

Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 2:1-23

“Birth and Boyhood”

All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Enid
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October 2017

Teaching: Having completed the genealogy of Jesus we now get to look at, what we might call, “the formative years” of Christ. A glimpse into what Jesus’ growing up years were like.

But before we jump into the text ... let’s make sure we’re all on the same geographical and historical page.

The text tells us that Christ was born in Bethlehem. A community that sits about a two hour walk to the southwest of Jerusalem.

The name “Bethlehem” means “house of Bread” ... a name, no doubt, given to it by man because it sits in a very fertile region, but in light of prophecy we understand the name to mean so much more, because not only did this “House of Bread” produce a lot of grain ... it also produced “The Bread of Life”, Jesus Christ (**John 6:35**).

Modern day Bethlehem is part of, what we know as, the disputed “West Bank”, on the West side of the Dead Sea.

According to Google, Bethlehem now has a population of about 25,000 ... the majority being Muslim, but it is also where the majority of all West Bank Christians live.

Micah 5:2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah (the name of Bethlehem when it was still under Canaanite control), Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."

So, we know from this passage along with several others, that Bethlehem was prophesied to be the birthplace of the Messiah.

The other thing we need to be, at least a little bit, familiar with is King Herod and his family. More properly we would call him (or them), Herodes ... a name that means “heroic” and belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Israel.

So, there wasn’t just one “king Herod” ... there were a number of them over the generations. But the one that **Matthew** discusses in this morning’s text is the one known as “Herod the Great”.

The Herodian family historically referred to themselves as Jewish, but records seem to indicate that they were Edomites, which would technically make them Hebrew, but not Jewish.

None-the-less, their power and royalty were backed by Rome so they had the authority to claim whatever they wanted and they had the power to punish those who dared disagree with them.

Now as we dig into the scripture this morning we're going to see three groups or individuals in **this chapter** and each of them is going to offer us a unique view or perspective of Jesus Christ.

We going to see the **wise men,**
Herod the king and ...
the **Jewish people.**

So, watch for them and their perspectives of the Lord.

Verse 1: **Matthew** identifies Jesus both by place (**Bethlehem of Judea**) and by time (**the days of Herod**) which was 6 - 5 B.C.

Both important identifiers because of the Old Testament prophecies; **Micah** and **Isaiah** both telling us that Christ would come from Bethlehem and **Daniel** tells us when. **Matthew** now presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of all these.

Q. Now ... what are these magi? – Well in the Greek it's magos (mag'-os) and it can mean scientist, magician, sorcerer or wise man. So that doesn't really provide us with a concrete answer, but take note of what they're doing ... they were gazing at the stars. "**We saw His star**" they say.

So, the most probable title for this group would be astrologers ... or "One who studies the stars to predict."

They're said to have come from the east which, based on the geography as well as the origin of the word "magi" ... probably means somewhere in Mesopotamia ... east of Israel.

Q. And the next question is "how many magi were there?"? -- The most common answer is, of course, three.

Q. But where does it say that? – It doesn't, but people assume three because three gifts are mentioned. But ... **Psalm 72** says prophetically ...

10 Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. 11 And let all kings bow down before him, All nations serve him.

The fact that **these verses** are a messianic prophecy is certain, but whether or not they're specifically speaking of these magi bringing gifts to Christ is not as certain, but if, they are prophetically speaking of these magi ... there were certainly more than three that visited Him.

Verse 2: For those keeping track ... the title "**king of the Jews**" is yet one more prophetic fulfillment (**Jeremiah 23:5**).

Q. And how did these magi know the "King of the Jews" had been born? -- They "**saw His star in the east**".

And the sighting of this star was enough to cause them to pack up their camels and trek some 600 miles to search for the child.

Q. But the night sky is full of stars so what was it that compelled them to follow this one?

Numbers 24:17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob (renamed Israel), A scepter (one who rules) shall rise from Israel ... (clarification added)

Q. So how were these men from Mesopotamia so aware of biblical prophecy? -- Well it's interesting to note that the prophet who spoke those words recorded in **Numbers** was named Balaam.

