

Praising God: The Wise Men

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 2, and we're going to read the first 12 verses, Matthew 2, 1 to 12.

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. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly, and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

[1 : 18] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

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 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.

May God bless that reading from his holy word as we come to the third of our mini-series on praising God, those who praise God for the Lord Jesus.

[2 : 22] We noticed some weeks ago, the angels who praised God for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Last week, we looked at the shepherds who praised and glorified God for what they'd seen in the birth of Jesus there in the manger.

And then this morning, we're going to look at the third of these three aspects of praise that the Gospels give us. The wise men, the magi, the magicians, who came and worshipped the Lord Jesus.

And that's what we're going to look at, is to see in the points there that we're going to go through, revealing the revelation of Jesus to these men from the east, outside of Israel, outside of the Jewish people, and yet God in his grace, revealing Jesus to these outsiders, if you like, who would come inside to the kingdom.

But of course, in contrast to those who came to worship Jesus in faith and in truth, we see those in particular who maybe pretended to want to worship Jesus, but had no inclination to do so.

In truth, the hating of Jesus, as we see in the example of Herod. And then back to these wise men, these men who came from the east, and their worship of Jesus.

[3 : 42] We'll look at that worship in more detail. Because, you know, as we read there, as you're reading the Christmas story, it doesn't take long before Jesus, before the coming of the Lord Jesus, attracts the most vicious of opposition, even, you know, in the midst of all the wonderful praise that we've been thinking of, the praise of the angels, the praise of the shepherds, yes, the praise of the wise men, but within that time of praise, these times of praise, we see the most vicious of opposition to Jesus, even as we read there in the example of Herod.

Because what we're seeing, even in that, what we might call that microcosm, is the bigger picture.

The division of the world in relation to the Lord Jesus.

We see that even in this section here. You know the story. The coming of these men, in many ways, these mysterious men from the east, but interspersed with their coming, is the hatred of Herod to

the Lord Jesus.

Because Herod knows, he's been told that a king's been born in the very territory where he's been given rule over. Now, obviously we'll look at that in more detail in a moment, but what are we to take?

What are we to gain? What are we to grasp from this passage? Well, sure, many things, of course. But surely, we'll see what this passage tells us about God's ways with man.

[5 : 15] God's leading men and women, boys and girls. God leading his people. God leading you to the Lord Jesus. And we're going to see, of course, the hatred of men, other men, other men and women against the Lord Jesus.

But then, as we'll see again, this great breadth, this scope of salvation to all nations, all peoples. That's what we've been singing in these initial two Psalms, that all nations coming to God and praise and worship.

And so I pray that, you know, as we look at this passage more closely, the more you'll be encouraged to praise God for the Lord Jesus, that you'll praise him for the gift of the Lord Jesus. You'll praise him for that great salvation that's been offered to you, given to you, revealed to you, in and through the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

So let's look, first of all, then, at the revealing of Jesus, the revealing of King Jesus. As we read now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the King, listen to the number of times the word King is mentioned.

[6 : 28] 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? So just a few words, a few verses, in fact.

Matthew, the author here, Matthew's bringing home to us the revealing of the revelation of Jesus, King Jesus. He's King.

He's been born King, as we're told, King of the Jews, King of the Lord's people. And these mysterious men from the east coming to worship this king. And then the contrast between the false king, false King Herod, and true King Jesus.

You see it just in a few sentences. Because when you know a wee bit more about Herod, you realize, in fact, he wasn't really a true king. In fact, he wasn't even a Jew.

His father was from the territory called Edom. His mother was from Arabia. But Matthew tells, in fact, he was put in charge of Judea by the Roman occupiers.

[7 : 33] He wasn't really a king. But on the other hand, Matthew tells us of the true king, Jesus, born in Bethlehem. Why Bethlehem?

Well, Bethlehem, of course, was the city where King David was born. Jesus mentioned here as the King of the Jews. David was the human ancestor of Jesus, King David.

And so Jesus, here he's the true king, the true king of his people. He's no false king. He's no pretend king. He's no puppet ruler like Herod was.

Because Jesus has all authority. That's what Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Herod had a little bit of authority there in Judea. But that authority given to him, granted to him by the Romans. But Jesus has all authority to rule and to reign, been given that authority by his family.

