

Matthew 2 - God is with us - Let us worship Him

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[0 : 00] Thank you. Morning all.

Morning. John started off last week. We're in our series of Matthew. So we're going to be looking at Matthew probably for a good long time, I suspect.

The thick edge of a year. And today I'm going to look at Matthew chapter 2. And one of the really interesting things about preparing this is how I felt about reading the Christmas story in September. And culturally it's really interesting because typically we would read this chapter around the middle of, well, the start of December. Or else if we're reading through the Bible of the year, at the very start of the year, not very often in September.

So I went to the loft, got the tree out, put some tinsel up. I didn't really. But it did make me feel a little bit more Christmassy than I thought I might.

[1 : 12] Let's read Matthew chapter 2. So in the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?

For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage. When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him. And calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet. And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah.

For from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod secretly called for the wise men, and learned from them the exact time where the star had appeared.

Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child. And when you have found him, bring me word, so that I may also go and pay him homage. When they heard the king, they set out, and there ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising.

[2 : 21] Until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said, Get up and take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt to remain there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child and to destroy him.

Then Joseph got up and took the child and his mother by night and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet out of Egypt.

I have called my son. When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all children in and around Bethlehem, who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

[3 : 30] Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. Her voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children. She refused to be consoled, because they are no more.

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel. For those who were seeking the child's life are dead.

Then Joseph got up and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled. He will be called a Nazarene. Stacks in that chapter, just a few 21 verses or so, and lots and lots in there.

[4 : 34] So, just want to have a look very briefly first at the central character of the wise men. The wise men wanted to find out where Jesus was.

They saw this star rising, and they thought, well this is significant, and we'll follow it. Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?

Where is he? They knew their scripture, they knew their history, they knew that something was coming up. But they didn't quite know what. But they knew that they had to go.

They were convicted by the Spirit to go and follow this star, and be part of this narrative of the birth of Christ. We observed his star at its rising, they say.

Now there's some debate, interesting debate, but probably, broadly speaking, relatively fruitless, about how long these wise men travelled for.

[5 : 40] Some people say it was a relatively short journey, others say it was, I've read up to ten years. I think that's pretty unlikely. The consensus seems to be that it was something like a two year journey, which is why Herod killed all the children under the age of two.

But irrespective of how long a journey, it was a big commitment. They upped and they went. They got on with their calling, their task, and they were single-minded about it.

They wanted to find Jesus. They wanted to find the child who has been born King of the Jews. And there's something there, isn't there, for us, about a determination to know Jesus.

A determination to find out about Jesus. I don't think many of us are going to be called on a two year journey. Tradition would have it, rather than historical accuracy necessarily.

They were potted around on camels. We're a bit shy of camels in Whitby. But whatever it is, we need to understand our calling as a journey.

[6 : 55] Our calling to find out about Jesus as a journey to find him. And some of us are at the beginning of that journey, and some of us have been on that journey for a while.

It doesn't really matter. Because the core here is that we seek. Is that we seek. And just as Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost, as we read in Luke 19.

So we need to seek the one who saves those of us who need him. We've come to pay homage.

We've come to pay homage. They recognised the holiness, the significance, the importance of Jesus. And that was unusual, wasn't it? Because he was a baby.

You don't tend to go and worship babies. People goo over babies and get a bit zippy. And say that they're the most beautiful child in the world. Which is impossible because my kids are.

[7 : 59] But that wasn't funny. That was an empirically true fact. But we don't believe it though. But we don't go and pay homage to a newborn baby.

But they knew that they needed to do so. And when they found him, they fell to their knees. They were overwhelmed with joy.

Overwhelmed with joy has really struck me this week. It's a typical time, isn't it? We read the news. We read the news locally.

We read the news nationally. We read the news internationally. And what doesn't spring to mind is I need to live a life overwhelmed with joy. It strikes me that I need to live a life overwhelmed with sadness and despair and horror.

And yet when we meet with joy. We need to be overwhelmed with joy.

[9 : 05] Whatever overwhelmed with joy means, by the way. For some of us that will mean dancing. As I mentioned to somebody last week, the next time I dance the day that Jesus comes back, I'm not much of a dancer.

If you want to dance, that's fine. If you want to jump up and down, that's fine. If you want to cry, that's fine. If you want to sit in wonderment at the glory of God, that's fine.

But one of the things that we need to find in our hearts. One of the things that we need to find in our behaviour. One of the things we need to find in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Is that we are overwhelmed with joy.

That our relationship with Jesus brings us to our knees and brings us great joy. And we need to ask the Holy Spirit to grow the gift of joy in our lives.

