

# Responding to the Good News of Christmas

*Christmas*

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This morning I want to with it still being Christmas weekend, I want to look at the second chapter of Matthew continuing to consider the birth of the Messiah, the coming of Christ, and the significance of it. We did look at that on Christmas Eve but I want us this morning, I think Matthew in his gospel in chapter 2 really invites us to look at not just the issue of the message, we really looked at the content of the good news of Christmas, the message of Christmas on Christmas Eve but it's receiving the message of Christmas. And so he invites us, we're going to see in this passage, he really highlights for us the recipients of the news. We're going to see there's a comparison and contrast of basically three different recipients and their responses, their respective responses to the news of Christmas.

So we could title the message "Responding to the Good News of Christmas." Responding to the good news of Christmas and Matthew 2:1-18 what we're going to see in this, we have in this account a glorious and gracious invitation of God to all people everywhere to believe. We're going to see in this the incredible liberality and generosity of the God of heaven, that he sends forth his truth everywhere, to every creature, and he invites all men to be saved. And at the same time, we see in this message a solemn warning to those of us who are near the things of God. It's a gracious invitation and a solemn warning all at once that we would not take for granted the blessing of being close to the word of God, close to the people of God, close to the things of God because we see in this really that contrast. We're going to see as we look at the passage how those who are farthest away are impacted most profoundly and see God most earnestly, and those who are close by are hardly impacted at all.

So responding to the message of Christmas, Matthew 2:1-18.

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is

what has been written by the prophet: 6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way. 13 Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called My Son." 16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning asking that You might quicken Your word and that as we hear it this morning, that You might cause it to accomplish Your purpose in each heart, that You might strengthen faith of those who believe, that You might deepen our repentance. For those that are still, Lord, not Yours, that You might awaken faith and awaken repentance and give life. But what we desire more than anything, Lord, is that Jesus Christ be praised and honored, that truly all glory be to Him, the true King. We pray this in His name. Amen.*

So responding to the message of Christmas and as we look at this, I want to just make a couple of preliminary observations before we get into the outline of the message. We're going to see that the outline is basically we're going to look at three different people or groups who received the message of Christmas and we're going to look at the appropriate response or according to their respective responses. That's going to be the outline, but before we get into that, I want to make a few observations and the first is that, you know,

there's not a record just so we're clear, the text doesn't say that there are three wise men, though three works well in the song "First Noel." One of the lines had to rhyme with "three, the wise men three," or whatever. There is no record of how many there were of the magi. The reason that that's inferred over historically is because there are three gifts listed but we're just told magi, plural, from the east have come, and so we don't know for sure how many. There may have been more. There was probably a large party of people attending these magi no matter how many there were.

And the second observation is that the magi are not visitors to the stable. Often in the Christmas, you know, nativity scenes and stuff, the magi are there but in reality they weren't there at the nativity, and we see this, first of all, in verse 11 it says, "After coming into the house." They came into the house, not the stable. There's no record of the manger. As the shepherds, remember, they were told they would see the baby lying in a manger. They went that night of Christ's birth and they saw him in the manger, but the magi come sometime later, not probably months later and we know that because of Herod's inquiry. In verse 7, "Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared." He wanted to know exactly when the star appeared. Why does he want to know that? Well, he says because he wants to worship but, of course, that's not his real intent. We see his real evil and sinister intent in verse 16, "when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi." Now I think probably what this means is it was several months. He was looking for a child that might have been 4, 5, 6 months old and just to be clear, he wanted to make sure he eradicated that rival to his throne, and so he gave instructions to the soldiers who were going to carry out this diabolic order to kill everybody that was from 2 years old and under. Any child that you think could possibly be the Christ child. He gave a margin around it. Probably they're seeing the baby 4, maybe 3 months old, maybe 6 months old. We don't know, somewhere in that range.

Another aspect of that which I think proves that is that they weren't there at the manger scene, is that when Mary and Joseph dedicate Jesus, Luke tells us, remember Luke gives us the story of the manger, and also the dedication of the baby Jesus as in obedience to the law they took him after the time of purification, they had him circumcised on the eighth day, then they took him to the temple to dedicate him to the Lord. This would have been about six weeks after his birth, and they made the appropriate offering for the firstborn. We're told in Luke 2:24 that they offered two pigeons or two turtledoves. This was the offering required in the law for those who were poor. Had they already received the gifts of the magi, they would have been able to offer a lamb because they are receiving a great amount of financial gift right here. The gold, frankincense and myrrh are worth a lot, and I think in the Lord's providence they testify to Jesus' personhood, who he really is, but they also provide a providential, real, tangible blessing and it funds the trip into Egypt. So the sovereignty of God is just beautifully on display here but when we carefully observe the text, we see that the magi really shouldn't be in our manger scene.

