

The Birth of the True King

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Date: 11 December 2016

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[0:00] How about I pray for us before we begin, though? Father, thanks again for your word, the Bible, and we do pray that you would help us to pause from the business of life and really take in what you are telling us this morning.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I thought I'd start this morning with a Who Am I quiz. And because it's Christmas, instead of the usual Freddo frog that I occasionally give out, I've got a box of lint, which is just up there.

Can you bring it up for us, Glenn? So there it is. So I've upped the stakes because it's Christmas. Thank you. So here's the quiz. All right. Ordinarily, yes.

But this person was born in America. Not Bethlehem. More specifically, I was... Sorry, did I say Tom? No. I was born in Mississippi in the 1930s.

In 1948, I moved to Memphis, Tennessee. And in 1956, I was an international singer. Who said Elvis Presley?

[1:12] That was Doug. Yep. Here you go. Yeah. All right. I sold more than one billion records, more than any other artist, and famous for songs like Jailhouse Rocks, Blue Suede Shoes, Elvis Presley.

He's also got a famous hairdo to match. In fact, I was thinking, the only other person I thought who could pull off that hairdo was probably VJ. So next... I reckon...

That's not bad, is it? That's not bad. All right. We'll take it off now, poor guy. He's a student minister, so I'm allowed to do that to him.

It's part of his training. Now, Elvis is also famous for having more impersonators than any other icon or celebrity before or since.

In fact, there's a group of scientists who work out of Cambridge University, and back in a number of years ago now, December 2000, this is what they wrote on the next slide. They wrote, There are now at least 85,000 Elvis's around the world, compared to only 170 in 1977, when Elvis died.

[2:24] At this rate of growth, experts predict that by 2019, Elvis impersonators will make up one-third of the world's population. Perhaps you will be one of them. But Elvis fans, the real die-hard ones, will say that there's only one true Elvis, only one true, as his nickname was, king of rock and roll.

And in today's Bible reading, we meet a couple of kings, and by the end of the reading, we'll see that only one of them is the true king of the Jews. The other is an impersonator.

But first, we meet some Magi who come to Jerusalem asking a troubling question. So we're at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. He says, 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. Now, Matthew is the man who is writing this account of Jesus' life.

That's why it's called Matthew's Gospel. And here, Matthew introduces us to a number of people, doesn't he? Jesus, who by this stage is probably a toddler. King Herod, who was a puppet king of the Jews the Romans had put in to rule.

[3:53] And thirdly, the Magi. The word Magi means magician or wise men. Not in the sense of wise philosophers, but more like those who studied the stars and wrote horoscopes.

These Magi would read the stars and advise their king, told the king his horoscope, if you like. I checked out my horoscope the other day, and on the next slide, it said that you should be in your peak physical health.

I hope not, because I hope it gets better than this. You're in physical and mental space to accomplish wonders, so don't be surprised if today you do just that. So, look out world, here I come. Now, horoscopes are rarely right, though they are so general, and people often try to find some truth in them, that people think they are right.

But on this occasion, God uses this wrong practice of the Magi to bring them to a right conclusion, that the king of the Jews has been born.

And so they go looking in Jerusalem, the city of kings for the Jewish people. And they start asking people in Jerusalem, where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

[5 : 10] By the way, do you notice their question says, where is the one who has been born king, not the one who will become king? They're asking, where is the child who is king now?

And this is a disturbing question. Look at verse number three. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Now, it's not hard to see why King Herod is disturbed. I mean, if you were king and you heard that there is another king in town, then you'd be wondering whether he would take your throne, wouldn't you?

In other words, the birth of this other king means competition for Herod. And we know from other history books that Herod did not like competition. In fact, Herod had two of his own sons killed in case they tried to take his throne.

That's the kind of man Herod was. But why is the rest of Jerusalem disturbed with him? After all, weren't they waiting for God's chosen king, you know, the Christ or Messiah, as we saw those names meant last week?

[6 : 21] Well, I take it if Herod was paranoid enough to kill two of his own sons, then who knows what he will do to Jerusalem to get rid of this newborn king. In other words, the city is disturbed because they fear how Herod will react.

And as we'll see in a moment, they were right to fear. But how does Herod act initially to start with? Well, it brings us to Herod's plan, point two in your outlines, verse four in your Bibles.

When he called together all the people, that is Herod, 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. And we read that in our first reading from Micah. 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. King Herod's first reaction is by wanting to know where this king has been born.

[7 : 28] So he calls together the teachers of the law, the people who taught the Old Testament part of the Bible, to see whether there were any prophecies about where this king or Messiah would be born.

And these teachers quote from the prophet Micah, as I said, and they say, well, you would be born in Bethlehem, which is a town in the land of Judah. Now, Bethlehem was a small and insignificant town.

Our first reading even said that. It's kind of like saying, you know, he was born in the insignificant suburb of Heathmont in the state of Victoria. Is anyone living in Heathmont, by the way? Oh, I didn't offend anyone.

