

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 2. And I just want us to look at that first section, from the beginning really, to verse 11.

I'm not going to read it again, just read the very beginning. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, and 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. As we know, the birth of a baby is normally a time of great excitement, great joy, great pleasure.

Of course, sometimes we know that things can go wrong, and turning from what should be great joy and great happiness brings terrible trauma and pain and suffering and anxiety and sorrow.

But when a baby is born into the world, we always ask ourselves, it's one of the natural things we would ask, I wonder what he, I wonder what she will do in life.

[1 : 20] Because at that moment, here at the beginning of a new life, we have no idea what this potential, this baby will realize in life.

And I'm sure that as Mary and Joseph and the wise men looked at Jesus, although they all knew that Jesus was special, I don't think any of them could anticipate or appreciate or understand just how incredible the Lord Jesus Christ is and was going to be.

So we find here that Jesus has been born into the world. And that in itself is quite an extraordinary thing. Because what we've got to remember is that the second person of the Godhead, the Son of God, had always been, has always been.

That this is where we come to areas that we just simply don't understand. We so often say it's a mystery. The Bible tells us it's a mystery.

And mysteries remain mysteries. Because while we believe all it teaches us and lay hold upon these things, there are aspects of it we simply can't understand.

[2 : 42] And so we find here that the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, as God had always been. But at this particular point, he took to himself what he never had before.

He took human nature. He came into this world. God sent the Father, sent him into this world, to be our representative.

To do for us what we couldn't do ourselves. So that meant that Jesus had to be everything that we are apart from sin. Every single thing.

So that the emotional life of Jesus was very similar to ours. He experienced happiness and sadness. He knew what it was to laugh, and he knew what it was to cry.

Jesus experienced all these different type of emotions that we do. And the Word of God shows us very clearly some of these experiences. He was somebody who knew in his body what it was like to be tired.

[3 : 50] He knew what pain was like. He was exactly like you and me. Apart from one difference, he didn't have sin. His life was one of moral perfection.

As we heard last Sunday, we were talking about his temptation. And the whole weight of temptation that was placed upon him. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

That really is quite an extraordinary thing in all points. Every temptation. Think about it. All the temptations. You sometimes say to yourself, I sometimes used to say to myself, Surely Jesus wasn't tempted here.

Surely Jesus wasn't tempted with this or with that. Yes, he was. In all points. That's what the Bible says. So we can't say, oh, there's only certain areas that Jesus was tempted in.

No. He was tempted in everything. Absolutely everything. And so it's really quite extraordinary. So here he is. And he had to be in order to be our representative.

[4 : 53] And yet he had never to yield to temptation. His whole life was one of living in complete obedience to the law. And so we find that the Son of God, here he is.

He is born into this world in our nature. And of course that's really what separates the Christian faith from every other religion in the world.

Because every other founder of all the religions had a beginning. There was a point when they came into being. With regard to the Christian faith, although there was a point when Jesus, when Christ took human nature to himself, there was never a point when he wasn't.

He is from everlasting to everlasting. When this world was made, he was involved in the making of this world. He is God, fully God.

But it was at this particular point that he took human nature to himself. And he did so just in a similar way in which we are brought into this world through the birth of a baby, through the growing of a baby in the womb.

[6 : 14] And in a miraculous way, an amazing way, there was that conception took place in Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. And through, though Jesus was made of her substance in the same way that any baby is formed within the womb, yet the Holy Spirit kept him free from all defilement, from all sin that is natural to the human nature.

And so it's really, that's why we say it is the great mystery. But it's essential for us to understand who the Son of God is, who this Jesus is.

Yes, he's man, as human as you and I. But he is God, and we must never, ever lose sight of that fact, the God-man. Now, the amazing thing here we find is that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem, because that in itself is quite remarkable.

We're told in verse 6, we have this prophecy, O Bethlehem and 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.

In fact, it's in the bulletin, that quote. But it's quite amazing that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem, because naturally speaking, now we've looked at this before, but we've got to highlight it again.