So, you know, if you're going to have a manger scene, I don't know, we may have magi in ours at home actually. We didn't put it out this year. Providentially, we did not. We had another manger scene that did not have that out, the magi in it. So anyway, you all can repent appropriately as you need to. No, but seriously, I think it's just good for us to be accurate as much as we can and represent things correctly. And so at the manger, the shepherds were there but the magi weren't. That's just a helpful observation that we see as we read the text carefully.

Now what I want us, though, to look at really what's the message here? Why did God give this passage of Scripture? Why did the Lord inspire Matthew to put this into his gospel? It's always so important to see that. I mean, Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit to put in the account of Jesus' birth and being laid in the manger. He's the one gospel writer who puts that in. Matthew is the one gospel writer who gives the account of the visit of the magi.

What is his purpose? Well, I think we can understand something of his purpose when we step back and look at the overall purpose of Matthew in writing his gospel. Each of the gospel writers, it's wonderful how God has given us four gospels, four accounts of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Someone has said that the gospel accounts are actually passion narratives with long introductions. They are narratives of the death of Christ with long introductions, that the whole point of Jesus coming was not to be served but to serve and to give his life. So the gospels make, all of the gospels make the focus the cross but they each introduce that message of the cross and the resurrection with distinct perspective on particular events. As John says in his gospel near the end of his gospel in chapter 20, I believe it's verse 31 he says, "There are many more things Jesus did and were they to be written down, the world couldn't contain the books that would be written about all that Jesus did. But these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

So each gospel writer includes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit certain things to accomplish the purpose and you have, in a sense, four distinct views of the glory of Jesus. God in his wisdom didn't just give us one, he gave us four different views, through four different personalities who in Luke's case researched it, Mark's case learned from Peter, Matthew who actually himself and John who actually himself walked with Jesus, these four views of the passion of Christ but also the life of Christ leading up to the offering of Christ and it's a glorious thing.

One of our members here, Ken Temple, is a missionary, as you know, actually to Persians, to Iranians, who the magi probably come from that area, and Ken has talked about how, he shared with me one time he was talking with some folks in Turkey and they were asking, he ministers to a lot of Iranians in Turkey because you can't get into Iran legally so he's done a lot of his ministry has been in Turkey ministering to Iranians that have come there. Anyway, he was talking to a Turk or an Iranian who was in Turkey about the gospel and introducing these things to him, and the man said, "Why are there four gospels?" And Ken had a really insightful illustration he used. They were standing on the street corner and Ken said, "You know, imagine that a traffic accident happened

right here and you wanted to find, the police wanted to find out exactly what happened. They might interview us because we're standing and we have this vantage point, but to get a fuller picture they might also talk to this person over there, and this person over there, and this person on that side so they get the full vantage point of exactly what happened." And there's a sense in which God in his wisdom gives us because the Scripture is the divine word of God, it's perfect, every word is God-breathed, and yet he uses human instruments who really in their own minds witness these things, or who research these things as we see in Luke's gospel, and he gives us a fuller portrait of Jesus, many angles looking at Jesus.

And Matthew's angle that he comes at, his purpose is to show Jesus as the King of the Jews. Jesus is the King of the Jews. Jesus, all of the gospel writers have this element in their message obviously because it's a key part of who Jesus is, but Matthew particularly emphasizes the messiahship or the kingship, the right of Jesus to reign as the King of the Jews, and that's because his purpose is particularly aimed at, he's writing to Jews who some are believing already and are shaken in their faith, others he's writing in an evangelistic way to Jewish people to say Jesus is truly the Messiah, receive him, believe in him, and one of the challenges that he is experiencing in his ministry, probably writes late 50s AD, probably 25-30 years after the resurrection and ascension of Christ he writes his gospel, and in that period of time what's happened is the overwhelming majority of Jews have rejected the Messiah. This is one of the just surprising and disturbing realities, that as the church, as the gospel goes forth from Jerusalem, it's all initially Jewish people who have been saved. It's the apostles who are all themselves Jews. It's the people at Pentecost, thousands saved on the day of Pentecost and Peter's preaching, he's preaching to Jews. They've come from other parts of the world but they're all Jewish. They've come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost and now they've been saved and they're going out and they're taking the gospel out and everywhere, remember how Paul when he goes on his missionary journeys across the Mediterranean world, he always goes first, where? To the synagogue. He goes to the synagogue, the gathering of the Jews and he preaches the gospel first there. The gospel first goes to the Jew and then after that to the Greek, and over time what's happened is more and more Jews have rejected the message of Christ, and more and more Gentiles, relatively speaking, are coming into the church. And for the Jews that are in the church, this is unsettling and they begin to doubt, "Can it really be that Jesus is our Messiah when can so many Jews be wrong about Jesus? And Gentiles, can they be right?"