There you go. It is a small suburb, though, isn't it? But despite appearances, Heathmont is not actually insignificant, did you realise? Because do you know which famous person comes from there?

On the next slide, this one. Chris Hemsworth. Do you know that? Thor, the God of Thunder. He actually went to Heathmont Secondary College. So Heathmont may seem small and insignificant suburb, but you've got someone famous coming from there.

[8 : 30] Even more so, though, for Bethlehem. For it certainly appeared small and insignificant. Perhaps humble is the better word for it.

And yet God's chosen ruler would come from this humble, small town. And back in verse 1, Who just so happens to have been born in this humble, small town of Bethlehem?

Verse 1, Jesus. It's pretty clear what the Bible is trying to say, isn't it? Herod may have been the Romans' appointed king at the time, but Jesus is actually God's promised king for all time.

Jesus is the promised king everyone has been waiting for. And so what will Herod do now? He's asked the question where, how will he react next? Will he bow before God's appointed king? Well, at first glance, it seems to suggest that he will. Have a look at verse 7. Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

[9 : 39] 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.

It seems that Herod will bow before God's appointed king. Although there is one word to suggest that Herod is not being all that honest about his comment.

Do you notice in verse 7 the word secretly? He secretly summons the Magi. And it's not long before we realize that Herod is lying and hatching an evil plan to kill his competition.

So just skip down for a moment to verse 12. And we'll cut into some of next week's passage, but that's okay. So verse 12, And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they, the Magi, 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, Jesus, and his mother and escape to Egypt. Why? Well, stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child and kill him.

[10 : 47] That's really what Herod wanted to do from the start. His plan to worship Jesus was a deceitful plan to find the child and literally kill the competition. In fact, when Herod realizes that he's been outwitted by the Magi, we'll have a look at verse 16.

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity for good measure, who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Herod is furious and true to form. He gives orders to kill every single baby boy in Bethlehem, two years old and under.

Not just Bethlehem, but its surrounding vicinity as well, to cover his bases. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine hearing the order and then watching your two-year-old grandson or son being killed probably in front of you?

Terrific, isn't it? But that's the type of king Herod was. Pure evil and kills people. And yet what sort of king is Jesus?

[12 : 03] Well, back at the end of verse 6, if you have a look there, back at the end of verse 6, we're told that he comes from a humble town of Bethlehem and that he will notice shepherd his people, Israel.

Instead of killing them, he will humbly care for them and even lay down his life to protect them just as shepherds did for their sheep. Do you see the contrast that we have here between these two kings?

And so which one do you think is the real king and which one the imposter, the impersonator? One promised by God who will humbly shepherd his people or the one placed by Romans who kills his people?

Well, it's obvious, isn't it? In fact, it's also worth noticing that even Herod thought Jesus was the real king. Do you realize that? You see, Herod did all of this not because he didn't believe that the promised king had been born.

I mean, if he didn't believe it, he wouldn't have done anything about it. Rather, Herod did all this precisely because he did believe the promised king had been born or at least there was a good chance of it.

[13 : 16] And he knew that he wasn't the real king of the Jews and he certainly wasn't going to accept Jesus as his new king. Herod didn't want to hand over his crown, you see.

The Magi, on the other hand, well, they have a completely different reaction to Jesus, which brings us to point three and back to our story at verse nine in your Bibles. Verse nine, after they had heard the king, the Magi, they went on their way.

So the king had said, find him so I can worship him. And so the Magi hear the king, they went on their way and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. The star they saw back home reappears it seems and they are overjoyed and the star guides them in some way until it rests over the place where Jesus was.

We're not exactly sure how the star did this. Did it shine down on the stables where Jesus was like a massive spotlight, perhaps? Or perhaps it hovered in the general vicinity where Jesus was and the Magi asked around just like they asked around back at Jerusalem.

[14 : 25] Either way, the God who made all the stars could certainly have controlled one star to lead these men to meet Jesus. And that's what happens next in verse 11.

They meet him. 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.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. Notice their reaction? They give Jesus gifts that were not your typical baby gifts, are they?

I mean, when you have baby showers, I suppose every parent would like some gold. You never can knock back gold. But usually the typical baby gifts are wraps and baby toys, nappies even, perhaps. They're gifts appropriate for a baby or a toddler. And yet these gifts are actually appropriate for this toddler because these gifts are what you give a king.

[15 : 27] And that's who Jesus is. What's more amazing is that they actually worship Jesus. Now I realize when most kids are born, especially if it's a first child or first grandchild, you know, they get worshipped a bit as well.

You know, if they fall over on the carpet, you're very quick to rush to their aid and if they want another chocolate, you say no and then you go, oh, okay, you little cutie and you give it to them.

And then number two comes along, they fall over, oh, they'll be right.

But something much more is happening here. These Magi literally got on their knees, bowed down and worshipped Jesus as though Jesus was their king, it seems.