[7 : 41] And it shows the sovereign control of God, because normally Jesus should not have been born in Bethlehem, except for the fact that Caesar Augustus, who was the king, had made a decree that there was to be a world census, where everybody had to go and register.

It was this time that every so often a census was taken, so that there had to be an understanding of all the personnel in different places. But you weren't just to go, I suppose they didn't have district offices in these days, but I don't know what they had.

But you weren't just to go to the place where you were living. You had to go back to where your roots were, where your people originally came from.

So there was a lot of crisscrossing of the land. And here we have Joseph and Mary, away up in the north, but they have to go down to the south, right down to Bethlehem, because that's where Joseph originally came from.

So that's where he had to go to register. So here's this heathen, pagan, ruler, Caesar, who has no idea of the scriptures, no idea of the prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, no conception whatever, that the Son of God is coming into this world.

[9 : 07] He orders this decree, so that we find Mary and Joseph making their long trek all the way to Bethlehem.

And that would be a long journey. I cycled it way, way, way back when, I can't remember, 1993, without doing this for the Nazareth Hospital.

And to travel that on foot and on donkey, and particularly for somebody who was expectant, was a real arduous task.

But anyway, that's what happened. And of course, we find that Mary arrives, and Joseph in Bethlehem, just at the time when Mary is to give birth.

So it's wonderful, just, I just find it so amazing, that it shows us how God is in absolute control of every single thing.

[10 : 08] And I think it's very important for us to understand that, because sometimes we lose sight of that, and we forget that God's in control, and he governs every single thing.

He's not only in control of people, he's in control of birds, of animals. You remember Elijah. And Elijah was hiding beside this brook, and there was no way of getting food.

What did the Lord do? He ordered ravens to bring food to Elijah. Now, normally, ravens would just gobble up if they got meat and food.

But these birds, which would normally devour any food, they pick it up, and they fly all the way, and they bring it down to Elijah. And Elijah eats it.

It's amazing. Daniel in the den of lions, he spent that night with the lions, and they were like tame pussycats, because the Lord had closed the mouths of the lion.

[11 : 06] These were the lions that were kept to kill and to eat prisoners. Incredibly cruel. That's what they did. And that night, these lions were, as I say, as tame as pussycats, because God is in control.

And this is the amazing thing. David, when he went out to fight Goliath, he knew that. He had killed a lion, and he had killed a bear, but he knew it was God who helped him. He told King Saul, I'm not afraid of that man, because I'm going out in the power of God.

God is in control. The God who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, he'll deliver me out of the hand of this man who's blaspheming your name.

Do we have that sense of the rule, the power, the authority, the control of God? We need to.

There's a lot of people who think that they're masters of their own destiny.

We're not. Supposing we have all the power and all the authority and all the riches in the world, we still are not masters of our own destiny. You can make every plan you want, but there is no guarantee that that plan will work out.

[12 : 18] And we discover that we in our own lives, how many plans have we made that have fallen apart? Because we're not ultimately in control. Things change.

And that's why it is so important for us to look to the Lord, to lean upon him and to ask him to guide us in the right way because, you know, we don't know the right way.

We think we do. That's why it's so important. Lord, lead me in the right way. You know what the Lord says to us? I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you shall go.

I will guide you with mine eye. Now that's God's promise. And that's why we should go to the Lord and say, Lord, see that word you have there in the Psalm, Psalm 32.

Please make that true in my life. Guide me in the right way so that I will know your path. I will know the right way to go because when I go that way, I will know your blessing.

[13 : 20] That doesn't mean that everything is going to go smooth, but you still know that you're in the right way. And God will prosper in that particular way. But anyway, we find that Jesus, Joseph, sorry, and Mary have gone to Bethlehem and the time, of course, of her birth, the time had come.

And we find that Jesus has been born. So we're told that 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 was born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it arose. And we find here this quite remarkable thing. And just before we come to look at the wise men, I often think about Mary.

