

Christmas Day Talk

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 2024

Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0 : 0 0] This is our first reading from Matthew. If you have one of these booklets, you'll find it on page 4. 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 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 Israel. Well, good morning. My name is Andy, and I'm on the staff team here, and I'm really excited because it's Christmas Day!

Maybe you're less excited if you've been up for five hours already, but it's brilliant, no more sleeps till Christmas. I've actually got a present with me.

[1 : 2 0] I'm going to open it now. Now, this is from my brothers, Phil and Tim. To Andy, we think this book is about your level.

Merry Christmas, Phil and Tim. I wonder what it is. I wonder what it could be. Where's Wally? That is about my level.

They're right, actually. Where's Wally? Now, who knows what Where's Wally is all about? Who's got one of these books or has seen them before? Basically, we know there's a guy called Wally on every page, and we've got to find him.

You know who you're looking for, but you just don't know where to find him. And that's part of the fun, isn't it? Trying to find him. And that's a bit like what we're looking at today in the Christmas story.

We're thinking about the magi, the wise men. They know who they're looking for, but they don't quite know where to find him, do they? Now, we don't know much about the wise men.

[2 : 2 2] They use, in the Bible, to describe magicians. Magi is where we get the word magic from. And they study the stars. And they saw, if you remember in our reading, if you turn it up again in page four, they saw a star in the sky.

And that led them to look for a new king. They knew who to look for, but they didn't quite know where to look. So if you look again at the little number one, at the reading, let me read it.

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's been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose, and have come to worship him. So they see a star in the sky, and they go and follow it. They're searching for someone born king of the Jews.

So where do you expect to find a king? Well, they went to the capital city. And they went to the palace. That's where you'd normally find the king, wouldn't you? They said, where is the new king?

[3 : 28] He's been born. Well, they speak to Herod. There he is. Look, he looks a bit confused. He doesn't quite know what they're going on about. He's left searching for answers.

So he gathers his scribes, his religious leaders together, and says, why are they looking for a new king here? Well, to get the answer, we need to do our own bit of searching.

Somewhere in this room, there is a crown, a golden crown with a piece of paper attached to it. Not the yellow ones, there for later. The golden ones, can someone find a golden crown with a piece of paper?

And there is a mauwam involved, if you get it, okay? Bring it to the front. Off you go. Off you go. Oh, we found it.

We found it. Sorry, lads. Call the search party off. Well done. Thank you, buddy. Do you want a sweet? Probably don't eat it right now. You just go and give it to whoever you brought you.

[4 : 34] Don't want to get in trouble. So, they were looking for a king. There's a scroll on it. No, I did this too tight.

Here we are. Oh. Hang on. Oh, it's the prophecy. It's the prophecy from our reading.

If you see it, it says, 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.

And now those words were from the prophet Micah, written hundreds of years before Jesus. And they're about the first Christmas. And they're about the first Christmas. And in the stories, the scribes, they get out of the scroll and they tell Herod what was written.

That God promised to send a king. He promised to send a king to shepherd his people. Someone who's going to look after God's people, being charged over everything forever.

[5 : 45] Now I need another helper. And another Malwham's involved here. So anyone, anyone want help for a bit of... Yeah. Does Iris want to help?

Does Iris want to help? Go on, Oscar. Life's unfair. Here you go. What I need you to do is hold this poster up for everyone to see.

Because on this poster is... Hold it up really high above your head. It's a test of endurance here, okay? On this poster is a picture of all the kings and queens in England.

It's a little bit outdated. But all the kings and queens of England that we've had. Now, here is the problem that we have.

What's the problem? Well, no king or queen lasts forever. That's why we have all of these. Because they don't last forever. All king and queens die.

[6 : 49] Basically, they're only really keeping the throne warm for the next one, aren't they? It's really a game of royal musical chairs. Being king or queen.

But God's king is different. Thank you, Oscar. You can sit down now, buddy. Yeah. There you go, mate. God's king is different.

God's king is going to rule forever. Christmas points to Jesus, God's king, coming to rule his people. To shepherd his people. And to be like a shepherd who gathers the sheep forever.

And how is he going to do that? How is God's king going to rule? Well, here, Jesus is called... Well, what's he called? Let's have a look for ourselves.