And yet Jesus was not their king. Jesus was the king of the Jews and they were not Jews. And yet still, they bow not only to show respect but they also worship as though Jesus is their king.

And their gifts and actions indicate that Jesus really is the true king, you see. And not just of the Jews actually, but of all nations like them. We started to see this last week when we looked at the son of Abraham named for Jesus where he would bring blessing to all nations.

[16 : 43] And here the reactions of the Magi are telling because they tell us that Jesus is that king, king of all nations who would bring God's blessing. That's why Matthew ends, as I said last week, by saying all authority on heaven and on earth is given to me, said Jesus.

I am the true king, all nations. So go and make disciples of all nations. See, Jesus is the true king of all people for Jews, for Chinese, for Sri Lankans, for Australians, for even us Melbournians.

And yet he's also a king born in a humble town who will shepherd his people, care for, even lay down his life to protect them, to protect us.

And for 30 years later, that's what Jesus did. He went to the cross and laid down his life for us. At the cross he took all the punishment we deserve for ignoring God and trying to be king ourselves like Herod.

And Jesus took our punishment so that we can be protected from it, you see. And instead we can be forgiven if we trust in him. Not just as our saviour though, but also as our king.

[17 : 56] We need to trust him as both. For all other kings are in the end just impersonators. They're not the real king. Jesus is the real king that God promised.

So the first question for us then is, have we accepted Jesus as our king? Or are we continuing to reject him like Herod? I remember being a bit like Herod myself.

I didn't kill kids just for the record. But I grew up in a Christian family. I knew about Jesus. I knew who he was. I just hadn't accepted him as my king.

I didn't want to let go of my crown, of running my life. Until one night I realised that I needed to. I had to if I wanted to be certain of heaven, if I wanted forgiveness.

In fact, I realised that I ought to, I ought to want to because he died for me. And so I prayed a prayer and said, sorry for knowing about you but not really accepting you.

[18 : 57] Thank you for dying for me. Please help me now to always live for you. I wanted to be less like Herod and more like the Magi, the wise men who were truly wise by accepting Jesus as king.

Have you done that? If you haven't and would like to, please talk to me after the service. For us who have accepted Jesus as king, who believe in him, then the challenge for us is are we continuing to

live for him as our king?

Does he continue to shape our priorities, our attitudes, our behaviours? Do we worship and honour him as king with our lives? With our time, our money, with what we read or watch on TV, the internet?

With the priorities we model for our children? With persevering in following him even when it's busy, even when it's hard? I remember one father who used to lose his temper very easily with his kids and on the road I think as well but he told me that he realised that if Jesus was his king, if he was to serve Jesus, something needed to change.

And so for almost a year this father would pray every day for lots of things but always included was self-control not to get angry. And over time he didn't lose his temper like he used to apart from a couple of relapses.

[20 : 20] You see, the kingship of Jesus shaped his life in a small but real way. For a family who most of us could probably guess who they are, it was persevering coming to church because they have an autistic son.

Family's no longer with us but they wanted to model to their kids the importance of meeting with God's family as King Jesus wanted them to and so they worked hard. The boy was a struggle and some days they told me that they only made it to the front door out there and he lost it and they just, that's it, they couldn't do it anymore and they went back home but imagine that every week getting dressed, getting it all together but yeah, I'm going to keep trying, going to keep trying.

For another guy I was speaking to this week he was saying that if Jesus is King then isn't he supposed to be watching over me like I don't always feel like it and then he said but then I kind of stopped and looked back over the past year and then I could actually see how he had been watching over me and how things had been coming into place.

You see the kingship of Jesus should shape our lives from both big things to small things not just because of who he is, the king but also because of what he's done in laying down his life at the cross for us.

Let me finish. Just two months ago on October the 14th the king of Thailand died. On the next slide is a picture of him and King Bumibol was the world's longest serving monarch.

[21 : 51] 70 years, Queen Elizabeth up to 65 years and he was honoured and loved by his people. On the next slide is a picture of his 85th birthday and that's the people turning out to celebrate just to give you an idea of their devotion to their king.

And when a journalist asked the Thai people why he was so loved one replied this on the next slide. He said, the king is my life. He's an artist, this guy.

He brought the electricity and developed our village and I know he treated all of us Thai people the same. He is the centre of Thais. How much more so ought Jesus, the king, be the centre of our lives?

Indeed, how much more should we want him to be the centre of our lives? For he gave much more than electricity, didn't he? He gave his life so that we could have life eternal. You see, we ought to keep worshipping Jesus with our lives because of who he is but we should also want to worship him as our king because of what he's done.

For Jesus is the shepherd king who laid down his life for us and that's a king worth following, isn't it? Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for this Christmas season.

[23 : 05] We thank you that we get to remember particularly the birth of your son who is born king. Father, we thank you that this king grew up to be a humble king who laid down his life at the cross for us.

And so because of who he is and what he's done, we pray, Father, that you would help us to keep living for him as our king. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.