It's a wonder for carrying a child must be quite an extraordinary thing for any woman to do and to bring a child into this world. is probably the most miraculous thing that any mother has the privilege and the opportunity to do.

But for Mary, she knew that the child she had was special. She knew that this was the Savior, although there was an awful lot she wouldn't understand.

[14 : 41] I think Mary is quite, we could spend, I'm not going to just, I don't want to digress too much, and it's worth a sermon in Zed. I think Mary is quite simply one of the most extraordinary women that is shown us in the Bible.

Mary is not somebody special, as some people think. There is no way to God through Mary. Mary was a sinner in the same way as you and me.

And you know what? Mary needed her son that she brought into this world to be her Savior. He wasn't just her son, he was her Savior as well, which is a quite remarkable thing.

That's how it was. But Mary's faith was extraordinary. She believed everything that was told her of God. Yes, she was highly favored among women, but her faith and her submission before God is really quite extraordinary.

She's a wonderful example of not just of motherhood, but of holy devotion to God. and we sometimes, I think, maybe are guilty of bypassing Mary for the very simple reason that we're afraid of elevating Mary.

[15 : 53] Well, we're not elevating Mary above anybody else, but it's an awful tragedy if we neglect her because she was a quite remarkable Christian woman, a great child of God, although she became the mother of the Son of God.

Anyway, we find when Jesus is born, we find two totally different reactions from the two, well, the two groups of people.

There's only one person and then there's a group of people. On the one hand you have the wise men and on the other hand you have Herod. You couldn't have a more extreme reaction. And you know, it's still the reaction that takes place in this world today.

Either people are for Christ or they're against him. Herod stands for those who are against Christ. Herod is the extreme example of those who are not just against Christ but they're so opposed to Christ and everything that Christ stands for that they want him removed.

Herod had only one aim in his mind. This, Christ, has to die. Got to get rid of him. It's very interesting that 33 years later after the birth of Jesus that another of the Herods is involved in the death of Jesus.

[17 : 10] Well, here's Herod the Great and he was an awful man. He murdered his favorite wife. He murdered quite a lot of his sons. He was a man who was known for slaughter.

A terrible character. But he stands for the spirit that is still here today throughout our land that is opposed to Christ, that wants rid of Christ, that wants rid of the Bible, that wants rid of Christian faith, that wants rid of Christian teaching, that wants anything to do with the Christian life out of schools, out of politics, out of, they're wanting society to be secular and that the Christian faith should have no influence, no input, no voice in all the different strands of society.

I would hate to live in a society where that is the case. That God is not, not that they can ever take God out of the picture, but you know what, if they get their way and the Lord says, all right, I'm going to give you, if that's what you want nationally, if that's what you want, I'm going to leave you, leave you to yourself, to your own devices, to your own wisdom.

Our nation will just go down and down. It will become even more and more and more chaotic. And that's why it is so important that we seek the Lord, that we pray that the Lord will never leave us to ourselves, that his influence in all the different strands of society will still be.

And we've got to thank God for the many, many people who love him and who are voices and influences for good in so many different ways, often in very quiet ways.

[19 : 00] But they are acting as salt and light in all the different areas, of society and we give thanks to God for that. But anyway, we find these wise men, the other side, they have come from the east and their hearts are full of love.

And they come asking about this Jesus. And it's very interesting that Herod calls for the chief priests and the scribes and he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

And they told him in Bethlehem of Judea and so on. And we have to ask ourselves, I suppose, to a certain extent about these wise men. They've always intrigued us.

Who are they? Where did they come from? And such like. Well, the thing what I love about these wise men above everything else is their desperation to find the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not so much where they came from. It's not so much who they were. It's not so much what they brought. What I love about them is the example they set us of seeking for Jesus.

[20 : 06] They sought diligently. They searched diligently. They were not going to give up. It didn't matter what came. They were determined they were going to find the Lord Jesus.

