

Worship the King

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

- [0:00] I was thinking about the American history with kings and realizing it's not very good.
- The thing that first came to mind was the flag during the American Revolution, don't tread on me. We don't like kings here in the United States. I know a few of you are from countries and worlds where kings are much more accepted than even celebrated.
- But here in America, we have a pretty bad history with it. And how we respond to kings is something pretty deep in the American psyche.
- But you know, it's interesting because when you think about the great stories of history, there are an awful lot of kings that come up in different ways. For example, for those of you who are Disney fans, if you've ever seen the Robin Hood version of Disney, it's great, right?
- Robin Hood leads this band of merry men. And what they're doing is trying to help the poor while the real king is off on a crusade. And in his stead, his brother, Prince John, too late to be known as John I, he's sure to be known as John the Worst, a pox on the phony king of England.
- [1:42] If you've ever seen it, if you haven't, go pick it up, order Disney+, get your free seven-day trial and do it. So, it's one of their best. It really is.
- It's great fun in this story to hear the humor and to think about how it's based on the courage of these men to fight against a false king while they wait for a true king to return.
- Or maybe you think about the Lord of the Rings and the story of Aragorn, the king who is hidden, who slowly... Sorry, spoiler alert. You can't get out of here.
- So, here it's going to go. He's the king. He's the king who's coming. And he's going to sit on the throne. And one of the great plot lines of the Lord of the Rings, particularly in the later parts of the Two Towers and the return of the king, is how will people respond?
- Will they doubt him? Will they resist him? Or will they embrace him and follow him? And, of course, as Tolkien writes that story, he draws on the richness of Christian theology and the biblical storyline.
- [2:50] Because, of course, Christmas is a story as well about a king who's coming. It's about a king, Jesus, coming to earth. And it puts before us the question, how will we respond to him?
- Who will we recognize? The true king. And so, we turn to Matthew, chapter 2. We're going through the birth narratives in Matthew, this Advent season.
- And we're turning to Matthew, chapter 2. That's in page 757 in your Pew Bible. And as you're turning there for us to read it, I'm just going to read...
- The first line is now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem. And then it goes on to tell this story. And one of the things we need to do is we talk about these wise men or kings coming.
- And we're saying is that I was actually at my kids' Christian school. And they have a crash scene out in front. And there's baby Jesus. And there's Mary and Joseph.

- [3:51] And there's the animals in the stable. And there's the sheep and the shepherds and the wise men. And they're all there at the same time. It probably didn't work that way. Pretty sure that this episode is quite a while after the birth of Jesus.
- There are a couple of clues where it says Jesus is no longer referred to as a baby, but as a child in this passage. It is not in the stable that they come, but they come to the home or the house where Mary is with the baby.
- And also you recognize later that as you see King Herod respond, his time frame is not, did this happen in the last two weeks?
- His time frame is, did this happen in the last two years? So we'll unpack that as we go along. But just so you know, our normal crash scene is a little misguided.
- It's a mashup of biblical stories. And it doesn't quite get the timeline right. So having said that, let's read this passage together. 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?
- [5:09] 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. And 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.
- [6:15] 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 worshiped him.
- And 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.
- Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you this morning that you have come to be our king.
- And Lord, we ask this morning that as we look into this passage, Lord, that we would understand your kingship more and that we would understand our own hearts more.
- Lord, that as we think about this Advent season, there is a new opportunity and an invitation from you to respond, to bow down and worship you.
- [7:20] Lord, I pray that your spirit would be with us this morning as we look into your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Who will recognize the true king?
- We're going to examine the story through the lens of the characters. There are three main characters in this story. There's Jesus, there's the wise men, and there's Herod the king.
- There are a few other ancillary people, but those are the key people in this story. So we're going to look at it through the main characters, and as we look through each one, we're going to hopefully fill out our own understanding of the Christmas story and think for ourselves about how we respond to the true king.
- So first, we want to think about Jesus, the true king. So part of what we've seen in the last two weeks, if you've been here, from Matthew chapter 1, one of the points that Matthew is trying to convince us of is that Jesus is the heir of David.

