

Matthew 2 “Let Earth Receive Her King”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Matthew has been telling us in his gospel about the entrance into the world of the Christ, the promised King.

Now, when kings enter, usually they make a grand entrance, right? You know, atop a horse surrounded by royal servants, sometimes with their own song played as they come in.

But here with these two peasants in a little town of Bethlehem, there's not a lot of the normal pomp and circumstance. Because Jesus is not a normal king, is he?

He came not to be served, but to serve. He came not to fight people to death, but to love people to life. He came not to demand that his subjects give their lives for him, but to give his life for them.

[1 : 09] But while he does make a quiet entrance in some ways, Matthew doesn't want us to miss what God's doing. Who the true king is.

Notice as I read Matthew chapter 2. All the different things God is doing. All the different ways that God is pointing people to Jesus as the king of kings.

The one that you don't want to miss. Matthew 2. God's holy word. 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.

And 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.

[2 : 21] 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.

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. 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.

And 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.

[3 : 31] And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping in loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children. She refused to be comforted because they are no more.

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.

And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

[4 : 51] Thus far, God's holy word. Will you pray with me? Father, thank you for the gift of your word, for this account of what happened when the king came.

And I pray that as familiar as the story may be to us, that we would, in a fresh way this morning, see our king. We would receive our king.

We would worship our king. And that is only gonna happen if your spirit works in our hearts. And so we ask for that, and we trust you for it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. In chapter one, if you've been here the last couple of weeks, Matthew told us that this baby born to Mary and Joseph was the Christ, the Messiah King.

Was Emmanuel, God with us? Was Jesus, Savior from sins? And now in chapter two, it's as though he takes a bunch of really bright, flashing arrows to point to the baby and say, King, King, King.

[6 : 04] Look at everything coming together at this moment in history. I'm just gonna point out a few. At first, God shows us several Old Testament prophecies from hundreds of years past being fulfilled in this child.

In other words, don't miss this, the story of Israel's scriptures, hundreds and hundreds of years of the holy scriptures. In other words, the story of the history of humankind is about this baby, this Jesus.

First, he quotes from the prophet Micah because the religious advisors to Herod go there to find where the Messiah should be born. This is the most direct of the prophecies being fulfilled.

Perhaps not where you would expect a king to be born, but yes, indeed, they confirm, if you're looking for the king of the Jews, go to Bethlehem. That's a big, bright arrow.

Everyone was clear on that. Nowhere else to look for the Messiah to be born except Bethlehem.

Now, the next three prophecies in this passage are a bit different.

[7 : 21] They're less direct, but they show the significance of this newborn king. The angel tells Joseph to leave Bethlehem and go to Egypt, which we learn will protect him from Herod's murderous plans that threatened the promised king's life within weeks or months of his birth.

Yes, sadly, if you're calculating that the wise men are not there with the shepherds the first Christmas night, I know it messes with me too. It's not the way it's supposed to be, but it is definitely less than two years.

They're there. They show up. Regardless of the exact timing, Matthew says what's really going on is something bigger. Matthew wants to connect the dots to the big story, okay?

This time, it's the prophet Hosea, another prophet who speaks for God, saying, out of Egypt, I called my son. In Hosea, the immediate reference is to the Israelites as God's son.

It's a very common way God referred to his people. God called them out of Egypt, didn't he? He delivered them out of bondage. The greatest redemption in the history of Israel recounted generation after generation.

[8 : 36] And now, God says, in this baby, this new Israel, the true Israel, my son, is coming out of Egypt.

A new redemption, right? A great deliverance is coming. But it won't come without a lot of heartache, just like the first time.

Herod, in a megalomaniacal effort to protect his dynasty. It's all he cares about. And this fits with other accounts of Herod's last years.

He decides to kill Jewish boys under the age of two in Bethlehem. We don't know exactly, perhaps 20 or 30 young boys.

But even one is terrible, right? Can you imagine? Weeping. Loud lamentation. Rachel weeping.

[9 : 34] Rachel is the wife of Jacob, whose name was Israel. So the figurative mother of the people of Israel, the whole nation, weeping.

In this Exodus mindset here, the scene recalls the killing of Israelite boys in Egypt, from which Moses is delivered in a basket in the river.

But the prophet quoted here is actually hundreds of years later. It's Jeremiah, a third prophet, writing of the Israelites. They're weeping. Why? They're weeping as they're taken into exile, out of the promised land.

No more. They're not here. And yet, Jeremiah 31, quoted here, is a chapter primarily of promise. That even in the darkest days for God's people, there will be return to God, covenant relationship, future hope.

[10 : 36] Friends, listen, never let deep weeping convince you that there won't be joy in the morning. Even if that morning is far away, this God is faithful.

He can be trusted. Here is the true king entering in the midst of the painful desperation of God's people. He doesn't just come when everybody's happy so they can celebrate together.