And they did. And that is always the outcome of those who really seek. And I've said it so often but I'm going to say it again. If you really seek Jesus you will find him.

His word guarantees you. It's not me who's saying it. His word tells us if we diligently if we truly seek the Lord Jesus we will find him. If you're seeking Jesus today and you're so far you're saying you know I haven't found him.

He is the one I really want for my life. Guaranteed you will find him. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But you will find him. If you continue to seek you will find that's what the word of God tells us.

So we find these wise men who have come. Now it would indicate to us that these were men who were in the east.

[21 : 10] We don't know exactly where. In all probability there were people who were in sort of Persia or Babylon over in that direction. And there were men who we believe were given to the

study yes of the stars and like the whole way of astronomy but also given to studying sacred writings.

They were men who delved into all these things. And we've got to remember that way back the Jews had been taken into captivity and there were many many Jews of Jewish descent living in these places in the Persia and Babylon and all these places in the east.

And there is in my mind no question but that these men in their studies had come to an understanding of what God was prophesying about his son about the Messiah about the Christ. And it tells us that they say here that for we saw his star. Now other people wonder what on earth is this. Well where I think that they were studying the prophecy is if you go back into Numbers a prophecy was given there of the star that would come out of Jacob.

And I think that this is all tied into what they're seeing that these are people who came to understand and you might say how on earth did they come to understand? Well I believe very simply through the Holy Spirit of God.

[22 : 42] And that an amazing thing was happening here. That although the Son of God was coming to the Jews as was promised we also know that the impact of the coming of the Son of God was to be global.

And God is showing at the very birth of his Son into this world that they're going to be coming from all parts of the world. So here we have people coming from way outside the borders of the land outside Palestine and they're coming.

A picture of what is going to happen and continue to happen and it's happening right up until this very day. So here they are seeing this star and a lot of people wonder what kind of star was it? Well I don't think there's, again it's my own it's not my own but I believe I've read this and I have no doubt to believe that this was an instance of the Shekinah glory.

A token of the divine glory. This star that they saw. Just in the same way as you have that pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led the Israelites.

[23 : 53] The flaming sword in Eden. The glory that shone in the temple and the mercy seat. The glory of God there. The Shekinah glory. I believe that that was simply a manifestation of the glory of God.

Whether other people saw it, I don't know. Because there were times when God revealed certain things to certain people. For instance, when Jesus rose from the dead, nobody but his own people saw him.

It was only he revealed himself to his followers at different times. Some saw him, some didn't. You remember when Elisha and the servant were in the city, Samaria, and the servant was beside himself with fear and he says, we're done for.

And Elisha said, don't worry, there's more with us than with the enemy. Because remember, the city was being besieged by the enemy. And Elisha said, no, there's more with us.

And you'd think the servant at that point must have thought, oh, Elisha, you're losing yourself. And Elisha made a very simple prayer and he said, Lord, open the young man's eyes that he may see. And that's exactly what the Lord did.

[25 : 07] He opened the young man's eyes and he saw that the whole place was surrounded, absolutely surrounded by angelic beings. The Lord opened his eyes just to see what we normally cannot see, the angelic hope.

Remember, there are angels ministering to us all the time. We don't realize it. But the Bible tells us that the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. Isn't that extraordinary?

We often say, oh, the devil made me do that. That was Satan's fault. I wonder how often we've actually said, you know, there's, I think, the Lord, just as Peter said, the Lord sent his angel.

I wonder how often we've actually said that. I think it's going to be one of the great surprises of glory to see the many, many deliverances we've had where the Lord has sent his angel and has delivered us.

I believe that it's not only Christians who are today professing Christians who are experiencing the ministry of angels, but those who are yet to be, because they are heirs of salvation.

[26 : 12] Those that are yet to come, those maybe today who are living in darkness, those who are opposed to God, they're running away from God, and God is still ministering to them with angels, because there's going to come a day when they're going to turn round, and they're going to follow him, because they're heirs of salvation.