You see this in the genealogy, which begins with Abraham, but then David is the next major break, and that this one who's coming, this baby, is in the line of David to whom God has given a promise that he would have a throne and he would reign as king forever.

[8 : 43] His descendants would reign forever. And so there's this Davidic claim that comes in, and even Joseph, when the angel comes to him, he says, you are the Joseph in the line of David.

We see that clearly. And so that's one of our major clues that as we're coming in, Jesus is being presented as a king in the line of David.

Of course, the Magi also come and they say, where is he the king of the Jews? Interestingly, this is a term that Jews never use for the people who rule over them, only for people outside.

And so, and it's interesting to play that out throughout the whole gospel, but they're looking for a king as well. And interestingly, God himself is doing something special to point the world to this child, right?

And this is the part that we wrestle with because God put a star in the sky. He literally moved the heavens to announce the coming of Jesus to the world.

[9 : 50] And he was doing it particularly to speak to these kinds of men who probably practiced astrology, who were looking at the stars as portents of what's going on in the world.

And God spoke to them and said, something amazing has happened. And they knew it enough to say, there's a king who's come and we want to find him. Now, those of us in our 21st century age with our astronomy and our physics are wondering, really?

And so the commentary spend lots of time talking about the Halley's Comet coming by earth around 10 BC or 6 BC or something like that.

Or maybe there was a convergence of planets that happened or maybe there was a supernova. Maybe God used these natural events as a sign, but he was using these natural means.

It's certainly possible. God does that all the time. And there's nothing wrong with that. God is not limiting his power by using natural means to do his revelation.

[11 : 06] But when you look at verse 9, it seems to suggest that the star that rose that first brought them to Jerusalem then moved and then came to rest in a unique way over the place where Jesus was.

Suggesting to me at least that there was a supernatural element to what God was doing here. And if that's hard for us to swallow, friends, just go back to the end of chapter 1 where a virgin gave birth to a baby.

And let's go, in light of that, the star isn't that hard to believe, is it? If we can deal with the virgin birth, we think the star can be maybe a little bit easier to handle. What we really want to see is that the God of the Bible is a God who works within the reality of our natural world, but is also able to work beyond it in supernatural ways.

And we can worship him as both. And in this story, so clearly God is moving the heavens to say, I am coming, I am bringing someone to earth who is worthy of your attention, those who are far off.

And it's fascinating to think about who these people are too, right? He spoke in the language not of religious Judaism, although he did all those things, right?

[12 : 32] But he spoke here in the language of astrology and astronomy. He spoke to people who weren't looking in the temple for the fulfillment of the Messiah's prophecy.

He went to people who were looking at the stars. And he said, you who are looking, I'm here. And I want to point you in this direction.

I want to point you to something greater than you even know what you're looking for. It reminds me of what Paul does in Athens in chapter 17 of Acts when he goes in and he says, you preach to this unknown God, but what you worship, I'm sorry, you worship an unknown God, what you worship in ignorance.

Now I'm going to tell you what it really is that you're longing for because God has made you to know the creator of heavens and earth. And the way that he made you to know this is through Jesus.

And at the end of that sermon, he says, and now he commands all people everywhere to repent. And this is what God is doing as he puts a star in the sky. Jesus didn't just come to Israel, but God made it clear from the very beginning that God came for all people everywhere.

[13:50] And this has always been God's plan. Think with me just for a moment. We just preached through Genesis. Do you remember Nick's sermon on Genesis 12? That God would bless Abraham and he'd make him the father of great nations and that he would bless him and he would make him a blessing so that through you all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Or listen to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 22, 27. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

For kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. Or Psalm 67, 1. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us that your way may be known on the earth, your saving power among all the nations.

