. Of our home life. At school. Jesus. Is in charge. And just as we close.

[19:22] Maybe. Maybe for the adults. Here this morning. Christmas day. Is a great time. To look to the past. The present. And the future. We can look to the past.

Being thankful. That King Jesus. Came into the world. As a mighty ruler. To die for us. We can look to the present. And delight.

In King Jesus rule. Now. And respond to him. In worship. However sacrificial. And however weak. It looks. At work.

At home. Or at school. And we can look. To the future. We can. We can have that confidence. We can have that certainty.

That King Jesus. Is for us. Whatever we face. In 2019. And beyond. And that King. Who reigns now. Will return one day.

[20:17] And when he does. Every knee. Will bow before him. And recognize him. As the true. King. Why don't we pray.

Together. They saw the child. With his mother Mary. And they bowed down. And worshipped him. Heavenly Father.

We thank you. That Christmas. At Christmas. You sent your king. Down to earth. To be in charge. To rule. We thank you. For that free gift.

Of being. A chance. To be in your kingdom. When we. Come. And bow to you. And receive that. Forgiveness. Please help. Us. To worship Jesus.

In all our lives. Amen.