So Matthew is seeking to address that, to prove the messiahship of Jesus and one of the things that you see and we've seen in what we read today, is that one of his formulas that he uses over and over again is to point out the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. Three times in the passage we read this morning, he cited Old Testament prophecy that was fulfilled, and often he introduces it with this formula, "This happened to fulfill what Jeremiah the prophet, or what Isaiah the prophet, or what the prophets said." And so he's showing fulfilled prophecy, fulfilled prophecy, fulfilled prophecy. Jesus is Messiah.

So that's his purpose and in light of that, it's even more striking that he includes the magi and I think he does that with an intention to provoke a sense of godly jealousy on the part

of the Jews. He wants to show them, "Listen, what you're seeing in your experience," now this is an encouragement to the Christian Jews, that is, the Jews who have received Jesus as Messiah, a small number. It's an encouragement to them and it's also a warning to the other Jews who have not yet received him that Matthew's trying to evangelize, that what you're seeing today in 60 AD with most Jews rejecting Jesus and the Gentiles coming to Jesus, is exactly what happened when Jesus came. Exactly the same thing. The people that responded to Christ were those the farthest away who came flooding, earnestly seeking him out, and those who were near were indifferent or opposed to him.

So he does this right at the beginning of his gospel, reminds them of this, and throws it out there to provoke a sense of the solemnity of the message that he has. And so he's, in a sense, at one and the same time he's offering to us the graciousness of God, the wideness of God's mercy, that the God of Abraham is a God who intended always to save all the families of the earth, but at the same time a solemn warning to those who are close and near the things of God, that we would not take it for granted, and the great relevance for those of us in Bible-believing churches and in Bible-believing families. To grow up around the things of God is by no means a guarantee that you are going to be saved, in fact, it's a call for even more humility and brokenness. Gratitude, yes, but gratitude with brokenness.

So now let's look at the responses to the message of Christmas. We're going to look at each, we're going to look at three different groups who received the message and their responses. The first recipient, so it's like recipients and response. You can think, point 1, we're going to look at the magi, the recipients themselves and their response. Point 2 will be Herod, recipient himself, his response. Point 3 will be the people of Jerusalem, the recipients and their response. That's the outline. So 1, 2, 3, A and B for each one.

So the magi. They're the recipients of the message of Christmas. They're the recipients of the message that Jesus has come, that God has sent his Son into the world, that the Messiah has arrived. And the word "magi" in verse 1, "magi from the east." This word "magi" is believed to be of Persian derivation. We get our English word "magic" from it. A magi was a sorcerer, a wizard, a person who might claim to have magical powers, an astrologer, one who studied the stars and tried to find meaning from that in a way that Scripture says you're not to do, the Jews weren't to do that, someone who interpreted dreams. And these people, that was the basic idea of what a magi was, where the word came from, and then in the courts of the kings of the east, the Babylonian court, the Persian court, later at this time the Parthian court, you would have magi, you'd have a court of advisers who were people who had insight, including spiritual kind of insights like these people. You can remember that Daniel and his three friends in the book of Daniel were basically trained in the school of the magi in Babylon. That's what's happening in Daniel 1. They're being enrolled for matriculation into the school of the magi and Daniel and his three friends do very well because God blesses them and Daniel becomes a great adviser to Nebuchadnezzar and then later even to the Persian, the Median king Darius after the change of hegemony.

