

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 1ST-2ND, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

KING OF THE JEWS (MATTHEW 2:1-6)

It has been roughly 1 ½- 2 ½ years since the close of Matthew 1.

- Luke 2 records the birth of Jesus, and now Matthew picks up the narrative during the infancy of Jesus “in the days of Herod the King” (vs. 1).
- This would’ve been in the last days of Herod the Great and he was very sickly, dying of gonorrhea and possibly cancer or kidney disease.

Herod the Great was a monster- at one point it was said of him, “It is better to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son”.

- Due to stress & illness, he had degenerated into a sickly, paranoid, and fearful king.
- So we can imagine why he was so “troubled” (vs. 3) at the news of the “wise men”.

There’s a bit of mystery surrounding the “wise men” (Magi)- most likely they were astrologers or students of the stars from the Parthian empire.

- The Magi are also mentioned in the book of Daniel (Dan.2,4,5) and worked as counsel to royalty interpreting dreams and possessing knowledge of planets & stars (Est. 1:13).
- Because of the Jewish community in Babylon, they were familiar with Jewish scripture.

The most likely reason for the Magi’s journey was a prophecy in Num. 24:17 about a “star coming from Jacob, ...a scepter arising from Israel”-an ancient prophecy tying the birth of a global King to an astrological phenomena.

- Herod was deeply troubled at this group’s dedication to finding this great King, so he summoned his group of advisers- the chief priests and teachers of the law (vs. 4).

These two groups knew the scriptures- they correctly identified the birthplace of the Messiah from Micah 5:2- but they were indifferent and unmoved by the idea of Messiah being born.

- Mere knowledge of the Scriptures is not enough- you can know the Bible well and miss the point entirely- if it doesn’t move you, it’s useless.
- It’s entirely possible to have a head full of knowledge and a very cold, proud heart.

WORSHIP OF THE KING (MATTHEW 2:7-12)

After Herod’s advisors told him where the Christ was to be born, he summoned the magi.

- Verses 7-8 make it apparent that Herod was scheming- he had no intention of worshipping Jesus, in reality he wanted Him dead.
- He was plotting to murder Jesus, so he sent the magi away on a 5-6 mile journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to find Him.

Why did Herod want Jesus dead? He was a paranoid, mentally ill, insecure leader that had a history of murdering anyone he deemed as a threat to his claim of being “King of the Jews”.

- There’s a little bit of Herod in all of humanity.
- In our natural fallen state, it’s difficult for us to recognize the authority of Jesus and relinquish control over our own lives. We like being in charge over our own lives.

The Magi left Jerusalem and followed the star, much like a sailor follows a star to get to his destination (vs. 9).

- The text gives every indication that this star was a supernatural phenomenon (a comet, a supernova, a planetary conjunction?).
- Nowhere does the text tell us that there were 3 Magi or that they were kings.

Because the Magi and Herod seemed to identify the appearance of the star with the birth of the Messiah, Jesus must’ve been at least a year old when they arrived.

- They were also “in a house” (vs. 11), so this wasn’t at the stable & manger.
- The star led them to the house, where they fell down and worshipped the Christ-child and offered Him gifts.

Gold- a gift for kings & royalty (Ps. 45:9, 2 Kgs. 5:5)

Frankincense- the only incense allowed on the altar in the temple (Ex. 30:9, 34-38)

Myrrh- used for anointing but also in the process of embalming (Jn. 19:39).

- These were gifts presented for a King who was also a Priest who had come to die.
- The Magi were warned by one final dream to go home by another route

AN ESCAPE PLAN (MATTHEW 2:13-15)

Once more we turn to Joseph, the dreamer, who the angel warns to flee to Egypt and remain there until further instructions are given.

- More than likely the family would’ve traveled 300 miles from Bethlehem to Alexandria, where a sizable Jewish population lived.
- Matthew tells us that this was all to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “out of Egypt I called my son” (vs. 15).

This is a quotation from Hosea 11:1, and it originally referred to the sonship of Israel.

- But now it applies to the solitary Son of God, who like Israel was forced to flee to the wilderness of Egypt.

