

Christmas: Week 2

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: 05 January 2020

Preacher: Dn. Marc Steele

[0:00] Amen. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.! Glory is of the only Son and the Father.

! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Blessed Feast of Epiphany, brothers and sisters, I got that outright without stumbling.

I wrote it down this time, so as to be clear. It's when you leave your notes that you get yourself in trouble. Of course, the epiphany is a fancy word, but it means manifestation, a showing forth.

And we remember this day the visit of the Magi as they were guided by the Star of Christ. This Christmas season, we're blessed that the Altar Guild has provided us with beautiful and vivid impairments and vestments that remind us of this star that was calling wise men from the East.

You may be wondering, Mark has preached a few times this past couple weeks. This is a short-notice sermon, mainly because our dear priest contacted me about Wednesday to say, I have a fever of 103 degrees.

[1:32] I have written sermons and tried to teach in fever deliriums before, and I very much would have enjoyed to hear Caleb's sermon for entertainment purposes alone.

All that being said, I was really excited to get to preach this passage. It was an unexpected blessing, and I'm very happy to be able to come to this section of Scripture.

Because I think this is a very, very deep, meaningful well of Scripture that Matthew has given us, that too many times we relegate to the kind of cue, we place the three wise men in the nativity scene.

Let's move on. We'll touch on it again next year. I wonder how often we stop and think about the culmination of prophecy that happens during these verses, if we think about the effectiveness of evangelization of the world that happens because of what we read in today's events, and what it says about our future.

Here, in both the historical count of Jesus' first years, and the additional Holy Spirit-inspired commentary given by Matthew, we begin to understand the consequences and the true meaning of what it means to have the Word of God made flesh.

[3:12] Well, what do I mean about that? Turn your Bibles with me to Matthew 2. We're going to be here most of the sermon. And you'll see in two places in our passage, two verses.

Try, if you can, to forget that it's Christmas. Try to pretend that you are reading these at a time before Christ was born. And try to understand what is trying to be communicated here.

We have one passage given at the end of our reading from Jeremiah 31. Thus says the Lord, a voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children because they are no more. It would be very difficult to understand that they would have any connection to the advent of the Messiah.

The other passage, Micah, given in a time where he is prophesying mainly about the future judgment to come at the hand of Assyria, the prophet Micah writes, But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, for too little among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

[4:46] Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth, then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord and the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace. Imagine reading this in the decade leading up to Christ's birth and try to understand and find meaning and comfort here.

But Matthew is clear that this is speaking of Jesus. He takes the Old Testament text and makes the connection.

We find that Scripture, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the best interpreter of Scripture. And Matthew brings in these verses to say, Here is the one who has been promised of ancient days. Here is the ruler of old. Here he is in Bethlehem. And I wonder when I come to a passage like this, I'm concerned about the church today because there tends to be two extremes within our teaching. [6:12] One places a priority on an experience with Jesus. It doesn't matter what the Bible says. If Jesus told me to do something, I'm going to do it.

All that matters is my relationship to him. And there is another extreme that places an emphasis on knowledge of the word. It's a tradition I came up with, where a relationship is kind of downplayed or not as emphasized as much.

But there is no tension between Scripture and Jesus. Jesus is the living word. What's more important?

Rightly handling Scripture or having a right relationship with Jesus? You can't differentiate between the two. It's like going to a marriage and saying, Who is more important in the marriage?

The husband or the wife? You can't make that separation. They're both equally important. How could anyone possibly have understood the meaning of this prophetic word?

[7:27] But now as Christ enters the world, as he's born in Bethlehem, he brings with him order and meaning.

He restores a purpose to those Old Testament prophecies which the nation Israel had thought was completely lost.

I talked about my Christmas Eve sermon about futility, hopelessness, meaning. But the eternal word, the word made flesh by its nature, brings order to man's past, man's present, and man's future.

And the account of the Magi today shows this. Let's look at Exhibit 1, their past. Matthew 2, verses 1 and 2.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men came from the east, came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he?

[8:36] Let's focus on these words here. Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, or star when it rose, and have come to worship him.

Pope Benedict wrote, and you don't get many Pope Benedict quotes from me, so enjoy it when it comes. But Pope Benedict wrote, It is quite natural that their search for the newborn king of the Jews should take them to Israel's royal city and to the king's palace.