[8 : 38] And so Jesus has all authority. And he's got that authority to rule and reign in your heart. And that was revealed to these people from the east.

because it wasn't to Herod and it wasn't to the Roman occupiers and it wasn't to the religious rulers of the time. It wasn't even to the people there in Jerusalem.

It was to these men, these men from the east that the revelation of Jesus as king was given. And it's these men who were going to follow on from the shepherds in worshipping Jesus.

In many ways, outsiders. outsiders, but outsiders given that inside information about the birth of Jesus as the true king. God revealing to these people, these men.

We don't know how many there were. Just made up. Of course, we don't know. Yes, there were three gifts given to Jesus. No, there may have been many more than just three of these people from the east.

[9 : 40] But God had revealed to these men from the east that a great event had happened. And they were going to follow that star to where it's going to show where the king, the true king, has been born.

Now, what does this teach us? Well, first of all, surely it shows us that God reveals the saviour. It's God who makes known the saviour to you. It doesn't matter if you're a person of a lot of power or no power at all in the world's eyes.

You don't like Herod, like the Romans. It doesn't matter if you have any kind of religious position with all the head knowledge that you've amassed over the years, just like the scribes and the Pharisees there in Jerusalem.

It doesn't even matter whether you've been living in the very centre of where Jesus is proclaimed. It's God's revealing to you Jesus so that you are enabled to seek him and find him.

That's what we see here in the passage. When Herod, he had lots of power, well, certainly an element of power, but he had no spiritual power to discern the saviour. The religious leaders at the time, they had so much access to the scriptures.

[10:56] Their eyes read from the Old Testament, but these same religious leaders were spiritually blind. They couldn't see Jesus as the one who was promised in the scriptures in the Old Testament, the one promised to come who'd be the Messiah, the Christ, the promised one sent from heaven, from God.

All these people who had so much privilege in the world, and yet God makes known Jesus to those whom God so chooses to show.

People, in many ways, who have nothing of any true value and yet God revealing the Lord Jesus to people like me, people like you and you to whom the Lord has made known the Lord Jesus.

Remember, that is a gift as we mentioned to the children. It's that, yes, the gift of the Lord Jesus, but remember he's gifted you faith to believe. Faith gifted to you through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

And you might have nothing of the world's value, nothing of the world's power, nothing of what the world counts as of true worth and value. But if you know Jesus, if Jesus has been made known to you, revealed to you, then you have all, all that you need.

[12:18] You have all, infinitely more than the world can possibly give you. And so give thanks to the Lord God, to the Lord Jesus. You know, think of it like this, Jesus, the Lord Jesus, he was revealed to poor, humble Mary.

Jesus was revealed to poor, humble shepherds. Jesus, the king, was revealed to these men and give thanks that God has made Jesus known to you because it's undeserved.

None of us deserve to be shown the Lord Jesus. But you can still echo the words of Mary.

Remember, when Mary was told that she was going to bear the Lord Jesus and she spoke of her joy and her humility.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. And you, to whom the Lord Jesus has been made known, has been revealed, you're truly blessed.

You're blessed. You've received the blessing. But remember this blessing as non-Jews, as Gentiles. Because surely that's what we're seeing is true in the passage.

[13:38] These men, these magi, these magicians, they came not from Judea, not from Israel, but from the east. I don't know exactly where, but from very much east of Israel.

And who's writing this gospel? It's Matthew. Matthew, this Jewish Christian. And Matthew wants to make absolutely clear in his gospel that Christianity, knowing Jesus, that's the true Judaism.

That's the true fulfillment of all the teachings that you read off in the Old Testament. All the teachings, all the practice pointing to the Lord Jesus. And Matthew wants to show that Jesus fulfilled all, all that was prophesied about him by the Old Testament prophets, through all the sacrifices, the sacrificial system.

Jesus had come to bring in the new Israel. He'd come to bring into his kingdom all who are his Jew, non-Jew, and Gentile.

And, in fact, Matthew's the only gospel writer who mentions these wise men because he wants to show that, yes, the kingdom of God is for all, Jew and Gentile.