So the magi, though, this was a word that would have been offensive. Right off the bat, I mean, the Jews reading this would have been like, "Magi? Magic? This is not good. Who are these guys?" I mean, when they're first reading it, before they know the rest of the story, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews?" How do they know? Not only does it have all those connotations of spiritual darkness, it has connotations of the Babylonian captivity and the Persian hegemony. That's where magi come from, from Babylon, from Persia. They're our enemies. They're the ones who oppressed us. You see all that connotation that would have come with that term when the first audience of this gospel reads it, Jewish believers or Jewish possibly converts that Matthew is trying to make through his gospel would have read this? It would have been disturbing and probably offensive but it was to call them to wonder. It was, in a sense, God saying, "The most unlikely are the ones who came."

And you see in it, I mentioned earlier the generosity of God, his kindness in extending his gospel throughout the whole of the world. In fact, I want to point something out, this is where the NASB, lately I've been calling out the NASB a lot more than I used to. I always thought it was the best translation but I have to call it out again. Today it misses and the ESV is better in this case as well as in the past, the last few times I've mentioned it. When he says in verse 1, "in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem," in the text, in the Greek it says, "Behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying." The ESV translates that particle, behold. It's basically an imperative verb that's given there as kind of an interjection to say, "Listen up. Look." And that word occurs in verse 9 also but it's not translated by the NASB here either. In verse 9 it literally says, "After hearing the king, they went their way; and behold, the star which they had seen in the east." Now normally the NASB translates that word "behold" because just in chapter 1, verse 20, if you turn your page over, "But when he had considered this," as when Joseph was planning to put Mary away, "when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream." Do you see what the author is basically saying, "Behold. Listen up. An angel appeared." It does the same thing in chapter 2, verse 19, "when Herod died," this is now Joseph after the death of Herod, "when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream." So the "behold" is kind of important. It's like saying, "Hey, give me your full attention." It literally means "look, behold," but it can also have the effect of, "listen, listen to what I'm about to say, look at what I'm about to show you." And I really think it helps to have the "beholds" in there in verse 1 and verse 9 because what it does is it emphasizes in chapter 2, verse 1, where it is, "in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east." Do you see that? It just underscores it, circles it, highlights it and says, "Look at them, it's magi from the east," those who were so far away.

Then in verse 9, "behold, the star." The word "star" occurs four times in the passage. Verse 2, "For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." Verse 7, "the exact time the star appeared." Verse 9, "After hearing the king, they went their way; and behold, the star went before them." Let me just say a word here too. This, I don't think that the star based on reading the text carefully, the star is not merely the joining of Jupiter and Saturn together, I mean, which happened this week. I don't know if anybody saw it. Wasn't it Monday night or something? We missed it. We tried to look for it and

couldn't find it. But anyway, that's really awesome that God does that and maybe there was something about that that got them started looking at the stars possibly, I don't know. But the reason we know it wasn't that is because the star in verse 9, "went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the child was." The star actually moves from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and shows them exactly where they're to go in, the house they're to go in. That can't be Saturn and Jupiter converging. That's a supernatural manifestation of God that resembles a star. Now he is doing it to people who are watching the stars. They're probably astrologers and maybe the first thing that got them going was some kind of natural heavenly occurrence, but now it's a supernatural heavenly occurrence, and even a natural heavenly occurrence at the right time is still supernatural. I had a professor that used to say this: everything is a miracle. Think about that. It's true. The fact that you're sitting here is a miracle. The fact that our bodies are holding together is a miracle.

So anyway, but the star, he says, "behold, the star. Behold, the magi. Behold, the star." I mean, it's the most surprising group of people to be coming and it's the most surprising form of revelation to be given. It's an example of the incredible generosity of God. It doesn't say we're to look to the stars. No, no, no, the word is clear, don't look to the stars, you look to the word. We have this book, this perfect revelation which you do well to pay attention to as a light shining in a dark place, 2 Peter 1. The word of God is sufficient, it's all we need, but the Lord even has a way of reaching out to people beyond the sound of his word.

Now I think it's likely these people in Persia or Babylon did have a good portion of the Old Testament. They probably had Numbers 24:17 which speaks about, let's just look at this, Numbers 24:17, this may have been what helped them to be looking for the star. The oracle of Balaam where he says, this is when Balak has paid Balaam, the prophet, an ungodly prophet but a prophet nevertheless, a man who somehow had insights into real spiritual realities and he pays him to curse Israel and Balaam keeps on blessing Israel and Balak says, "I don't think I'm getting my money's worth out of this." And Balaam tells him every time, he says, "Look, I'll do whatever I receive. Whatever I receive I'll speak. I can't edit it. I've just got to say what..." And God keeps putting in his mouth blessings and part of this blessing in verse 17, he prophesies something really amazing, "I see him," Numbers 24:17, "but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab." Balak, who paid for that prophesy, is a Moabite. Curse Israel and basically the curse falls right back on him. But in that, there's this amazing grace of God that a scepter and a star is going to come from Jacob, a scepter that will bring the reign of God's anointed one to the whole world.

