Responses to the King

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Date: 21 December 2014

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[0:00] and you would capture the affections of our hearts with his grace. We ask this in his name. Amen. You may be seated. Well, this should be fun. I've never preached with about 40 people behind me.

If you want to add your two cents, just tug on my robes. We should be good to go. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 2. So we hear from God.
Verses 1 to 12. A lot of the songs that we sing during this Christmas season talk about a king. Have you noticed that? Let me give you a few examples from our own service.
Page 4. Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. Page 9.
Hark, the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn king. King. Page 10. Do you guys know the words to O Come, All Ye Faithful?
[1:04] Let's sing it together right now. First verse. O come, all ye faithful. Joyful and joyful.

We can stop it there now. We'll leave the rest of these guys. A king. That's what Christmas is about. Notice how these songs have picked up on the very heart of Christmas.
It's all about a king. Yes, Christmas includes lights and gifts and cookies. I like that last one, the cookies. Shortbread dipped in chocolate.
Christmas includes friends and family and fun, but that's not the main point. Christmas includes chaos and stress and frustration, too.
Christmas includes loneliness and pain and sorrow, but that's not the main point either. The main point is the king, because Christmas is all about the king.
[2:04] And this, my friends, is the major theme of Matthew 2, verses 1-12. Take a look at verse 2. Verse 2.

Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? Note the words carefully. Born king of the Jews. This is not a king that has to earn being king.
This is not a king who has to develop into being king. He is king from the very beginning, according to this question. Matthew makes this very clear in chapter 1.
Look at chapter 1, verse 23. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us.
So Jesus Christ, from the very beginning, and we're talking like ten pudgy little fingers and ten pudgy little toes, and yet this is the king from the very beginning.
[3:07] God with us. And Christmas is all about this king. Now what I want to do for the next ten minutes is I want you to consider the absolute audacity of this claim.

But I want you to consider it very personal. I'm going to ask you one question. How will you respond to this king this Christmas? That's the question.
How will you respond to this king this Christmas? Because that's the question that leaps off the page of Matthew's gospel. The whole passage is designed to highlight the different ways in which people respond to the king.
And so Matthew kind of compares and contrasts the response of the wise men over and against, on the one hand, the response of King Herod, and then over against, on the other hand, the response of the chief priests and the scribes.
So we're going to look at all three. King Herod, chief priests, scribes, wise men. First, King Herod. King Herod was a wonderfully well-known and powerful man in the ancient world.
[4:15] He was brilliant and belligerent. Ridiculous. There's this story that goes that before his death, when he knew he was coming close to his death, he actually got thousands of people and put them in an amphitheater and ordered them to be killed upon his death so that there would actually be weeping and wailing when he knew that he would have none otherwise.

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He was a complicated man. One scholar says he was racially Arab, religiously Jewish, culturally Greek, and politically Roman. He was the king.
And yet when this little baby is born, this king shudders and trembles with fear. Look at verse 3. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.
This little baby child posed a major threat to King Herod and he knew it. His kingdom was threatened. Another king was in town and he could not stand the thought of losing control of his life. He could not stand the thought of not being in charge. So what did he do? He responded with resistance and resentment and later on in chapter 2 ultimately with hostility towards Jesus.
[5:36] The fact is, friends, is that many people have and still do respond to the king in this way. And there may be many of us in this room who are resisting and resenting Jesus right now.

We don't want him to be king. We don't really want to follow him, at least not on his terms. The reality is, is that so much of our resistance to this king is because we love our own kingdom.
We want him to be the king of our own little world. Whether that's our particular family or whether that's our finances or whether that's our moral autonomy or whether that's our sexuality or whether that's our social status and how we're going to climb up the corporate ladder.
Whatever it be, we want just one area of our lives that we can say, this is mine and it belongs to no one else. I'm Kate. And oftentimes, it's not such a macho thing of us to want to be king, but it's because we're actually afraid of being weak and needy and ordinary before the truth.
We're afraid of admitting that our lives are actually fragile and failed. There's a sense in which Jesus does do exactly what Herod thinks he will do. He shows up and says, I'm the king.
[6:58] Get off all your self-made thrones. Come down. Come to me and follow me in my kingdom. There's a sense in which Jesus is the king who comes to challenge and question any king or kingdom, big or small, that will not bow to him.

So the real question is, friends, how will you respond? Will you resist? Second, let's look at the chief priests and scribes.
These were the religious and pious folk of the day. These were the educated and learned folk of the day. They devoted a lot of their time to studying the scriptures. They knew it kind of like the back of their hand.
And so what's the natural thing for King Herod to do when he hears about this Jewish king? He says, well, I'm going to call these guys. I'm going to talk to them. They know what they're talking about. So look at verses 4 to 6.
Assembling, Herod assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, Notice how there's no movement after verse 7.
[8:27] It goes straight on to Herod again. In this text, we see Herod resisting Jesus. We see the wise men going towards Jesus. But we see the scribes and Pharisees just giving the biblical answer and doing nothing.

They're not even curious about who he is. They remain calm and cool and collected and keep their composure. In a word, they're simply indifferent.
They don't care that much. It's knowledge with no conviction. It's head with no heart. It's familiarity with no power. And the thing is, is that indifference is actually worse in many cases than hostility towards Jesus.
Because indifference is so much more subtle. You can go through the motions. You can show up to all the right things. You can say all the right things.
Indifference and indifference can go unnoticed. All the while inside, you're fostering a cold hardness of heart towards the king. Many people have and still do respond to the king this way.
[9:36] Maybe there are some of us in this room who are indifferent towards this Jesus. And friends, I think this is particularly challenging for us here at St. Thomas. We can hear Christmas story after Christmas story, year after year.

