

Advent 2019

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you!””
(Psalm 122:6 ESV)*

*“May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!”
(Psalm 72:2 ESV)*

*“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.”
(Psalm 146:3 ESV)*

*“Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!”
(Psalm 80:19 ESV)*

Responding To The King

December 29th, 2019

Matthew 2:1-18

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Introduction:

Good morning, and Merry Christmas! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 2.

When I saw that we were going to be working through the advent Psalms this year, I will confess that I felt a little stress. Particularly, as I began to study the first Psalm in the series which had the heading “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”... I thought: “Where is Christmas in this Psalm?”

But here we are a month later and we saw Jesus, didn't we? We were filled with anticipation and expectation for the glory that is to come! We prayed for the perfect King and we sang for the perfect King and we longed for his return!

And now, on this Christmas Sunday, God's Word invites us to respond to the King who has come.

I hope you have your Bible's open to Matthew 2. We're going to be reading from verses 1-18.

Hear now God's inspired, innerant, living and active word to us today:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When

Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Matthew 2:1-18 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Now, in order for us to see what we are supposed to see in this text, we need to realize that Matthew wrote this Gospel for a predominantly Jewish audience. That’s important to know.

Matthew here is writing to a people who are STEEPED in the Old Testament. Therefore, he takes any and every opportunity to show them all of the ways in which Jesus’ life – from start to finish – represents the fulfillment of all of the expectations of the Old Testament. D.A. Carson notes:

Of course Matthew did not just chronicle meaningless events. He wrote to develop his theme of fulfilment of scripture.¹

An analogy comes to my mind – and I suspect it is influenced by the toys that Luke has been unwrapping for the last four days... Imagine the Bat Signal. Do you remember that? It was a big spotlight that shot up into the sky and it meant: “We need BATMAN!” Well, the Old Testament is full of those signals. “We need a King like David! We need a Prophet like Moses! We need one who will unlock the blessings of God for us!” Can you picture that? Spotlights scattered across the night sky.

But here in this chapter, Matthew is taking all of those spotlights and he is pointing all of them at Jesus. Matthew wants us to see that every Old Testament promise and expectation finds its “yes” and “amen” in Jesus.

We’re going to see him do that in today’s text, because Matthew wants to help us to see and delight in Jesus. So, let’s ask the question:

What Does This Story Teach Us About Jesus?

First, Matthew clearly intended for us to see that:

1. He will be our Shepherd King

If you see nothing else in today’s text, you need to understand the significance of the arrival of the magi with their expensive gifts.

We have said countless times over this Advent series that David – and Solomon after him – was like an arrow shot at the sun. He pointed us in the right direction, but he ultimately fell short. And do you remember the peak – the apex – of Solomon’s reign? Three weeks ago, we looked at the story of the Queen of Sheba who came from her far away land to shower Solomon with gifts. In

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Matthew-Luke)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 83.

that moment, it looked like Psalm 72 was going to be fulfilled. Psalm 72, you remember, was a prayer for the perfect King and in that prayer the Psalmist prayed:

May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands
render him tribute;
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts!
¹¹ May all kings fall down before him,
all nations serve him! (Psalm 72:10-11 ESV)

So the Queen of Sheba arrived with tribute for Solomon and everybody was left wondering: “Is THIS the good King we’ve been waiting for?” But that question was answered on the very next page of the Bible. Immediately after the story of the Queen of Sheba, Solomon begins to go off the rails – the arrow that was headed towards the sun begins to plummet towards the earth with embarrassing speed!

Matthew intends for you to remember that as you read this story, because here, in Matthew 2, Jesus is receiving worship and tribute from the nations! Do you see that? Jesus is picking up where Solomon left off but – unlike David and Solomon and all of the other arrows shot at the sun – Jesus will not fall short! He is THE KING! This is why, in verse 6, Matthew includes a prophecy from Micah 5:2. It says:

⁶ ““And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”” (Matthew 2:6 ESV)

If you’re reading through the RMM reading plan then you are just now coming to the end of 2 Chronicles where a history is recorded of the kings of Israel and what a SAD history it is! Israel, for the most part, was plagued by kings who were self-serving, wicked men. The Jews were longing for a leader who would watch over them like a shepherd watches over his sheep but king after king, time after time, they received awful leadership. God saw this, and he said through the prophet Ezekiel:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? (Ezekiel 34:2 ESV)