We remember him best from the story of his talking donkey in **Numbers chapter 22**. But this prophet, Balaam was from ... Mesopotamia. So, these magi would have had access to his writings.

And Daniel ... who was also a true prophet of God, was held captive in the Persian region for quite some time.

Q. Could he have helped these people understand the signs of the coming messiah? -
- Sure.

But still I would have to question if that would have been enough to cause them to travel such a great distance "**following a Star**". Personally, I believe that the "**star**" itself played a significant role in their decision to seek out this "**King of the Jews**".

Q. So was this a plain old star? And if not, what was this thing they saw in the sky?
-- Well if it was a star, it must have been a pretty special one for these astrologers to recognize it as different from the other billion in the sky.

Notice that it says while they were still in the east ... they "**saw His star**". It does NOT say they "**followed that star**", but that they saw it when they were living in the east. And

we don't know how long this star hung in the sky, but by the time they reach Jerusalem, the star's already being spoken of in past tense.

While they're in Jerusalem, the star reappears ... obviously in the sky south of where they are and this time the seems to move ... leading them to the Messiah.

A special star indeed!

Verse 3: So we have a troubled Herod. The same man who had three of his sons, one of his wives, his brother-in-law, his mother-in-law and his grandfather-in-law all put to death because he feared their challenge to his throne.

When He first came to power he had the 70 members of the Jewish Sanhedrin counsel massacred and the high priest of that day drowned. All of which explains why when this guy began to feel troubled ... all of Jerusalem began to feel troubled with him.

In this case, he's troubled because a child has been born that some are saying has been born with the title "**King of the Jews**".

Verses 4-6: So Herod, in his paranoia, summons all the "in the know" people of Israel and inquires of them where this messiah is to be born.

Scripture doesn't tell us how much discussion there was over this or if they argued before answering him, but ultimately, they gave him an honest and correct answer ... Bethlehem. Because that's what Micah (**Micah 5:2**), the prophet had penned many years prior.

Verses 7-8: Now Herod knows the who and the where ... all that remains is the when. So, he tells the magi he needs to know the when, so he too can come and worship this new "King of the Jews".

Interesting that **verse 2** quotes the magi as saying the very same thing ... "that they may worship Him". Identical statements as they cross the lips of the speaker ... "that they may worship Him". But very different in the heart.

Jesus warned His disciples ...

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

And remember His chilling words just after that in ...

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

And therein lies the danger of religiosity. It's easy to look good on the outside. You can clean up your act and say lots of Christian things ... but all of that will get you a one-way ticket straight to Hell, if you don't have a relationship of submission with Jesus.

Verses 9-10: Again ... notice that **verses 2 and 9** speak of the sign of this "star" in the past tense. "They saw it when they were somewhere east of Israel", but then **verse 9** goes on to speak of it in the present tense.

And now it seems to start moving and leading them, but after it leads these magi to Bethlehem we don't hear any more about it.

Miracles have no boundaries.

Verses 11-12: Here's another example of where an honest open-eyed reading of the text will dispel the false images that many of us have stuck in our heads.

Q. Notice that the magi didn't visit the messiah in a barn or a stable or even in a cave? – They visited him in a house.

Notice also that in both **verses 8 and 11**, Jesus is referred to as a child, not an infant or baby.

And that information coupled with what we'll see just **a few verses down the road** ... tells us that Jesus was probably pushing two years of age when these magi first visited Him. He was a toddler!

So, the popular version of the Christmas story is that three kings followed a star to a manger to see a baby.

But the biblical truth is that a caravan of astrologers saw a miraculous sign in the sky and knew from the prophets that the sign meant the messiah was born so they traveled to a house to see a young boy.

So, this year when you set up your nativity scene ... set it up correctly. Place the "wise men" in the back yard or something and not in the manger because that's about how far away they would have been when Jesus was an infant.

But none of that changes the impact of the scene; this group of well-respected, professionals ... travel a great distance ... and prostrate themselves before a toddler. They're on their knees worshipping this child and lavishing Him with very costly gifts.

I don't think we can read this without taking a look at ourselves.

Q. How far are we willing to travel to come to Jesus? Some of us have trouble travelling from the television to the Bible ... much less all the way from our homes to the church building.