Then Isaiah 60, the prophet Isaiah 60:1-6. This is Isaiah 60:1, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes," verse 4, "round about and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill



and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD."

So you have these passages in the Old Testament that they likely, the wise men had access to, remember they had a large contingent of Jews that stayed in both Babylon and Persia and so there were synagogues there and so they were exposed in some ways to the things of God, and yet they were still very far away. But I think it's interesting, those passages, Matthew does not quote those in Matthew 2 and I was thinking about this, he seems to be taking every opportunity to quote the Old Testament as fulfillment, and I think the reason he doesn't is because he wants us not to get sidetracked by that too much, he wants us to get back to the main point which is, the main point is the unlikeliness of magi being there in the first place, the astonishing reality that people from that far away are the ones who truly understand what God is doing and are truly doing what God would have all men do, that is, worship Jesus Christ.

So that's the magi. That's point 1A. Who the first recipients, the magi, but what did they do? This is their response: they sought the King. They sought the King. They sought the King, first of all, diligently. Back to Matthew 2. They are said to be magi from the east. The word "east" is repeated a couple other times in the passage. Verse 2, "we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." Verse 9, "After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east went before them." In the east. In the east. In the east. From the east. What's going on with that? The word literally in its etymology means "from the rising." East actually translates a word that means "from the rising." From the rising of the sun. It's a word which implies great distance. Where are they from? Look at where the sun rises. Way out there where the sun rises, that's where these guys have come from.

Now as I said earlier, they're probably from Babylon or Persia based on what we know from history about magi. This means they've come between 800-1,000 miles. At 20 miles a day, they'd been traveling for 40-50 days when they arrive in Jerusalem saying, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" They'd come, I mean, when they see his star, they clearly have made preparations for the journey, they have gathered together the resources they need for a trip that long, they planned it. This is why we think probably about three months, maybe a little longer, I don't know, before they get there, and then they take this long arduous journey from Babylon or Persia all the way to Jerusalem. It's a diligent heart that they manifest. They're willing to work to come to seek Christ.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us what faith is. They're exhibiting true faith. Hebrews 11:6, "without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who comes to Him must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of all who diligently seek Him." They are diligently seeking him because they believe he rewards those who diligently seek him. They're coming to Christ. They're seeking him for salvation and it's that diligence that shows that they have been granted the gift of faith by the sovereign grace of God.

So they seek him, they sought the King, first subpoint here, diligently. There's four things about the way they sought him. So it would be 1B, 1, 2, 3 and 4. They sought him, they sought the King diligently. They sought him joyfully. Verse 10, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." In fact, you can see something of their enthusiasm even in verse 1 when it says in verse 1, "magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying." It doesn't say they said. This is actually the tense of the verb here implies it's a present tense verb, actually, and remember present tense in Greek means ongoing continuous action. They arrived in Jerusalem and they're going everywhere saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him. Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" They're earnestly seeking him. They're joyfully seeking him.

But that diligence and joy, next, they don't just seek him diligently and joyfully, they seek him humbly. When they come into the house in verse 11, they fall to the ground, "they fell to the ground and worshiped Him." They prostrate themselves before the young baby. They lay down their dignity. These are guys who are in the courts of kings. They are men of power and influence. They're not kings themselves but they're men of power and influence and when they see God's Christ, they fall on their faces. They count their own dignity as nothing in his presence. This is how we need to seek him, to fall on our faces before him, in the essence of our hearts to prostrate ourselves before one so worthy.