Well, whether other people could see the star or not, I don't know, but anyway, I believe it is God who has revealed this to these wise men, and they have seen the glory of it.

And so, as we said, this was a sort of an expression of what was going to happen in latter times, where the gospel was going to go out way beyond the borders of Palestine.

In fact, Isaiah 5, 600, 700 years earlier prophesied about this very thing. I believe it includes ourselves. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that fills it, and the coastlands, and their inhabitants.

Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise in the islands. Well, in the ESV it's got coastlands, but in the AV it's got islands. I think that includes her selves.

[27 : 34] But 700 BC, Isaiah wrote this about the global praise of God throughout the ends of the earth, away out to the islands.

How far are we away from where, in the land of Judah, where Isaiah penned that? Because God was there revealing to him of how it would be in the days to come.

and this was all being brought in through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we have this great example of these wise men who were seeking Jesus, who found Jesus, and they brought to Jesus the presence.

Now we don't know how many wise men, people always say, oh there were three wise men, but they say that simply because there were three different types of presence. It doesn't tell us how many. there was gold, which spoke of royalty, frankincense, which spoke of sacrifice and service. The frankincense was always, or often used, sprinkled on the altar during the sacrifice, and myrrh, which was used for anointing, sometimes at weddings, but often when somebody died.

[28 : 46] Very, again, there's a whole sermon in that. Gold, the royalty of Jesus, frankincense, the service of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, and myrrh, the death, the anointing of the body of Jesus.

So it's very symbolic, the actual gifts that they brought to Jesus. And so they worshipped the Lord Jesus while Herod on his throne fumed.

And then we have that horrific action of Herod, wherein his anger to destroy any rival to his throne. He had all the baby boys in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas under the age of two put to death.

That shows the power of hell that is at work in so many people's hearts. We see it today in this world that we're in. You know, every so often it's like one new atrocity after another and we think, where does this end?

How low, how perverse, how evil is the human heart? Only God's grace can change that.

[29 : 58] I hope today that we will have the same urgency as these wise men, that we will want to fall down and worship this Jesus who is Lord over all, and that we will know personally in our own hearts his love and his grace.

Let us pray. Oh gracious God, we give you thanks for all that you've done for us, for what you have revealed to us of yourself, for the faith that you've given us in order to believe.

We pray that you will grant us grace in all that we're about, in our going in and in our coming out.

We pray to bless Calumian tonight here and the fellowship afterwards.

We pray to bless us in our homes and our families. Pray for those who are in hospital, those who are ill. We ask Lord that your hand will be upon them, that you will bring recovery in all the different circumstances, from operations, from breakages, from all the different troubles that people experience.

We ask Lord that your healing hand work as a great physician, and may your presence, your power, your peace be in us and upon us all, and take away from us our sin in Jesus' name.

[31 : 15] Amen. We're going to conclude singing from the Scottish Psalter in Psalm 36. Psalm 36, verses 5 to 9.

Junus Huddersfield. Psalm 36, verses 5 to 9. It's on page 251.

Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens. Thy truth doth reach the clouds. Thy justice is like mountains great, thy judgments deep as floods. Lord, thou preservist man and beast, how precious is thy grace.

Therefore, in shadow of thy wings, men's sons, their trust shall place. They with the fatness of thy house shall be well satisfied. From rivers of thy pleasures, thou will drink to them provide.

5 to 9, Psalm 36, at Junus Huddersfield. My first in all is in the heavens.

[32 : 25] Thy truth doth reach the clouds. Thy justice is thy mountains great, thy judgments be but lost.

Lord, God, we serve as man and beast, our precious is thy grace.
Therefore, in shadow of thy wings, and sons, their trust shall play.
Then with the goodness of thy heart shall be well satisfied.
from rivers from thy pleasures I will drink to them provide.

[33 : 52] Because of life the part in pure peace of life.

And in the purest light of thine we clearly life shall see.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more. Amen.