Q. And when we do come to Him, what are we bringing Him?

Q. Are we worshipping Him humbly or do we worship Him only when we think no one's watching? – True worship ... be divine design is humbling!

And if that's not enough ... in **verse 12** we see their trust and obedience. God spoke instruction to them and they risked their lives by disobeying Herod, to obey God.

It's what Paul wrote in ...

1st Thessalonians 2:4 we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

Verses 13-15: Joseph had a dream back in **chapter 1** telling him to marry Mary. Here he has another dream telling him to go to Egypt. It's a sequence that, I think, illustrates just what a gentleman God is.

In the first dream, Joseph was given instructions which he obeyed, but in a relative sense it wasn't a really scary step.

I mean think about it ... he already loved Mary and had already committed to marry her, so for the most part God simply gave him reassurance. Here, however the instructions are far more radical; leave your home, your employment, your family, your property and your inheritance and go to a foreign land.

God starts off with a confidence builder and as we faithfully step out in those smaller callings ... we then get the privilege of seeing God move through our lives in bigger ways.

But if you don't step out in those smaller callings don't blame God when you don't grow. Step out as He leads and let God do great things through your life.

In the **latter half of verse 15**, Matthew once again speaks of fulfilled prophecy.

Q. Have you thought about how ... from a human perspective the Old Testament prophecy of the messiah would be a real problem to fulfill in one person? – I mean ... **Psalm 110:4** tells us that the messiah must be of the priestly line (typically the tribe of Levites), but **Genesis (48:5-6)**, tells us that He must come from the tribe of Judah ... not the Levites.

No problem ... God simply brought Him through the tribe of Judah, which just happened to descend from the priestly line of Melchizedek. A priestly line even older than that of the Levites.

Now we have **Micah** saying that the messiah must come from Bethlehem, but in **Hosea 11:1** it says that God will call Him out of Egypt.

Every detail is ordained!

Verses 16-18: Herod was a cruel, paranoid man. But once again ... prophecy is fulfilled.

Verse 19-21: In Joseph's first dream he was asked to risk his reputation by marrying a girl that seemed to have been unfaithful during their betrothal.

In his second dream he was asked to risk his livelihood, his income and his comfort.

And here he's asked to risk his life and that of his Son.

God's willing to prove Himself to us ... if we'll, like Joseph, keep saying "OK Lord ... you called and I'm moving out in faith".

Verses 22-23: Born in Bethlehem ... called out of Egypt, but known as a Nazarene (**Isaiah 53:3, Psalm 22:6 and Judges 13:5**)!

Simple enough ... for our God!

Conclusion: So three people or groups:

- 1.** Herod, the king who feared the messiah so much that he wanted Him dead.

You've probably heard the old Charles Spurgeon illustration about every human heart containing two items; a crucifixion cross and a thrown.

It's an accurate statement that Jesus occupies one or the other. Many are afraid of giving Jesus the thrown (the control of their lives) so they keep Him nailed to the cross.

Clearly ... that's what Herod did. He protected his thrown at all cost and it cost him his soul.

- 2.** Then we have the Jewish people who didn't necessarily want Jesus dead, they just didn't want Him.

They knew the messiah was coming and they were even anxious and watchful for Him. They'd seen it throughout the scriptures, but Jesus wasn't quite what they were looking for in a messiah.

He didn't come into the world the way they thought best and He didn't have the right social status ... so they just kind of ignored Him. They decided ... not to decide, which means ... they decided. Jesus said ...

Luke 11:23 "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters."

Those who choose not to choose, have chosen against Him.

The Jews did that ... and some of you may be doing that this morning.

- 3.** Lastly, we have the magi; The men who travelled long, sacrificed much and worshipped humbly.

Noteworthy that only one of these three groups are ever referred to as "wise men". But they chose the wise path.

Q. So what about you? Which of these paths are you on? Are you unwilling to give up the thrown or are you still deciding not to decide? Or maybe you're one of the wise people whose ready to give it all up to worship Him?

I want to be the one who's wise enough to choose the same narrow path as these wise men (**Matthew 7:13-14**). To give it up and to worship humbly.