Where is the king of the Jews? Now, do you know the next time he's called king of the Jews in Matthew's gospel? It's actually when he dies.

[7 : 51] When he's dying on a cross at Easter, a sign is nailed upon the cross called king of the Jews. And so at his birth, we're getting a little glimpse of how he's going to shepherd his people.

How he's going to bring God's people together like sheep and rule forever by dying for us. And after three days later, he rose again.

And then he said to his disciples, his followers, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. You see, God's king has been given all authority.

Here is God's king. He's been given all authority over everyone and everything. He even rules the universe now. That's what the Bible says.

Right now. Right as you're breathing. Jesus is ruling. Now, we may feel we know the Christmas story well. And because of that, it can wash over us, can't it?

[8 : 59] But we can stop and think and refresh ourselves this Christmas with the significance of the first Christmas. A God's promised king has come and he's been placed in charge.

So this is not just a 2,000 year old story that happened over the other side of the world that doesn't really affect me now. Because if we are living in heaven and earth, then Jesus rules.

He is ruling from his throne in heaven now. All because his birth points to his death and resurrection for us. Now, 2024 has been an uncertain year.

The markets, I'm told, don't like uncertainty. We don't like uncertainty, do we? What will happen in 2025? We don't know.

We can find that unsettling, can't we? But the Christmas story gives us certainty that Jesus is God's king. He is in charge.

[10 : 06] Even when it doesn't look like it out of the window. Even when it feels really weak to be one of his followers. To live with Jesus in charge. He is still in charge.

Now, Christmas reminds us that Jesus is God's king who is going to rule forever. Now, that monumental news brought different reactions.

I'm going to think more about them later on in the service. Wonderful. We're going to have our second reading now. And Megan is going to read for us. So, the second reading is carrying on just where we left off.

So, it's on page 5, Matthew chapter 2 and verse 7. 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 that I too may come and worship him.

[11 : 13] 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.

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.

[12 : 24] This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son. Great, brilliant.

We'll keep that open again. Now, here's a question to start the second half. What do, this is a Christmas quiz, what do Donald Trump, Marmite, and Jesus have in common?

Speak to the person next to you. What do Donald Trump, Marmite, and Jesus have in common? I'll do my little Trump dance.

Like that. Okay. Let's come back together. I've been practicing my dance moves for later, just to fit in.

Okay, so, what do Donald Trump, Marmite, and Jesus have in common?

[13 : 28] They divide people. They divide people, don't they? The soon-to-be Donald Trump, President of the United States, Donald Trump, he divides.

He splits the room. He might not split this room, but he splits the room in America. A really big debate. A really divisive campaign.

It's the same with Marmite. That divides the room as well. Hands up if you love Marmite. Hands up if you hate Marmite. Okay, the loves have it, the loves have it.

And actually, it's the same when it comes to the Christmas story. We learned about the significance of that first Christmas, that Jesus came as God's king to rule forever.

Well, the next bit of the story tells us that King Jesus splits the room. He splits the world. Because he's either rejected or worshipped.

[14 : 36] Now, first, let's look at King Herod. Now, Charles Dickens brought us Ebenezer Scrooge. Dr. Zeus brought us the Grinch.

They didn't hate Christmas because of Jesus. But King Herod did. You see, at first, Herod seems quite reasonable, doesn't he?

He asked the Magi to find the new king so that he too could worship him. But notice, he's not that keen because he doesn't go with them.

Even though it's five and a half miles outside city walls. I mean, some of you are going to be doing that this afternoon for your Christmas walk to walk off your turkey.

So he's not that keen to go and see Jesus. It's only down the road well then in verse 13, that was a little clue, but the little 13 gives, he shows his true colours.

[15 : 39] So if you look down again, it says this, 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. You see, there are two kings in the Christmas story.

In verse 1, Herod is described as a king and in verse 2, Jesus is called king. But Jesus being God's king would mean that Herod would have to budge aside.

He would have to get off his throne, but he doesn't want to. He wants to get rid of Jesus. Now imagine during the school holidays you're looking for stuff to do so you go visit Buckingham Palace and maybe you've got some kids with you and they get a bit bored looking at old paintings and chairs but they spot the throne room.