They seek him diligently, joyfully, humbly, but also whole-heartedly. I think this is the point of those gifts that they brought. They worshiped in verse 11, then opening their treasures, they give their treasures to him. They bring that which is most precious to them and they lay it at his feet. This is what true faith looks like. It seeks Jesus as King diligently. It seeks Jesus as King joyfully. It seeks Jesus as King humbly. And it seeks Jesus as King whole-heartedly. There is full surrender to this one who has been born King, and the gifts themselves testify of his glorious person. The gold, I mean, that's the historically that has been the one precious metal that represents the ultimate wealth. Gold. And so it's wealth and frankincense, that which is incense offered to deity, and so frankincense testifies to his deity. It's also very valuable. I'm sure what they did with it, you would think they sold it and used the funds. But the testimony is not just is Jesus is royal. The wealth of all the nations belongs to him. He's the King. That's gold. Frankincense, he is God. Worship belongs to him. Prayers are made to him. And myrrh, myrrh was also a valuable costly perfume but it was used in burial primarily, and so myrrh would have been applied to Jesus' body when he died. So here you have, in a sense, his royalty in the gold, his deity in the frankincense, his humanity and death in the myrrh. They're testifying probably beyond their ability to fully understand but God has ordained that their testimony is perfect. Jesus is King. Jesus is God. Jesus is the Lamb of God and they worship him.

That's the right response. That's the only appropriate response. That's the only sane response to who Jesus is. That's the only sane response to the message of Christmas, it is to worship him, to seek him diligently, to seek him joyfully, to seek him humbly, to seek him whole-heartedly. And you know, this says something really profound about the way

we should think evangelistically. I think this tells us and when you read the New Testament carefully, the people who appear to be the farthest from the things of God are more often than not the ones most ready to hear. The people who appear to be the farthest from the things of God are more often than not the people most ready to hear that God is working in their hearts to show them how far away. Think about the people that came to Jesus in his ministry. The Pharisees rejected him in large part because they saw him as a companion, I mean this was one of the reasons, it was ultimately their unbelief, their wicked hearts, but their justification for it was he was a companion of sinners. He hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes. Now, of course, they didn't know because they didn't really examine themselves, they were former prostitutes and they were repentant tax collectors because they had come into the presence of Jesus and he changed everything.

But think about that, that's the people following Jesus then, and how is it that we forget that today? I mean, I think this way, the person who seems to be, you know, well-dressed and have things together, their lives together, they seem in my mind to be the person that will be most likely to respond to the gospel, and it doesn't mean that you look at them and say no and you don't give them the gospel. No, you do but we should be diligent to give the gospel to those who seem the most unlikely. It may be the most difficult to start the conversation with them. We've got to find a way to do it because very often those are the people, though they may initially seem resistant who will run to Christ diligently, who will seek him joyfully, who will bow before him humbly because they know who they really are. They're not pretending and they'll surrender their hearts completely.

That's the beauty of the magi as a representation of how we should respond to the message of Christmas. The second recipient, though, is Herod the king. This is the second main point. Herod. This is Herod the Great. He was an Edomite who had been made king of Judea by Rome. The Jews, faithful Jews, basically didn't have a high regard for him because he was an Edomite. An Edomite is a descendant of Esau, not of Jacob. He's not an Israelite. He has no title to the right, or no right to the title King of the Jews. But the Roman Senate had conferred upon him the title King of Judea or King of the Jews, and it's interesting in the text that Matthew twice describes Herod as "Herod the king." Look at verse 1, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king." Okay that one seems okay. That's natural. Herod is the leader, okay. "Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.'" Look at verse 3, though, "When Herod the king," do you see that? Matthew's intentionally transposing that. Herod the king. The king of the Jews. Herod the king. To put that contrast up and it's anticipating the fact that Herod sees in the birth of this Messiah a rival for the throne he wants to cling to.

So what we see in Herod, his response, this is 2B. We looked at the recipient is Herod, that's 2A. The response is he opposed the King. He magi sought the King, Herod opposed the King. He did so secretly, two little observations about how he opposed. First of all, secretly. He didn't openly oppose the King. When he heard the message, it says he was troubled, and interestingly, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. That was their

response, to be troubled. Not to be joyful, to be troubled. But in verse 7 he secretly calls the magi and tells them, "Hey, go and search carefully because I want to come worship Him." But he has no intention of worshipping him, does he? He opposed the King secretly and then that secret opposition gives way to opposing the King openly. Secret opposition gives way to open opposition when in verse 16 he realizes he's been tricked, he sends his soldiers, enraged now, he can no longer hide his opposition to the kingship of Jesus. Enraged, he rebels against him and sends and tries to eradicate the Son of God from the face of the earth. His brutality is astonishing, every child two years old and under. Jesus was probably 3, 4, 5 months old but he kills every child two years old, male child, every child two years old and under.

What you see in this is that when the message of Christmas goes forth, when the message of the gospel goes forth, some will receive it like the magi, and some will receive it like Herod. They will see in the message that Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords and they will see it as a direct affront to who they are and their own personal autonomy and authority, and they will hate the message. At first secretly many times but at some point openly because they can't hide the antipathy and the rage.