And they gave gifts. Gold, frankincense and myrrh. Must have been a bit odd for Mary, wouldn't it? I brought some gold, frankincense and myrrh.

[10:09] Oh, smashing. I was just thinking of that. Baby grow would have been helpful, but you know. But they gave gifts. Precious gifts. Now we're not in the place where we have to give gifts to Jesus.

Except the sacrifice of our life. The willingness to follow. The willingness to do. The willingness to be who God calls us to be.

And they were attentive to the Holy Spirit. They heard in a dream. They heard in a dream. They saw in a dream.

They discerned in a dream that they shouldn't go back to Herod. It was a good decision. It was a good decision. They heard right from God and they went home by a different route.

These days they might have had a sat-nav strapped to the head of a camel to help them. But they went back by a different route.

[11:08] The Holy Spirit prompted them in a dream. Next slide, please. Okay. So, Herod. Herod was a big cheese.

He was in charge. And he had lots of power. Lots of authority. And he was a man who didn't really truck much disagreement. And disagreeing with Herod and disagreeing with rulers of that time was not a great deal, great, great, great thing to do.

It was what some people might describe as career limiting. Often because you were short of one head by the end of the disagreement. Herod was not given to being frightened.

He was in charge. He was powerful. And he had people who would do his bidding. And yet, when he heard about Jesus, he was frightened. He was frightened.

Isn't it interesting for those of us who love Jesus? Who try to follow Jesus? Who call ourselves after Jesus? Isn't it interesting that somebody finds Jesus frightening?

[12:19] Even the concept of Jesus frightening. Even the name of Jesus frightening. And Herod, this great big cheese, who had plenty going for him, in the world's eyes, was frightened of the name of the person of Jesus Christ.

Find out where the Messiah is born. I want to know where the Messiah is. I want to know because I want to go and worship him. No, he didn't. No, he didn't.

He was full of secrecy and trickery. His heart was full of deception. And it was full of deception because he was scared.

Somewhere in his soul, he must have worked out that this Jesus was a threat. A threat to his position.

Not to his life, but to his importance. His position. His power.

[13:23] His power. And that fear. That secrecy and that trickery turned into fury and murder. He killed a load of children.

On the basis that maybe I'll get the one that's making me so scared. And again, that's something that we need to reflect on.

I'm not suggesting for one minute that your hearts are full of fury and murder, by the way. But what I am suggesting, and what I have to examine in my own heart, is how important do I think I am?

How important is my status and position to me? And what would happen if somebody came and threatened my status and position?

And that's a question that only each of us can answer in the sight of God. What would happen if suddenly all of who I think I am, all of who I think my identity is, has been taken away?

[14:39] What would happen if my qualifications, my skills, my experience, my job, my home, my status in society was all gone?

And all threatened. Would I lash out? Would I defend myself? Would I get into secrecy and trickery? Would I play small P politics or even big P politics? Would I make sure that by hook or by crook, I maintain who I am or who I think I am?

Would I surrender my future, my place, my being to God's will? So Herod was in a troubled place. Let's go again. Jesus and his parents. They received the wise men and their gifts and welcomed them. I suppose that you would, wouldn't you?

[15:48] People turn up with gold, frankincense and myrrh and say, I've come to pay homage to your child. Well, I guess you would. And they knew, didn't they? Joseph and Mary, they'd had visits from angels who said, don't be afraid.

I always think that's really amusing. Angels always say, don't be afraid. I think I'd be fairly afraid if an angel turned up. But I'd be reassured by their reassurance. But they received them and they welcomed them.

And then Joseph heard from the Holy Spirit. Don't stop where you are. Get up and run away. Herod's after him. Herod's going to come and kill Jesus.

Get out. And Joseph got out with Mary, his wife and Jesus. And they became refugees.

They became displaced people. They were strangers in a foreign land. However you want to describe it.

[16:49] And there's something very modern about that idea of being strangers in a foreign land. Of being a refugee. And we see across the world thousands and hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their homes.

Lost their position. Lost their everything. And they are, they were refugees until a despotic ruler Herod had died.

And the danger was removed. And then they came back. And they settled according to and fulfilling the scripture. And right the way through this chapter.

This happened because of this. This happened because of this. This happened to fulfil this. This happened to fulfil this. This narrative is all about the fulfilment of God's word.

And so is your life. And so is my life. As we are obedient to God. We are fulfilling his call on our life.

[18:00] There probably aren't many prophecies. Well there aren't many prophecies in scripture about me. Except. That I am called to follow the will of God.

And go where he takes me. And do what he asks me. And be who he wants me to be. And so there is for you. And some of us will be called to be strangers in a foreign land.