[14:58] Jesus came to the peoples. And, you know, God appointed his son, the Lord Jesus, as the one saviour, the one true saviour for all the world.

So he's not just the saviour for Israel, the nation of Israel. He's not just the saviour for the ethnic Jewish descendants of Abraham. He's for all peoples.

He's the saviour, the saviour of the world for people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. These wise men, these magi, these magicians, they, as we said, came from outside Jewish territory.

They were outside the Jewish nation. But even their coming to Jesus shows, tells us, of all nations, all peoples, coming to Jesus to worship him as the one true saviour of the world.

The evidence is there in the passage. And, of course, the evidence is still with us today. Even in this very building, even in the very gatherings that we've seen over the years, even to the present day, people coming to worship from so many different countries, from across the nations, even in our little prayer meeting on Wednesday, you know, when we're praying for others, these prayers are for all the nations, for all the peoples from every nation.

[16:31] Even last Wednesday, for example, a few days ago, we were praying for the church, for the Lord's people in Scalpe and Stirling, as well as for the Lord's people in West Africa, praying for people at home, praying for those overseas, for people whether in a little island or a large city.

That's the evidence that Jesus is the same. Seeing it even in a little prayer meeting, in a little part of a little county, in a little country, even in these times of prayer, joining with the people across our land, but across the world.

It shows that, yes, Jesus is the saviour of the world, as you see here in the coming of these gentile people, these men to Jesus. And so we can rejoice that you who know and love the Lord Jesus, you do it because Jesus came for you.

He came to save all peoples, all peoples, all nations who love him, who serve him, who are his. But remember this as we hinted at the start of our thoughts here.

Jesus coming to earth, it's brought division. That's what we see certainly here in the episode with Herod in verses 3 to 9, the hating of King Jesus.

[17:59] I mean, look at Herod's reaction when he's told the news or he finds out of these wise men coming into Jerusalem. look at what Matthew tells us.

We're told that he's troubled. This is a power-hungry man. This is someone who's killed even his family members because he was afraid that they were going to take his place in authority.

This is a power-hungry man who isn't even a Jew. And now he's hearing that they are troubled. And you can see why he's troubled. Because if there's a king of the Jews being born, he's not a Jew.

Aren't the Jewish people going to put this king of the Jews in place of himself, in place of him? And he's going to lose his power, he's going to lose his status, he's going to lose his influence.

He's troubled. But isn't that the kind of response to Jesus today? Still trouble, being troubled at Jesus. Maybe even some of you this morning troubled at the prospect of receiving Jesus as king in your life.

[19:04] Because if he's going to be change, then of course it means your status, your influence, your whole life's going to be changed. It's going to be changed in a way that your fear is going to ruin you, ruin your reputation, ruin your subperson.

And you won't have the same Jesus to rule over you. And that means therefore you're going to be amongst those who hate Jesus. You're going to despise him for his coming to earth.

And you'll blot out from your heart and mind even the true meaning of this time of year, the true meaning of Christmas. And you'll blank out Jesus. And you'll replace him with something that anaesthetizes your troubled soul and leaves Jesus out of your life altogether.

And you're going to try and fill your God-shaped space, that space in your heart with, well, with whatever you think will satisfy but can't satisfy. And you'll try and ease your troubled mind with, in fact, increases trouble, gives you the greater restlessness.

If that's striking home to anyone this morning, well, remember the words of St. Augustine, our hearts are restless until they find the rest in you, until they find the rest in the Lord Jesus.

[20:25] Well, Herod certainly was restless, he was troubled. And in his restlessness, in his trouble, he thinks he's got a plan that's going to solve his problems, solve, ease his troubles.

He'll find out exactly where this newborn king was born. And he'll send these eastern visitors to go to where that newborn king was born. And he'll pretend to want to come and worship the newborn king.

And in his pretense, he'll do as he'd done to others, as he will do to others. He'll kill the child. He'll remove that threat to his rule.

And his heart, he thinks, will be troubled no more. But again, doesn't that strike home even to so much of what's happening today? A pretended worship.

Maybe a sort of easing of the conscience. You know, taking part in an outward form of worship but really empty of true worship from your heart. Because it happens and it particularly happens at this time of year.