This is why when we preach the gospel and we share Christ, there will be times we receive this kind of response. People will hate what we're saying. Jesus said this is the way it's going to be, "If they hated Me, they will hate you. A servant is not greater than his master." And this is part of the cost of sharing the gospel. We need to be willing to endure that and don't be surprised by that, don't be discouraged by that. In fact, when you see it, be discouraged for the person's soul but in a part of your heart praise God that his word is true. Even the intensity of their opposition proves the veracity of the gospel. Think about that. It does. It doesn't make sense for people to hate the gospel as much as they hate it if it weren't true. The reason they hate it so much is because they know it is true. If it weren't, they'd just be, "You crazy nuts. You guys are just into mythology and all that." And they would just laugh at us. Well, they try to laugh at us but when you really make the claims of Christ to them, they should still just be able to laugh and say, "Well, fine." No, they can't do that because they hear in the gospel the truth of the gospel and they rebel against it and hate it, and when we see that, there should be a part of us that takes comfort in the fact that, "Lord, Your word is true. Praise Your name. I have an opportunity to stand with You and receive the reproach of Christ. I'm unworthy. Help me, Lord."

So that's a part of the way people are going to respond. So sometimes those who appear at first to be enthusiastic in their reception, remember he says, "Hey, guys, I'm so glad you're here. Go and search carefully for Him and find Him because I want to worship Him." We have to be aware of the fact that sometimes it's going to happen within the church. We will see that those who appear to be true followers of Jesus will actually be the fiercest opponents of Christ. This is what we see as we read the rest of the New Testament because false teachers and false prophets abounded. Those who appeared to be followers of Jesus turned out to be opponents of Jesus. Now these are people, these aren't just your everyday Christian, what he's talking about here is people who want authority and position but who in reality hate Christ and there will be that reality to understand.

That's why the real qualification for leadership in the church, the ultimate requirement is humility. The ultimate requirement is to be willing to be made nothing that Jesus could be everything, to have the heart of John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, I must decrease." That was not Herod's heart and that's not the heart of some who received the message.

So we saw in the magi they sought the King. Herod, we see in Herod that he opposed the King. And thirdly with the people of Jerusalem. That's the third group. How did they respond to the message? They ignored the King. They ignored the King. They were complacent. They were indifferent. They were unmoved. Astonishingly. He mentions in verse 3, "all Jerusalem was troubled with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born." They know their Bible, they know Micah 5:2 which we looked at last Sunday. They know that, they say, "We know where the Messiah is to be born, He's to be born in Bethlehem." Bethlehem is about 5 ½ miles from where they're standing, 5 ½ miles. The magi have come about 1,000 miles, a month and a half journey, earnestly seeking to worship Christ. Now Jerusalem knows the Messiah, they have the report the Messiah has been born 5 ½ miles away, and nobody goes.

It's like the contrast, the magi, those who were farthest away are seeking so fervently, so earnestly, and those who were right next door ignore the birth of the King. They do so with some anxiety. I would say here they ignored Christ first anxiously. Verse 3, they are troubled. They're unsettled by the news. Why were they unsettled? Possibly because magi are giving the news. More probably because they don't truly worship the King. And then they're anxiously, their anxiety gives way to indifference because they don't do anything. I mean, isn't it astonishing? They don't get up and go. Herod even says, "Just go find Him and let me know where He is." And there's none of the scribes, none of the chief priests, none of the people of Jerusalem, they should be forming a caravan, "Let's go see Him." I mean, think about if people knew, you know, that, you think about how what people do to go see a movie star or if you found out, you know, some of you in your past might have gone to hear some musician, some singer was going to be, you know, at the arena signing autographs. You'd go see him. But the King of all, the Lord of lords has been born and nobody goes. And we see in this, we're supposed to see in this just to be perplexed. How could this be that those who were the closest to the things of God, that those who were closest to the working of God may in reality be the farthest?

It is a solemn warning to us. Proximity can lead to complacency. Easy access can result in apathy. There is an inherent danger of being around the things of God. Now listen to me carefully. The biggest blessing that you can have in your life is to be around the things of God. Hear this carefully. To have the word of God taught to you from your childhood, young people, is the greatest gift that you could receive in this life. But there is in the midst of this greatest most wonderful gift because as Paul said to Timothy, "Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, remembering from whom you learned them, that from childhood you were taught the holy Scriptures by your mother and your grandmother. Continue in these things." That's the most precious treasure, the word of God, more valuable than all of the wealth in the world is nothing.