That surely is where the future king must have been born. It is the natural expectation of the Magi that they would have come to find Israel's future king sitting in Jerusalem.

But have you ever stopped and thought about how they knew that this would be a king born to the house of Israel?

Now, one of the problems when you come and preach from the Magi is there's a lot of church tradition that have a hard time cutting through to understand what's truth and what's not.

[10:00] But there seem to be some clear indications in scripture how that knowledge came to them that this would be a king of the Hebrews, not a king of the Syrians or king of any other country in the area.

It's not just the idea of them using a pagan form of astrology. That's not what's going on here. They understood that this star rising was a prophecy of the king of the Hebrews.

One of our earliest messianic prophecies comes from the time of Moses. In a time when Israelites were in the land of Midian, there was a prophet named Balaam.

Balaam is not one of the shining stars of scripture. But he was someone that the Holy Spirit used as a prophet to give a vision of the future.

And in Balaam's final prophecy, he writes, The oracle of Balaam, the son of Baor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the word of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered.

[11:30] I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

This is a prophecy written about 1,500 years before the birth of Christ. Similar prophecy was given about 600 years before the birth of Christ in today's Old Testament reading that Chris read for us. Isaiah writes, Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples.

But the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you, and all nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Say, this is a prophecy well established amongst the people of the Hebrews. But what in the world does this have to do with Gentiles from the East?

[12 : 53] Let us not forget that the Hebrews were cast out of the land of Israel. The knowledge of their scriptures were sent out into the lands.

And many Bible scholars, and I agree with them, will point quickly to Daniel, a prophecy written about 500 years before the, a prophet that prophesied about 500 years before the birth of Christ. Let us not forget what Nebuchadnezzar did in promoting him. Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

The king answered and said to Daniel, truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries.

For you have been able to reveal this mystery. Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and, key to our verse today, chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

[14 : 24] Daniel would have been the head of the school that these wise men would have descended from. I'm not saying that there's a direct lineage so-and-so taught so-and-so down to these men.

What is clear is that the ministry of the prophets spread the news across the eastern world that a star would rise and it would point to a king that was the son of David.

This is a proof of the accuracy of God's word but it's also the proof of God's intent towards man.

Christ come and restores meaning to the past of not just the Hebrews but that of the whole world.

And it draws not just the Magi to the feet of Christ it draws the whole world to the feet of Christ. For when the fullness of time came God sent forth his son born of woman born under the law to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoptions as sons.

Christ also restores meaning to the Magi's present. And this speaks uncanonly to our present age as well.

[15 : 49] Because the same principalities and powers that are under the power of the prince of the air that is Satan are still in effect today. Why did Herod ask when they saw the star?

He rightly assumed that it appeared at the time the new king was born. And he wanted to understand the age of his competition.

Herod was a sick man. He had a whole succession plan in line. You can read about it in your history books.

He did that thing that rulers did in those days. Same thing Alexander the Great did. Herod thought he was the Alexander Great of his time I guess that history doesn't look that way.

Herod dies a few years after this story. He splits it up and gives his kingdom to his four sons. He split his kingdom into four. Any child that came in he was not assuming that he would have a royal line from a carpenter from this young woman.

[17 : 07] But he needed to understand what time his competition was born. I think it's fascinating to note that Christ was between one and two years old when this account happened.

I believe probably closer to two. This means that the wise men from the east even if they took a couple months to reason about what this sign meant what they should do what their response would be it took them over a year to get there.

I mean they made a significant time commitment to make this journey. They poured a major part of their lives. They committed their lives to honoring a king.

And knowing that it was a child they could not have expected any reward from him. The only thing they wanted was a chance to honor the king promised from of old.

yet the presence of the living word in the world threatens the power of this age because it announces to every ruler and leader that they are accountable to the creator of the world and that their time is limited.

[18:25] And it's appropriate and proper at this time to point out that the enemy of Jesus is also the enemy of life.

Herod was an evil man and he killed thousands of children to secure his power. And I would love to tell you that that was a practice that has been lost to antiquity.

But we live in a country where Chris, help me out. How many abortions a year? A million? It's less now, thankfully, but about 800,000.

About 800,000 children a year this country puts to death. And that's why I would invite you plea with you, ask you to join us on January 18th and march.