Even in the Old Testament as God was working with a particular people, his goal was always to shine a light to all people. And Matthew himself knows this because this story at the beginning with the birth of Jesus then gets tied up at the very end when the early church worshipping a resurrected Christ is told this by Jesus.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age.

[15:37] The beginning story in Advent and the end of the story the post-resurrection Jesus Matthew sees tying them together in this grand purpose of God that Jesus isn't coming just as a tribal God for a little people but that he has come for all people everywhere.

And friends we need to stop and recognize that this is hard in our world today. There is a strong desire in our culture and our world because of the conflicts and because of the evil that's been perpetrated in the name of religion to minimize distinctions or to give people safe places.

You stay there I'll stay here. We can worship God as long as we don't make global claims as long as we don't say this is for everybody everywhere.

But if we do that we domesticate the God of the Bible and we minimize his glory. Because when God put that star in the sky to point wise men from other countries to come and to lay their gifts and to honor him God was reminding us that he lays claim to the whole world and that as this king comes he does command all people everywhere to repent.

He calls all people to respond not just in Christendom not just in the west not just in the places where that's acceptable but in all places Jesus says I have come to be your king.

[17:28] And we know the promise Philippians 2 that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Some will do it by compulsion as God reveals himself fully and it will be terrifying and some they will do it gladly because they have already worshipped him.

And so the question before us as the true king is revealed in this story is how do we respond to him? Let's look at these two other characters in the story to think about what the responses are in his original advent and his coming.

First of all let's look at Herod who is a false king and a false worshipper. Commentator Archie France says this about Herod Herod's concern was understandable as an Edomite that is a non-Israelite but outside of Israel as an Edomite and a Roman appointee he was vulnerable to the claims of a king of the true Davidic dynasty.

He said his later years were plagued by fears of rivals. when the story that a king of the Jews has been born as the Magi come and bring this account to him in Jerusalem he is troubled and not troubled in the sense of oh I haven't heard about that I wonder what that's all about I should find out more he is unsettled his insecurity is exposed he feels vulnerable and as he responds you see the depth of his unwillingness to receive a true king his insecurity leads him to insincerity with the men he had hoped not to honestly find this new king and worship him as he said but he hoped to destroy him as we see further on we didn't read this but if you just go on to verses 13 and following in chapter 2 what we see is that Herod finds out that the wise men never let them know where he was where the baby was and so in rage and in fear

[19:52] Herod commits infanticide throughout the land killing the babies under the age of 2 in order to remove this kind of rival he showed his worst in his insecurity he did not want this king to come and rule over him now the story lets us know that at the end of the day Herod dies that's verse 19 and Jesus lives and the story goes on but what we see is in Herod someone who desperately clings to his kingdom at the cost of innumerable of unbelievable evil and suffering that he perpetrated and it's easy to denounce Herod as an evildoer and to scorn him as a fool how could he do that how could he be so selfish and so so evil towards other people in order to protect his own little kingdom but I wonder how easily we decry Herod while doing the same thing in our own lives and the kingdom of our own hearts every day

Jesus comes to lay claim to our life Jesus comes to be king to have the right to rule over us to determine what is right and wrong to determine truth and error to give us commands for us to obey and to follow to assert his authority for our good and for our blessing but to claim authority over our lives as king and I wonder how well we actually do when he does that when he puts his finger on our life and says I'd like to reorder this part today when God says I'd like you to give up that how do we respond so often like Herod we cling more tightly our fist becomes stiff in light of his command to release and to let go when he asks us to give up our desire to control a loved one when he asks us to give up our good health and walk in illness disease when he takes away a job or a career a position in our community or family when he threatens the security of our present worldly well-being financial personal physical when he starts meddling with our entertainment how we eat food and what we do with our sex and what we watch on our screens he steps in and he says