And is it failing to actually blow our minds in our categories? You can hear the gospel preached Sunday after Sunday. But does it move our hearts? We can go to Bible study week after week. But do we start to lose interest? Because slowly and surely, we can find ourselves spiritually dry, lifeless, unmotivated, indifferent, and maybe even cynical.
Not sure why we're Christians anymore, but we're just going through the motions. And we're no longer captured by the glory of Jesus Christ. Maybe some of us here know that experience.

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I've felt that plenty of times in my life. If you're in this place, I think Jesus has a word of challenge and a word of comfort for you. I think it's a word of challenge first.
[10:40] Don't settle for indifference to the king. We have to fight against this indifference that is in our hearts. Jesus Christ himself in Revelation chapter 3 spoke to a church that was beginning to become lukewarm about him.

And he said to them, I see your life. And I see that you are neither cold nor hot. But would that you are either cold or hot. Jesus does not like indifference.
Yet to that same church that he spoke words of challenge, he spoke words of comfort. Later on in that passage, he says, Behold, I stand at the door and I knock.
Let me come in and open the door and I will dine with you and make my home in you. There's a sense in which this Jesus that we are indifferent towards knocks at the door of our lives and is pursuing us.
It says you can open it and you can experience radical new life. You don't have to be indifferent to him. You can know what it's like to dine with him. You can know what it's like to have fellowship with this king.
[11:51] The question for you, friends, is how will you respond? Will you remain indifferent?
Finally, let's look at the wise men.

They're a bit happier folk. These wise men were most likely Gentiles, pagans as they would have been called, from the Arab world. And they understand how to respond to the king.
They respond first by seeking him. Friends, they traveled hundreds of miles in the desert, walking a long distance to get to see this child.
Hundreds of miles to see him. Then they respond by rejoicing. Look down at verse 9. I mean verse 10.
When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. They knew what they were about to see was cause for abundance of joy.
[12:55] And notice the language of abundance. It doesn't say, and they rejoiced. It doesn't say, and they rejoiced exceedingly. And they rejoiced exceedingly with joy. It says, and they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

It's as if Luke is trying to say, as they have stumbled across the greatest source of joy that the world has ever seen or known. And they're thrilled that they get to be there to see it.
It's astounding, the joy. Friends, do you have joy this Christmas? Is the fact that Jesus Christ is coming to the world and that he's coming again, give your heart joy.
Are you thrilled by that fact? Are you more excited that he is coming than you are that gifts are coming? Is that what gives your heart joy?
Is that what makes you come here and want to sing tonight? Because that's why we're here. And then they worship.
[13:53] Notice how they fall down. Anytime people see God in the Bible, they end up falling down. Please don't miss the extreme normality of this domestic situation.

I got this great privilege a few years ago. My best friend was having his first child. And I was a bachelor at the time, and I still don't have kids, so I have no clue about this stuff.
He invited me to come live with him, literally, from the second they brought their first child home for the first week. I'm experiencing what it's like, and it was chaos. It was awesome.
I'd wake up on the couch at three in the morning, and she would be nursing and eating food, and he would be figuring out what the words are supposed to be. But the point is, is that we get this picture of this kind of pristine Mary sitting there with Jesus and glory and halos all around.
But this was a normal family. I mean, the shepherds walked, I mean, not the shepherds, the wise men walked into a situation where Mary was probably slipping off having to nurse quite often.
[14:59] Joseph and the others were trying to figure out what in the world am I supposed to do. The house was probably in utter disarray. There were probably grandparents and relatives and friends and neighbors coming in and doting over this newborn child.

It was normal, and it was domestic, and it was familiar, and it was unassuming. And all of a sudden, these wise men show up, and they fall on the ground, and they start worshiping. They start worshiping.
Right in the midst of the chaos and the mess of daily life, they start worshiping. What do they do? They open their treasure boxes.

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A few years ago, my brother gave me a Christmas gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What am I supposed to do to that?
It came in a nice little box, and you open the little box, and it had kind of this red suede. It sounds fancier than it is. It probably cost me like $15. And, you know, they give you a little vase with a few gold flakes in there.
[16:07] And then they give you some frankincense, which is kind of this whitish, rock-like, milky resin that comes from trees in South Arabia. And then they give you some myrrh, which is kind of a reddish resin that comes from other trees in South Arabia.

And the thing is, is that these gifts are significant. Gold is a gift that is fit for a king. And so what they're doing is they are honoring him.
They're saying, take the best of what I have. You are worthy of the glory and the honor. Here's what I have, my gold. They give him their treasures. Frankincense is a gift fit for God.
In the ancient world, this was burned as incense during prayer services or worship services. And so when they give him this, it's as if they are hailing him as God and offering him all their prayers and all their devotion.
And then myrrh is a gift fit for a dead body. It's a reddish color, and it was used as a spice in embalming ceremonies, and then actually burned as incense during burial services.
[17:19] In the Old Testament, gold and frankincense is given to kings, but not myrrh. But not this king. Not this king. This king, from the very beginning, gets gold, yes, because he's the king.

He gets frankincense, yes, because he's God. But he gets myrrh, yes, because why is he coming into the world? He's coming to be the king who will go to the cross. And that will be the way that he shows the world he is really king.
From the very beginning, he is coming to go to the cross. And the wise men travel great lengths to lay all their gifts down before this king, and to hail him as the Lord of the universe.
And the question that God wants to ask you and me now is, how will you respond to the king this Christmas? How will you? Will you resist?
Will you remain indifferent? Or will you bow down and give him everything you have and glad adoration? Which will you choose? In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
[18:31] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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