Sometimes that will be a good thing. Sometimes that will be a hard thing. It doesn't necessarily mean a strange land. And a foreign land as in overseas. It might just be a different part of the country. But God has a call on our life.

And we need to be attentive to the Holy Spirit. We need to listen to God's prompt in our lives. We need to understand what that means.

And we need to be obedient to the voice of Almighty God. Because just as we see through this chapter.

[19:05] The fulfilment of God's plan. The fulfilment of God's word. Our lives need to fulfil the call that God has on each of us.

So three different groups of people. Three different responses. Herod preserved his position. He was fearful.

He was angry. He was murderous. The wise men were obedient. Humble. Excited. Giving. And attuned to the Holy Spirit. Jesus and his parents were welcoming.

Attuned to the Holy Spirit. And they were refugees. Strangers. In a foreign land. So what about you?

What about me? What about us? Thanks, Josh. Who do you say Jesus is? Who do you say Jesus is individually?

[20:07] It's a question that's asked in Scripture. Who do you say I am? And Jesus says that to you this morning. To me this morning. Who do you say I am?

And underneath that question. How does who I am make you feel? He loves you very much Norman.

He loves you very much. Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is our Saviour. Jesus is our Lord. Jesus is our Brother. Jesus is our Brother. Jesus is our Lord. But sometimes.

As maybe as children. You used to say. I certainly used to say. Is that a threat or a promise? Lo I am with you always.

[21:08] Is that a threat or a promise? I see everything. Is that a threat or a promise? You see we have to.

If we are in relationship with Jesus. We have to understand. What that means. It's not a come day go day.

Sunday morning stuff. It's something that has to. Dominate our lives. Inform our lives. Shape our lives. Shape our behaviour. Help us become the people that we are. And that's really hard. Because. Like many of you. Like all of you. I have lots of different voices. Into my life.

Lots of different instructions. Lots of different expectations. I have a boss. Who has expectations. I have a wife. Who has expectations.

[22 : 09] Which is more scary than my boss. I have me. Who have expectations. I have lots of things.

Lots of people. Lots of situations. That dominate my life. And dominate my behaviour. And yet. The ruler of all. Has expectations of me.

Behavioural expectations. Service expectations. Thoughts expectations. Language expectations. And it can become overwhelming.

Unless we get on our knees. Unless we find ourselves. In the response that the wise men had. They just fell down and worshipped. Worshipped. And there is something.

Enormously healthy. About falling down. And worshipping. Now some of us. Won't want to get on our knees. Because it will take us a fortnight. To get up again. But the idea. But the idea.

[23 : 18] That our calling. Is to be in homage to Jesus. Is one. Which we need. To really internalise. And understand.

And accept. And accept. And work out for ourselves. What it means. How do you respond? If Jesus makes you feel frightened. You've misunderstood him.

Because Jesus doesn't want to frighten you. He loves you passionately. He loves you with a love that. No one else.

Can demonstrate. And if he makes you feel frightened. Please just have a chat with somebody. Because that's not who Jesus is.

But he will ask you to change. And the thing that Herod could not do. And the most tragic story. In the gospels. Is the rich young man.

[24 : 20] What do I need to do. To achieve eternal life. Give up all you've got. Give your predictions. And follow me. I can't. I can't do that. And then that awful verse.

And he went away sad. And he went away sad. What a terrible thing. To go away sad.

How do we respond? How do you respond? And what's your relationship with him like? Again.

I don't want to. To labour the point. Except to say. Our relationship with Jesus. Should be one of joy. And fulfilment. Should be one of great. Great excitement.

And yet. I just wonder. How many of us live. With a sense of disappointment. Or a sense of anxiety and fear. Or a sense of sadness.

[25 : 21] And that can be for so many different reasons. And I don't want to minimise those reasons. We can feel let down.

Or disappointed. Or hurt. By church. By Christians. We can read about things. And think. Goodness me. Is that. Is that the organisation?

Is that the church? Is that the God? Who I worship? It's been a terribly sad report this week. For me in my profession. Around safeguarding issues in churches.

And other religious denominations. And religions. And it's bad reading. Bad reading. We have to do better.

As a Christian community. I have to do better. As a Christian. What's your relationship.

[26 : 22] With Jesus. Like. You see. We have a choice to make. This is. Well known. A little quote from C.S. Lewis.

It's often used in Alpha courses. Called C.S. Lewis's Trilemma. And he's. I'll just read it. It's very clever. You must make a choice.

Either this man. Jesus. Was. And is. The son of God. Or else. A madman. Or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him.