- What Matthew is helping us to see is that Jesus inaugurates the new exodus.
- The flight to Egypt is not just about running from Herod, it’s about painting a picture for us. In the Exodus story of the Old Testament, we see the mercy of God in that He saved His people by bringing miraculous deliverance from their bondage in Egypt.

- When the people were slaves to a ruthless pagan empire, God raised up a deliverer (Moses) and showed His mighty works in bringing them out of their bondage.
- The Exodus story is recounted every year by the Jewish people.

In the Exodus story of the New Testament, we see the mercy of God in that He saves His people by bringing the Messianic Deliverer from Egypt.

- Just as God delivered His people from the Egyptians in the Old Testament, so now He was delivering His people from their bondage to sin in the New Testament.
- Just as Israel was God’s son brought out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1), so now Jesus is God’s Son brought out of Egypt.

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS (MATTHEW 2:16-18)

After Herod realized that the Magi had “tricked him” by not disclosing the exact location of the Christ child, he became “furious” (vs. 16).

- Herod was willing to do anything to protect his own interests, including murdering children.
- The story of the slaughter of young boys in and around Bethlehem is actually very consistent with the pattern of his life given to us in history.

Demographers tell us that there would’ve been perhaps two dozen boys 2 and under in Bethlehem who were killed because of Herod’s order.

- The weeping from their mothers, fathers, and siblings would’ve filled the air and been so great that it would’ve noticed by all that lived in that region.
- Matthew again points to another prophecy fulfilled.

The quote from vs. 18 is from Jeremiah 31:15, where the prophet describes the capture and forced march from Israel to Babylon.

- “Rachel” is used as a figurehead for all the women of Jerusalem who are grief stricken
- And now the women of Bethlehem are mourning and grief stricken because of a similar atrocity committed against the Jewish people.

But God tells these women “they will return... so there is hope for your future” (Jer. 31:16-17).

- What Matthew is wanting to communicate by tying these verses together is that the grieving parents in Bethlehem could find comfort in the Lord’s promise.
- They could trust, even without understanding, that there was a hope behind their tragedy.

A CITY CALLED NAZARETH (MATTHEW 2:19-23)

After the death of Herod, another dream directs Joseph back home, and on the way he learns that Archelaus, Herod’s oldest son, is reigning in Judea (vs. 19-22).

- Herod Archelaus was so much of a monster he was eventually put out of power.
- Joseph was understandably afraid (vs. 22), and God directs him again in a dream.

Joseph is told to go settle his family in Galilee and to live in a city called Nazareth (vs. 22).

- Nazareth was a small town of a few hundred residents and a bit of reputation (John 1:46).
- It was a farming village that was also a Roman military outpost for good reason.
- In 4 BC, the Roman armory in Sepphoris (four miles from Nazareth) was robbed.

The Romans retaliated by crucifying 2,000 Jews, burning Sepphoris to the ground, and selling all of its inhabitants into slavery.

- Less than a decade later, when Jesus was just a boy, Judas the Galilean instituted a tax revolt, evoking another crackdown by the Romans in which many were also crucified.
- As a boy, Jesus probably witnessed Roman oppression and was familiar with crucifixion. He also would’ve been familiar with farming, village life, and the needs of the common people.
- He grew up surrounded by sick and sinful people who were not part of the religious elite.
- Matthew tells us that the fact that Jesus would grow up in Nazareth is a fulfillment of what the prophets spoke when they said He’d be called a “Nazarene”- there’s no direct quotation of this, it’s really just a theme echoed by all the prophets.

Isaiah 11:1 speaks of a branch growing from the root of Jesse- “neser”.

- Nazarenes were scorned, derided, and generally despised- so this also fits with Isaiah 53:3 where it says, “He was despised and rejected by men...and we didn’t value Him.”
- As a Nazarene, Jesus was rejected by the very world He came to save.

CONTROL.

- Will you, like Herod, **refuse to relinquish control** and get off the throne of your life and worship Him as King?
- Will you, like the Magi, **trust Him enough to go anywhere** and give everything just to know and behold Him as King who controls all areas of our life?