He comes to bring hope when you're hurting. In fact, the darker the night, the brighter his light shines. I think perhaps Christmas is most clearly seen through tears.

don't lose heart. When the king is here, the true king is here, there's hope. And the final fulfillment is a bit more obscure.

Look at verse 23. What was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled that he would be called a Nazarene. I say obscure because see, there's no prophet that says that directly.

[11 : 45] That Jesus would be from Nazareth like Micah tells us he'll be born in Bethlehem. Matthew may be making a play on words. Here, that's possible.

That prophecy that was read earlier in the service from Isaiah 11 about the righteous branch from Jesse's stump because the Hebrew word for Nazareth sounds like the Hebrew word for branch. Could be. But he says here prophets, plural. So I think likely it means what the Jews would have understood Nazareth to mean.

Nazareth was a reference to what? Nothing good comes from Nazareth. Nowhere Nazareth.

And many prophets discussed the Messiah being of no reputation, despised, rejected, and so forth. Jesus is gonna fit that description.

[12 : 46] There are many other prophecies, hundreds of them, that Jesus fulfills in various ways. But just in this passage, just in this moment after his birth, do you see God is pointing the bright flashing arrows at this unique child?

He's saying special messages have been sent, birth announcements, for hundreds of years. You've never sent birth announcements a hundred years in advance, have you? No, you weren't that sure. They've pointed to this day, he says. Don't miss it. Notice how God's also working in international politics. The people, the leaders, the events of the day to bring his king into the world in just the right way.

Have you ever thought about that? How Mary and Joseph ended up in Bethlehem where the Messiah was gonna have to be born? Was it just some magical happenstance? God providentially orchestrated the Roman Caesar who thought that life was all about him to issue a decree for a census, right, of the entire Roman world.

Once again, here in this passage, the hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord. He is controlling all of these events. In fact, we'll come back to the magi themselves, but he brings these people, we don't know how many of them, on a long journey from a foreign country to get the attention of King Herod.

[14 : 21] Herod the king. Herod the king. Twice for emphasis. See, this whole story is about who the true king is, isn't it? Does Herod really seem like the king?

Does he seem in control here, scrambling for advice, fearing for his power, raging at any rival or rumor of one that comes up? He's a human leader.

Human leaders seek to deceive like Herod's direction to the magi about this child. Human leaders do wicked things like ordering the killing of other people.

Human leaders ultimately rise and fall like Herod and his son Archelaus. They're coming and going and yet the divine leader is the one in charge.

God is using each of these events and the people there to take Jesus to Egypt, to bring him back to Israel, to divert them to exactly the right place in Nazareth.

[15 : 27] God's up to something. God is at work way beyond any human king who thinks he's in charge. Even in the midst of grievous tragedy like the deaths of little boys in the little town of

Bethlehem.

Now God's still working gloriously to highlight the identity of the true king across national borders against all odds. Jesus will reign on David's throne.

Imposter Herod? No way. Prophecies. Politics. And that's not all God is using to highlight the arrival of his promised king.

There are several extraordinary communications here in this passage, aren't there? And we see and watch God supernaturally superintending the whole story through these communications. teachings. Notice how the passage is marked by dreams, isn't it? If you like dreams you probably noticed that. First a dream to the magi and then three more times in addition to the one in chapter one to Joseph.

[16:37] I mean this guy's not getting to sleep at all. I mean every night repeatedly the angel of the Lord the messenger of God brings clear direction to the point that Jews and Gentiles obey without hesitation.

God is speaking. God is directing. God wants them to know where to go so they don't miss it. Which brings us to the most prominent and famous divine communication in the story.

Right? The star. God, the creator king is also directing all of his creation, all of nature to point to the promised king.

Now there are a lot of explanations you can read out there for what's going on in the sky, this possible phenomenon. What kind of star or supernova or divine light.

I am sure there are a lot of you in here who know more than I do about what's going on in the sky. People talk about why it moved. How it showed the magi exactly where Jesus was.

[17:43] Some of the discussion is quite interesting and I would commend it to you. some of it honestly is quite distracting from the real point. The passage is very clearly saying that the star brought them to Jerusalem and then it directed them specifically, however it did it, to the king of the Jews so that they could worship him.

In fact, it seems quite clear for example from the dream where God speaks to them that God is the one directing these stargazers from the east.

Right? This is something he's organized. Maybe these guys coming were from Babylon or Persia and they'd heard some of Daniel's prophecies there about this coming king of the Jews.

He wrote those prophecies while he lived there. Maybe they'd been watching for signs for a long time intrigued by this God who delivered his people so powerfully. We're not sure.

There's a lot of things we don't know about the star but we know that God is using anything and everything to bring the nations to worship the true king.