I'm the king and I want to order all of these things according to my kingdom and of course he comes as a good king he comes as one who wants to bless us and to love us and he comes as one who wants to lead us in paths of righteousness where we will flourish and live and yet so often we like Herod resist him we only want a king if he will leave well enough alone with the things we don't want him to mess with we only want a king when we get to choose him not when he asserts his authority over us we only want a king when he meets our standards and our requirements and so often we in our independent 21st century individualism say Jesus don't tread on me so before we throw

Herod into the eternal lake of fire let us be careful to recognize how often we are very much like him but thankfully the story is not just about Herod and there is another way to respond to the king there is another character here that we see in this story and ironically it is not the respectable religious person in the story it is not the one that we expect to be ready to receive the king of Israel but instead it is these men from far away these outsiders who show us the way to respond to the true king and so our third point the third character is the magi the true worshippers now we use these words magi that is just a transliteration often we talk about kings we three kings of orient are right bearing gifts we traverse afar and so on so forth why who are they exactly what what's their story well the reality is this is all we know of them right this story tells us everything we know which isn't very much they probably came from the east maybe

Babylon maybe Persia maybe they were from another Arabian tribe we don't know likely magi is often related to astrologers the reason why we call them kings is actually from the old testament psalm 72 verse 10 says may the kings of tarshish and the coastlands render him tribute may the kings of sheba and seba bring gifts may all kings fall down before him and all nations serve him and then the passage we read earlier in this service that Kelly read reminded us of this prophecy where he talked about the nations shall come to the light and kings to the brightness of your rising they will gather together and the wealth of nations shall come to you and those from sheba will come they shall bring gold and frankincense and they shall bring good news the praises of the Lord and so in the tradition of the church as we've read these stories and these old testament passages that seem to allude to the coming of

[26 : 29] Jesus and this light dawning on the darkness and this light announcing the coming of the king and the nations coming to worship him they thought oh well these are kings so there are three kings yeah maybe it's hard to know it's hard to know what role astrologers would have had in some of these other kingdoms they might have had some measure of prominence they certainly had wealth it's likely they were representative of the peoples that they came from given the way that they came but it's really not clear what is clear is this they were men who were watching the stars and they were men who responded by coming from far to find this one this king and interestingly the Bible has a lot to say about astrology none of it's good it's not a positive thing in the

Bible for us to be looking at the stars we shouldn't be looking at our horoscopes to think this is what God has to say to us today these are not places where we normally look but interesting this story never has a word or hint of condemnation all of that is reserved for Herod the king of the Jews the king of Judea right here what we have is men who seem to be honestly seeking and as they were seeking they go of course to Jerusalem because that's the center in the capital where else would a king be born and they show up and they ask this innocent question where is he and through all the mechanisms of Herod they find out that there's through a prophecy in Micah Bethlehem is the place and it's ironic because if you go back and you read in Micah 5 about this passage comes in an oracle of judgment against

Israel because of their disobedience and yet with this thread of a promise through it that a shepherd king will come and will restore God's people and yet Herod and the scribes and the elders couldn't receive this news read this passage in Micah and say maybe this is the one maybe this is how God is actually going to fulfill this prophecy instead they feel threatened but the magi receive this news well and they turn and they go and they head towards Jerusalem and the star that they had seen at first now led them more specifically they were being led by the maker of the universe to a baby to a child and when they found him oh before they found him look with me again

I love this verse verse 10 when they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy joy when we read that the carol service Eli looked over me and said that's really redundant dad why did he write it that way and I said that's the point it is redundant rejoiced exceedingly with great joy is redundant but he's doing that to say when they saw that the God of the universe was continuing to lead them to the very place to the very one whom they had to come to they were filled with a joy and what does it look like to rejoice exceedingly with great joy it's like when your team wins the Super Bowl and the last second and you rejoice and you jump up and down and you throw your popcorn all over your living room because you're so happy that your team won or it's what happens when you get down on one knee and she says yes joy overflowing overwhelming it captured and filled their hearts because the star was leading them to the one that they were looking for and when they found him they went in and they worshipped they bowed their knees not resisting that this one would come with a claim of kingship they bowed their knees honoring him and lavishing upon him expensive gifts gifts that honored his particular place as a coming king now is it clear that these magi understood that this was the incarnate son of