The word of God is everything. But there is a danger to being around the word of God and not treasuring it yourself, not humbling yourself under it, not receiving it with faith, not actively pursuing Christ through his word.

So this is something for us to consider, not just young people but all of us who are around the word of God. As a preacher myself, to think about the fact that it is easy, much easier than we would readily admit to become cold and complacent with the things of God, and we need to cry out to God for mercy. And I want to tell you, I think a couple of passages I want you to think about and meditate on because I think we all of us would do well to think about this. God is so gracious and kind. One of the beautiful things the Lord did was to send John the Baptist before he sent Jesus. I mean, we know everything he does is right but do you know what John the Baptist's message simply was really? His message was to all the Jewish people who were around the temple, who had the whole Old Testament, all the Gentiles who are out there in darkness, they're basically in their minds like dogs compared to people, we're the people, the Gentiles are the dogs, and what did John the Baptist come saying? He said basically, his message was, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Be baptized." Do you know what baptism meant for a Jew to be baptized? Do you know who was supposed to be baptized before John's ministry? When the Gentile dogs, I say that because Jesus remember says that to the woman, the Syro-Phoenician woman, when the Gentile dogs come to faith, they were to be baptized. That is, a Gentile when they came to be a Jew, they were to experience proselyte baptism. They were basically saying, "I need to be washed. I need to be clean." So John the Baptist comes to the nation of Israel and he says, "Repent and be baptized because the Messiah is coming. The kingdom of God is at hand." What's he saying? "All of you Jews, you need to be baptized. You need to see yourself as filthy as the Gentiles. Get ready. Make a way in your heart for Christ to come and the only way He's going to come to you as the Jewish people is that you see yourself as filthy and as in deep need as the worst and darkest Gentile." That was John the Baptist's ministry.

And this is what's so beautiful about Paul's testimony in Philippians 3, another passage to meditate on. Philippians 3:4-11. Look what Paul said, "although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." Look at my resume. Look at my resume. I'll match it up with any of you Jews, Paul says. But look what he says next, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Whatever I thought was worth anything I now consider as nothing. Circumcised the eighth day, it's irrelevant. Born of the tribe of Benjamin, it does not matter. Zealous in the law and keeping the externals of the law, it's absolutely worthless. All that matters is Christ. That's what Paul has come to see. "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." The only way we can gain Christ is to count everything else as rubbish.

So it's a blessing to be under the law, to be under the word. It's a blessing to be around the things of God but the person who believes must come to see himself as filthy and as distant from God as the worst pagan, the person wrapped up in spiritual darkness of the magi. I need Jesus to lighten my heart. I need Jesus to give me a new understanding, a new heart and that's true of every single person around the things of God. The only way we will become followers of Jesus is to have a new heart. We need heart surgery as much as any other pagan. No matter how wicked we see people around us, the world is getting darker and darker and darker, but you and I before God are just as in need of grace as the worst sinner. And when you understand that and when you're willing to bow your knee before Jesus and acknowledge that, then you can receive him joyfully because he is a Savior of sinners. He didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The physician heals those who know they're sick.

So the message that these magi put before the Jews in the first century was, "You need to be as humble as we are." The reason so many rejected Jesus is because they were not willing to humble themselves. May that not be true of any of you. May we bow our knee and give him all the glory. All glory belongs to Christ and if that's your heart, there's no way he'll keep you away. That's what this says. He's so generous, so kind. Any, anyone can come to him.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that You save those who appear to be unsavable and, Lord, the reality is that the most unsavable person in the world, in my view, should be me because each of us knows our own wickedness more than we know anyone else's if we're willing to see it. It's obvious there every moment of every day. There is no good in us that is in our flesh, nothing to commend us to You, and yet Jesus is full of goodness. Jesus is able to cleanse and to save to the uttermost the one whose hope is in Him. O Lord, we pray that all of us who are around the things of God would not be complacent, would not be indifferent but that we would seek diligently, that we would seek joyfully, humbly and with hearts that are fully surrendered. Have Your way in my life. May that be all of our prayer. Never stop, Lord, having complete reign for Your glory in those who belong to You. Help those, Lord, who are still holding back. Let them see that that is insanity and that You will not turn away any who genuinely comes to You. Be glorified, Lord. We pray in Your name. Amen.*