[18:55] That's what's going on. Quite remarkable in fact that something in the sky would lead them there because God has actually repeatedly through the Old Testament told his people not to read messages in the stars.

There are warnings against astrology but here God himself speaks the language of the wise men if you will.

He leads them straight to the king they seek. I just love this about our God. Think about what he's doing. Yes, there are prophecies there for the religious scholars but who gets the messages about Jesus?

There are also angels sent to lowly left out shepherds to bring them to the king. And then there are dreams and a star sent to reach these misguided wise men from pagan nations to bring them to the king.

God wants everyone everywhere to see this king doesn't he? The king is not coming primarily for the royal family to strengthen his dynasty.

[20:12] Not primarily for the religious insiders to polish up their morality a bit. Not primarily for the powerful warriors who will extend his reign most effectively.

No, he seems to be the king of those who don't have a kingdom. The king of those who don't deserve a good king. the king of all of everyone everywhere.

That's who he is. And by the way that's exactly who the prophets have told us to expect. Many of them tell of the Messiah for the nations.

In a new way the Gentiles are going to hear the good news. Let me just show you a little from the prophet Isaiah. Is the king of the Jews the king of the Jews only?

Isaiah 11 the branch from Jesse's stump will bring the new world order of peace and joy and the peoples the nations shall come to his signal his banner.

[21 : 17] Isaiah 49 the servant Messiah coming to bring God's people back to him. That's not enough. That's not big enough for what God's up to. It is important that he is also the light to the nations.

Isaiah 60 nations shall come to the promised king's light kings to his rising and here they are right? From the east wise men bowing down just as God promised he pulls out all the stops prophecies politics dreams stars bringing the nations to bow before the king of kings at the very beginning of the gospel written to show the Jews their Christ who their Messiah is they're reminded that their king is for the nations how huge is God's heart right for everyone everywhere do you share that heart?

if you follow the Christmas story the Bible's version of the Christmas story the baby born in Bethlehem will lead you to the nations praying giving going whatever it looks like to share tidings of comfort and joy to tell it on the mountain we sing and that the fact that that's who this child is is yet more evidence that he is indeed the promised king of kings see God wants everyone everywhere to see who the true king is and to respond appropriately how do you respond to a king showing up? interestingly enough it's not always easy to respond appropriately to a king is it? I remember when I was a boy going to play a game called king of the hill we'd play during the high school football games when I was younger and you'd find a good hill maybe you've seen this before it would have worked really well as a children's moment but Derek missed the opportunity you have one kid stand up here and he pushes all the other ones down right?

whoever can stay up on the hill it would have been great y'all would have loved it and he is king of the hill as long as he can stay on top not my favorite game I didn't like all the pushing and shoving but I like kind of sneaking in the side and whenever one kid would kind of get on top and right as he yelled I'm king of the hill I like to try to knock his feet out from under him and make him seem not so big and strong I just didn't really want to face him maybe Herod played that game as a boy what happens when he hears about a potential king of the Jews someone climbing the hill toward him he's troubled angry worried we know from other historical sources that Herod became frantic and paranoid about protecting his throne during his latter years he attempts to exert control doesn't he through the magi and then when they don't play along he is furious the word ramps up he orders the killing of young boys in an effort to eliminate a threat to his dynasty and maybe your first response to that is that is crazy and rightly so you're not wrong but stop to think how we respond when our control is threatened when our sovereign rule over our self is challenged when our autonomy the great unchallenged assumed good of modern

[25 : 21] America our sacred freedom to manage our own lives the way we want when that's taken away how do we respond we protect our hill our throne passionately don't we have you ever felt something like Jesus you are disrupting my plans for my life your rules your priorities your providences in my life they're really frustrating sometimes Jesus will you let God ask you today what he asked Jonah after Nineveh repented he said do you do right to be angry that's a hard question are you like me needing to repent of self protective control wanting to have things my way whether that's the way

God wants them or not I don't care all the time I just want them to be my way I forget who the true king is and that it's not me see that kind of anger will eat you alive from the inside and it will spill over to destroy others too still happens just as it did with Herod the more power you have and the more protective you are of your power the more devastation you'll tend to leave in your wake if you refuse to bow the knee to king Jesus that's one bad response maybe a little more familiar painfully to us now but it's interesting that Herod was not the only one troubled at the news of a coming king was he it says all of Jerusalem with him everybody stirred up about this it's a big deal in town and so