God the word become flesh now come to be the savior by dying on the cross for their sins and rise from the dead probably not it's not clear that they knew all that they were worshiping as they bowed down but Matthew knows exactly who he's talking about and he's saying these men are an example for us of what it looks like to receive and honor the true king to bow down and to bring our riches of our life and our love and lay them at Jesus feet as the true king of our lives so friends this is the story of the magi for us how will you respond to the coming of the king how will you respond today two thoughts on how we might apply this to us today first of all do you really believe that it is

[32 : 35] God's purpose for all people everywhere to hear of this king and to bow their knee do you believe that that is actually his purpose in the world don't let this gift be only about you and your personal happiness don't let this gift be just about your family but consider that what we celebrate when we celebrate Christmas is the coming of one who lays a claim to the whole world and the call for us to go and make disciples of all nations is real and embedded in the Christmas story itself and may we take that to heart when we think about how are we investing our lives so that Jesus might be known everywhere so that he might be worshipped so he might be worshipped by people from every tongue and tribe and nation as it says in

Revelation 7 the vision around the throne room of what eternity will be like is that God is gathering people from every tongue and tribe and nation that his glory may be multifacetedly recognized and honored by the breadth of humanity consider this Christmas investing in the Lottie moon offering consider this Christmas inviting your neighbors to the Christmas Eve service consider this Christmas praying that God would allow you to be a part of telling the world about this Jesus and secondly maybe more fundamentally may we be those who bow our knees before King Jesus we recognize that he is the one who has come and as a king to be our rescuer born thy people to deliver born a child and yet a king born to reign in us forever now thy gracious kingdom bring by thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone by thine all sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne may this be our prayer that

Jesus alone would rule in our hearts this Christmas season let's pray Jesus you are the king Lord you are great and mighty in your love and wisdom in your power and grace Lord I pray this morning that you would help us to see you as you are so that we might respond rightly by bowing our knee to you Lord I pray for those this morning who may be seeking maybe are realizing this morning that they have never truly allowed you to be king in their lives Lord will you turn them to you this morning that they might surrender their lives and bow before you as king Lord this morning for some of us we may realize that we have bowed to you and said that many times and yet you've put a finger on a part of our life where we don't really want you to be king

Lord may we surrender that to you this morning and Lord as we do these things Lord may we know the joy of the Magi Lord that we would be filled with joy inexpressible Lord that you have come to be our king and our savior we pray this in Jesus name amen well friends it is fitting as we continue our service it's fitting that we would come to the Lord's table you know one of the most remarkable things about the gospel is that the king who came did not come on a great horse with an army at his back to conquer Rome and to free Israel and to enact a political revolution but the way that he came was in humility and he came in obscurity and the way that he established his kingdom was by offering himself up on a cross for us and we see his power in that he was raised from the dead having lived the life that we could not live having died the death that we deserve he was then raised to new life and this is the king that we worship and this is what we celebrate when we come to the

Lord's table this is the implements by which Jesus rules his body and blood broken and shed for us what an amazing king one that we in our human wisdom would never create and yet here it is the real king and this is the kind of king that we worship here at Trinity we invite all who have bowed their knee to Jesus who have put their trust in him and his life and his death and his resurrection on their behalf put their trust in him as their lord and savior we say come eat together let us enjoy the fellowship if you're here this morning and you have not done that if you're here this morning and you're seeking to understand this Jesus more there are prayers in the bulletin I point them to you so that you could pray with them but we encourage you don't take the cup don't drink or don't eat the bread for that's an expression of faith as we do it together but instead consider consider the call that

[39 : 03] Jesus is putting on your life this morning he comes to you and he says I want to be your king will you receive him this morning let me invite those who are serving to come forward thank you