This is it. This is it. The throne room and nobody's looking. Mum and dad are distracted and so they slip under the rope and they sit on the throne.

- [17 : 06] They rather like it actually. They start pretending they're ordering people about like their mum and dad get me this, get me that. They probably do that anyway, but they're just pretending they're in charge. They're giving orders to their parents and their teachers.
- And then, well the king walks through the door. That would be a very good moment wouldn't it to get off the throne and let the right king sit down on the throne.
- The real ruler is here. But actually the children they don't. They love it too much. They love sitting on the throne.
- They love pretending to be in charge and so they don't want to budge aside when the real king shows up. You see, that is what King Herod was doing. God's king has come but Herod doesn't budge.
- He doesn't want someone else in charge over him. But rather than this being just one person's rejection and reaction to Jesus, Matthew, who wrote this biography of Jesus, wants us to see this as a typical reaction.
- [18 : 26] So if you look at verse 3 again, if you flick back, when Herod found out a new king had been born, he was troubled and, if you see it, all Jerusalem with him.
- None of Jerusalem wanted Jesus ruling over them. And that is still a typical reaction in the world today. None of Jerusalem then and none of London now wants Jesus ruling over them naturally because, well, we enjoy being on the throne of our own lives too much.
- We don't want Jesus to be in charge. Yes, perhaps we're not at the extreme end like Herod who wants to kill. People, we may be quite polite towards Jesus but have no intention of letting him rule.
- That's the first reaction to Jesus. Now, here's the other reaction to Jesus in Matthew 2 from the Magi. Look at how they reacted to God's King Jesus.
- Have a look at little 11. 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 gold, gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- [19 : 49] The Magi searched for the new king. They found him and rejoiced. They bowed down and worshipped him and gave him presents fit for a king. And then they leave with God's favour and protection.
- Now, it seems foolish for adults to bow down and worship a baby, but Matthew wants us to see that this is actually the right reaction to God's king.
- Now, time for some help again. There's some yellow crowns around the room, and if you can find a yellow crown, go bring it up and you'll get a sweet at the end. Go find a yellow crown and bring it up.
- Now, have you got your crowns? What I want you to do, get up onto the stage, please, on the stage if you can.
- Get up on the stage. Go across the stage. I want you... It's amazing what a sweet offer of a sweet does, isn't it?
- [20 : 53] Look, I'm crawling out of the woodwork. Okay, I want you to... And we want to be able to see your face. So... You all right there?
- I want you to put the crown... Put the crown on your head. Put the crown on your head. Balance it on your head. Now, what I want you to do, balance the crown on your head, head.
- And then what I want you to do is I want you to bow down to Jesus. Okay? We're going to do one, two, three, bow down to Jesus. Now, this is a proper bow. Oh! Proper bow.
- Head down. Head down. Bow down like this, guys. Head down. Well done. Okay. I think we get the picture.

Great. Put the crowns down. You get to sit down because when we bow down to Jesus, our own crown falls off.

[21 : 59] I'll say that again. When we bow down to King Jesus, our own crown falls off. That is a picture of what it means to worship Jesus.

that we stop living with ourselves in charge and let Jesus rule our lives instead. So as we close, like Donald Trump one last time, like Donald Trump, like Marmite, Jesus splits the room and he splits the world.

And here is the Christmas challenge. how will we respond to Jesus? Will we reject him or will we worship him?

Will we reject him like Herod and all Jerusalem with him, keeping him at arm's length and locked out of the throne room of our lives? Or will we, like Matthew wants us to do, come and bow down to Jesus, take off our own crown and worship God's King?

Perhaps you're here this morning and you've not reacted to Jesus like that. Well, this Christmas Day is a great chance to do just that, to recognise Jesus as King and receive forgiveness for how we have lived with ourselves as King.

[23 : 35] And for those of us who already worship Jesus as God's King, well, we can keep delighting in Jesus rule forever. He rules us now and he will rule us in the future.

We can have confidence. King Jesus is for us whatever happens in 2025 and beyond. May I wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for King Jesus who has come to rule. Thank you that we can worship him and receive forgiveness from you.

Amen.