[21 : 30] You know, the many acts of worship that have happened even over these last few days. But without that true heart desire to honour, honour our Lord and King. You know, we sing and we hear the most beautiful words that express the Saviour's birth.

But has the heart been engaged in true worship of God even, you know, singing these words. And you can read the Christmas story again and again. But you're reading that story in faith.

You can come to church each Lord's Day. But again, this coming to the worship reflect what the psalmist said. Psalm 122 when he said that, you know, I joyed went into the house of God.

Go up, they said to me. Well, I pray, you know, even this pretended worship, this pretended desire to worship Jesus, may that be a warning to each one of us, especially when we can so easily take for granted the privilege that's ours, whether it's in this building or buildings elsewhere, church buildings.

Let's be aware of the danger of coming to these places of worship without that true heart's desire to worship our Lord and Saviour from the heart. Because, you know, each one of us, I can slip into, you can slip into, just slip into a sort of complacency, just going through the motions, and our heart's been so far from true worship of our Lord and Saviour.

[23 : 07] But what about true worship? What about our true worship of the Saviour? Well, what do we see in the passage here? Certainly in verse 2 and verse 11, we see that, if you like, the true intention to worship Jesus.

These men from the East, they'd followed that star, they'd followed that star to Bethlehem. And they had one purpose in mind. That purpose was to worship, worship the king.

It wasn't, you know, the sort of false pretended worship of Herod. This was true worship. Matthew, Matthew writes this gospel. He's a true follower of the Lord Jesus.

He knows what worship is. And he's not watering down his words, you know, thinking they're just a sort of false worship. He knows that these men have truly come to worship the Saviour.

and then worshipping the Saviour, recognizing who Jesus is. He's the Word made flesh. He's God very God.

[24 : 12] He's the one who's begotten and not created. He's the one they're going to worship. And so Matthew tells us in the account, these wise men, they arrive at the house where the infant Jesus is with Mary and Joseph.

What are we told? They worship him. They fall on their knees and they worship the Saviour. They're bowing before Christ, the King, as they bow before him. Yes, kings at the time, but they bow before the King who truly is the King of Kings.

And bowing to the King, they offer him their presents, their treasures, treasures, gifts, fit for a king, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Gold, frankincense that was used in healing, myrrh that gave fragrance. These were gifts that befitted the royal status of Jesus, gifts that were given willingly, gifts to the one who came and his King, who came in his wings, who came to bring the fragrance of grace into the lives of his people. These wise men, these Magi, they gave Jesus their treasures. And in your worship of Jesus, you give him what's true treasure.

[25 : 35] What's true treasure for you? It's your heart. Jesus, you see, Jesus came to give you, to give you himself. As we said, the greatest treasure of all, the greatest gift of all.

Well, you give to him all that you are. You know, we've seen it this time of year, so much of the world's treasures are given. Given us gifts and wonderful gifts, given in love.

But how much more for you to give the Lord Jesus the treasure of your heart and to give it in love? Because he came in love to give you his saving grace, his saving love.

So it's got to be first in your affections, first in your heart. See, the story of the wise men here, the story of their coming to Jesus, visiting him, worshipping him, it's a lesson for each one of us.

It's that lesson for you, for me to come to Jesus, to seek him, and to find him. You see, wise people will reject the hatred of the Herods of the time.

[26 : 46] So we read there in verse 12, people, and being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. They were wise in discerning where true worship and false worship was.

These wise men saw through the pretense of Herod and his intentions to worship Jesus. And wise people today will still heed the voice and hear the voice of God and turn aside from all the influences of the Herods of the world who have no love for the Savior.

But what about you? Are you wise in relation to Jesus? Or do you still have that foolish rejection of Jesus in your heart?

I pray that even in these days, the times that we're living in, that even these times will be a time when you seek the Lord, when you give him your heart, when you bow before the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and when you go in your way, rejoicing, knowing that you've met with Jesus.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, forgive us for the many times when we've had a false worship in our hearts, a pretended worship, but may we be as those who came to worship the King and to give him the treasure of our heart.

[28 : 12] We praise and glorify your name that you sent the Lord Jesus, as the greatest treasure of all. We never despise that gift, despise that true gift, but give him the glory.

Continue with us now, Lord, we pray. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.