And kill him. As a demon. Or you can fall at his feet. And call him Lord God. But let's not come with any patronising nonsense. About him being a great human teacher.

He's not left that open to us. He didn't intend to. What Jesus said. What Jesus said. About himself. About who he is.

[27 : 17] Is so outrageous. That if it's not true. He. Was mad. And we are mad. To follow him.

If he. If it is true. And brothers and sisters. If it is true. We have no choice. But to fall to our feet. And worship him.

As our Lord and Saviour. I suppose what Lewis is saying here is. You can't be ambivalent. You can't say. Yeah. Yeah. Jesus. Take him or leave him really.

Like sausage rolls. Yeah. They're alright. Right. We can't have that response. And this. This passage. This story. Shows us.

The visceral response we have. Hatred. And violence. And murder. And fear. Or love. And passion. And homage. And humility.

[28 : 14] Which one? Which one? Jesus doesn't give us the option. To be sort of real. Right.

We read in Revelation. You're lukewarm. You're lukewarm. Neither hot nor cold. I'm going to spit you out of my mouth. And I suppose that there's a challenge there.

Isn't there? There's a challenge there. About lukewarmness. There's a challenge there. About ambivalence. Yeah. Jesus. Yeah. He's alright.

Yeah. He's done some good things. Church. It's alright. Quite like going. Good music. Nice building. Nice people. It's alright. I'll come when I can.

I'll be in fellowship when I can. And when I can't I won't. Or is there a passion in our hearts? Is there a passion in our hearts?

[29 : 18] To follow him. To be led by him. To be guided by him. To be disciplined by him. To be shown the way by him. To be called by him into whatever it is.

That we are called to do. And uniquely you will be called to do things that no one else can do. One of the wonderful things and the wonderful realisations as I go through life.

As I've tried to hear from God. Is that there are things that he wants me to do. That no one else on this earth can do. That is my calling.

And I have to do it. There are things that each of you here in this room today. There are things that God wants you to do. That no one else can do. And that might feel really extraordinary.

It feels extraordinary to me. Loads of people can do what I do now. No one else can be Andy Lloyd. There's not another one of me. You can be pleased to know.

[30 : 18] But there ain't another one of you either. And you have a purpose. In Christ. You have a calling in Christ.

To be you. To be you. Ambivalence doesn't work. Take it or leave it doesn't work.

You're either in or you're out. Thanks Josh. And Jesus divides opinion. And those opinions are often.

Very strongly expressed. You can see opinions of Jesus. And his teaching. Pretty well daily. If not daily. Weekly certainly.

In the press. Printed. In the spoken media. In the television. In books. You can hear. All sorts of different.

[31 : 18] Views. Very strongly expressed. But the truth of the matter is. Fear and anger. Fear and anger. Are not part of who Jesus is.

Fear and anger. And hatred. And murderous. And deceit. And trickery. It's not who Jesus is. And it's not who he wants us to be. Love.

And acceptance. Are. And that's our choice. And that's our choice. Homage.

Or. Do we just get into this disappointed bitterness. That so often typifies. Those who are seeking. But have not yet found.

but the truth of the matter is maybe disappointment and bitterness among those of us who know the truth but have unresolved stuff in our lives unresolved disappointment unresolved anger unresolved hurt all of which is real but it's still unresolved at the cross of Christ at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ we can find healing and wholeness sometimes miraculously and quickly sometimes over a period of time and that's in God's hands but God is a God who wants us to be whole in him and one day when it is our time to be called those of us who know and love Jesus will become whole will become healed will become free to worship him for all eternity casting golden crowns around a glassy sea sounds quite good fun thanks Josh so Jesus calls each of us to him come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I'll give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me learn from me for I'm gentle and humble in heart and you'll find rest for yourselves for my yoke is easy and my burden is light if you'd like me to

[33 : 50] I'll do another sermon now on that there was disappointment I've been taught my disappointment by Glanthis I won't dwell on it except to say Jesus calls you today come to him if you're weary and carrying a burden come to him if you're not weary not carrying a burden by the way but for those of us who are weary and carrying a burden come to him and he will give you rest Jesus is gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls the calling that Jesus places on your life on my life on your life on our life as a church is easy and light goodness me that will do for me will it do for you so what's your response

Jesus today is here his Holy Spirit is here resting on each of us nudging us showing us prompting us prodding us what's your response you can't ignore him you can respond in wonderment or you can respond in fear you can respond in acceptance or you can respond in rejection you can surrender to God's will or you can drive on with self-preservation your choice Jesus calls you you can't ignore that call the wise men simply follow the star to the conclusion will you follow the star individually to the conclusion Thank you.