Stand with us for life. Stand against the herds of this age. This passage also speaks to the fact that unlike how the world smears us, it's not just the unborn that we care for, it is also the born.

[19:56] Because we mourn in the slaughter of innocence the death of those young infants under the age of two who were killed by the wicked rule of that time. Our driving principle is to value life at all stages, born and unborn, from conception to natural death.

exhibit three, the future. The present shows what was promised in the past is cured, so we can count on God for what will happen and what he promises for the future.

God is not limited by time as we are, and what he has decreed, he has also secured. And despite the forces of evil, what they want to do to destroy the newly born king, God's plans will not be thwarted.

Stand in that time. clergy get one a year.

We get one a year. Stand in Bethlehem for a minute.

[21:27] Think about this. There is one infant under two years old, his carpenter father, the new mother. Herod is coming after him with the mightiest army on the planet.

Is it not great odds? But the angel warns Joseph and the family and the family leaves for Egypt, also prophesying scripture.

The magi are also warned in a dream to go a circuitous route, another direction there, prayer.

Because nothing will stop the living word from marching into the world.

And the scope of Matthew's account here gives me a couple thoughts about how we live as worshippers of the child king today. The one thing I thought as I considered is that it is an almost unreasonable thing that the magi come from the east.

It doesn't make rational sense. They just follow the clear proclamation of what God's word had promised. For that reason, I don't feel the need in our preparation to evangelize to get ready to argue people to the faith.

[22:53] What we're called to be is heralds. God doesn't need our help to bring people to faith. He asks us to herald the promises of Christ. I know what some will say. They'll say study to show yourself approved.

Yes, that is the case, but the call on that is to rightly handle the word of truth. In the other passages, be ready to give what not an argument or a defense or a way.

We get scared when it comes to evangelism about this. We get scared when we're told to tell others about the child king. Guys, it doesn't make sense that God became man and lived amongst us.

You're not going to reason people to that place. As I told someone earlier this week, the resurrection doesn't make sense. These things are things you cannot reason people to. What we're called is to give an answer for the hope.

What brings you the hope? The hope is found in the manger and is testified to by God's word and was testified to by the heavens themselves.

[24:04] Can you improve on that? And for me, that takes a lot of the stress off my evangelism because the only thing I am doing is proclaiming that there is a child born in the manger and that child brings salvation to all men.

Salvation not just for the needs of this world, but dealing with the very sin nature of man itself and offering freedom and redemption to everyone who will come and worship him.

And the second point I would have is that this points to our future, points to the future not just of the Magi, but the future of Herod, the future of our president, every president that's ever served, every world leader.

We need to remember that this points to the fact that before Jesus, every knee shall bow and call him Lord. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Let us confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only God and Son of God, the eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten of not being with the Father, through him all things were made for us and for our salvation, he kicked me out from heaven, as was incarnate from the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary, and the same man.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who received in the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son, his worship can glorify, who has spoken through the prophets.

[27:31] Amen. Let's pray for the church and for the world, saying, hear our prayer.

Father, we pray for the Bishops' Assembly of Florida, of our Church, and pray that you would pour out your Spirit on them and enlighten their minds and make a sense of where you are moving.

[29:20] For our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are persecuted for their faith, Father, we both help Christian believers in all countries for their behavior.

Father, we pray for Pastor Wang Yi of China, the early reign covenant church, a believer who is then vocal about his faith, and who is sentenced to jail this week in a secret trial.

Our nation, for those in authority, and for all in public service. Lord, at this time, in which international tensions are arising, we pray particularly that you would give our leaders wisdom.

For all those who are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. Pray for James, switch across, and take me a night.

For all those who are in trouble, in the sin of hope, in the resurrection, and thanksgiving, thus spread. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

[32:14] Amen. Let us humbly confess our sins before God. We will do that.

We have sinned, and thought, and worried indeed, by what we have done, and by what we have left unrun. We know not what we have done our whole heart.

For the glory of your name. Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who in His great mercy has promised forgiveness of sin, to all those who sincerely repent and with true faith turn to Him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all

goodness, and bring you to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[33:52] Hear the word of God to all who truly turn to Him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The same is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[35:36] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. So, that's the first thing. So, you can't do that. So, you can't do that. So, you can't do that. So, you can't do that.

So, you can't do that. So, you can't do that. So, you can't do that.