Herod turns to these Jewish chief priests and scribes they're the religious and the social leaders of the day among the Jews and they locate the birthplace immediately Bethlehem nailed it the king awaited for generations is being born in Bethlehem look they open it up they read it your ruler is here your shepherd is here they all see it and so they organize a search party no so they call for a coronation and start planning the celebration no so they rearrange their schedules to join the magi on their journey to be among the first to see the promised Christ they've been waiting for no isn't that odd the very people who knew the most notice he assembled all of them but none of them can

make the six mile journey to

Bethlehem on behalf of King Herod he has to send foreigners to find the baby and report back meanwhile we got lots to do in Jerusalem they got the right answer they knew facts about the child but they missed the child they missed the whole thing can you relate to that is life pretty busy just a little so so so much so sometimes that it distracts you from making a priority of Jesus I mean you hang around the church enough to know plenty of things about him or maybe you don't maybe you avoid church altogether but you went to church as a child or you been on the internet recently you know some stuff but if you're honest you've got important things going on in your life I've got to enjoy college only got a few years I've got to advance my career how else am I going to be successful I've got to enjoy my grandchildren good things but is anything causing you to miss the king your schedule your commitments your religious duty even is there any chance that your life looks pretty similar to what it would look like if Jesus had never been born are you like the other good people in Jerusalem accidentally perhaps indifferent to the true king y'all may that not be true in our lives accidental indifference distracted indifference let's repent of that indifference today to celebrate

[30 : 50] Christmas afresh it's not too late to turn from the busyness to be honest and say Jesus I've been missing you maybe for days maybe for years but I don't want to miss you anymore God wants me to see you as king see God is highlighting the true king so that everyone everywhere will respond appropriately that earth that's all of us and all of creation let earth receive her king which means according to the song that I really like that every heart must prepare him room have you thought about that how do you prepare room for a king there is one way you make it his you vacate the throne right you clear the hill he can have it repentance and faith you focus all that place in this case your heart if you're preparing your heart you focus all of it on him you want to know how worthy king

Jesus is of your heart's attention and affection just watch the magi it's beautiful I don't even know all they knew or understood about Jesus probably less than the scribes in Jerusalem but they came likely on a journey of months to worship him they put their lives on hold to be with him they were the furthest thing from indifferent weren't they they worshipped him and not just a going through the motions kind of worship because it was Christmas and there were some fun songs to sing and they thought they'd show up no verse 10 they rejoiced exceedingly!

with great joy that's four times a lot of joy in case you didn't notice then when they saw Jesus they fell down and worshipped him clearly he's the king of more than the Jews if these foreigners are already bowing before him and then they bring him gifts gifts worthy of a king for sure costly sacrificial gifts perhaps indicating more than they understood about the identity of the king gold for a king who would be the perfect priest and sacrifice frankincense who would die and be buried for our sins myrrh but for sure giving their best to the one who deserved it all and then they obeyed what God told them in a dream see they're really clear on who the true king!

is aren't they and it's not easy Herod seems to have the power right I mean maybe these guys just came to curry favor from a nearby king butter him up a little bit improve relationships no they came to bow before the true king heartfelt joy humble!

worship sacrificial giving willing obedience the response that God wants everyone everywhere to have to his son given to us worship Christ he says the newborn king won't you come this morning and bow before him with all that you are with all that you have listen if you're someone who hears that invitation but you feel far off from God if you're honest you're like I don't know I would have a lot of questions to answer I would have a lot of things to figure out I would have a lot of stuff that probably needs to be changed in my life before I could even hear or consider that look the invitation of this king is come today you don't have to figure all the other stuff out he is a king who welcomes the worship of those who are far off who just come to bow before him if this is the very first day you've ever heard an Old

[35 : 17] Testament prophecy you've never even heard of it in your life God has indeed arranged the circumstances the events of your life and the people that you don't even know about so that you can be here today and hear this good news then come and worship Jesus born to die for you to rise and live forever for you and for me come worship him today maybe you're more of a nearby person maybe you're surrounded by the things of God Christmas feels like it comes all the time you're quoting the prophecies yourself now but you're just kind of waiting for an extraordinary communication from God and then you'll rearrange your life for Jesus you need to take this

passage as a warning as well as an invitation warning it is easy to drift into indifference about Jesus especially when you're surrounded by all of these things all the things of God around you all the time it's easy to drift and to miss the fact that God has communicated extraordinarily through his son not by a dream not by a star this time but by his very son come in the flesh there's no more extraordinary communication come for you that is the point of Matthew 2 the king has come he's here friends come and worship slow down and worship repent and worship bring gifts and worship change your schedule and worship do what he says and worship it could be Christmas in a new way for you even though you're here every year this Christmas I urge you there are many good things on your calendars in the next few days I'm quite sure there are many important people there is only one worthy of your worship bow in worship for a while this Christmas start right now make time this afternoon figure out how you're going to bow in worship right now and then one day at a time next year worship with all you are and all you have worship Christ the newborn king let's pray God may our hearts hear that call as we hear your word and as you bring us to bow down would you help us by your spirit that life may not be about us that the hurry may not be the focus of the next few days but that King Jesus would be on the throne of our hearts would you prepare our hearts! for that we ask in his name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org