“A shepherd King is supposed to feed the people FIRST, but you keep letting the people starve while you feed yourselves!” God was so fed up with the failure of these kings that He promised:

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:15-16 ESV)

Are you seeing this? Let’s go back to the “Bat Signal” analogy. In Micah 5:2, one signal shoots into the sky for a Shepherd King that will rise up in the line of Judah. Here in Ezekial 34, another signal shoots up that declares that God HIMSELF will shepherd his people. And in Matthew’s Gospel, he is bringing these two signals together and showing us that they both find their fulfilment in Jesus! Jesus is GOD IN THE FLESH shepherding his people!

He will care for the least of these. He will guard and protect each and every one of his people. He will lay down his life for the good of his people. Jesus is the perfect Shepherd King! He is the GOD KING! He is the King we have been waiting for and, Matthew would have us see, the King has arrived! HALLELUJAH!

Second, we learn about Jesus that:

2. He will be our Ultimate Redeemer

If I were to say the word “redemption” to a Jew in Matthew’s day, what story would they think of? Immediately, their minds would turn to the story of the exodus when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into freedom. The exodus was the greatest story of redemption in the whole Old Testament! God’s people sang about it, celebrated holidays and feasts to remember it, and prayed about it all throughout the year. It was THE story!

Here, Matthew is setting the stage for a new story of redemption and he does so by highlighting details that bring our minds back to the first exodus story. Commentator R.T. France notes:

There is not a neat point-for-point correspondence, but rather a series of echoes throughout the chapter which builds up to a deliberate depiction of Jesus as the new Moses.²

“A series of echoes.” I like that language. Let me just briefly tell you the story of the birth of Moses, and see if you can’t hear the echoes that will be packed up by Matthew in his Gospel.

When Moses was born, Pharaoh called for the murder of all of the Jewish baby boys in Egypt. Moses’ mother acted quickly and sent Moses down the Nile in a basket in the hopes that he might possibly be spared. Miraculously, Moses was discovered by the Pharaoh’s daughter and she nurtured him as if he were her own son.

Does that sound familiar? In today’s text, Herod calls for the slaughter of every Jewish boy in Bethlehem under the age of two. Like Moses’ mother, Mary and Joseph were quick to act and they were able to save their son from a wicked tyrant. And how did they save him? By fleeing to EGYPT! Do you see that? Jesus, our ultimate redeemer goes right back to the place where the redemption of God’s people was most gloriously displayed and Matthew says in verse 15:

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” (Matthew 2:15b ESV)

Matthew is inviting us to see this glorious truth: Jesus is the new and better Moses and he is going to lead us out of our slavery once and for all! Jesus came – not to deliver us from slavery to Pharaoh or to Nero or to any other political power – but to deliver us from the slavery of the curse of sin itself!

And that’s exactly what he did! The Apostle Paul wrote:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

² R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 1; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 91.

In the same way that the Israelites structured their entire lives around the remembrance and the celebration of the exodus, we now structure our entire lives around the remembrance and celebration of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Easter story is OUR exodus story and it begins right here with the birth of Jesus Christ.

He is our Ultimate Redeemer, and Matthew wants to make sure that we see that.

Finally, we learn about Jesus that:

3. He will be our Perfect Peace-Maker

In this tragic story, all of the boys in Bethlehem under the age of two are put to death. At this time, Bethlehem would have had a population of about 1,000 people so there were probably about 20 families affected. Can you imagine what that would do to a small, intimate community? The grief would have permeated throughout the entire city. Matthew describes the scene with a quotation from Jeremiah 31:15 where the prophet Jeremiah describes the horrific scene at the time of the exile:

¹⁸“A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Matthew 2:18 ESV)

Now, thus far Matthew has pointed us back to the greatest King in Israel’s history, and then he pointed us back to the greatest redemption in Israel’s history, but now he is drawing our attention back to the exile – the greatest DEFEAT in Israel’s history.

During the exile, men and women were separated from their families and dragged off to Babylon. What on earth does the birth of Jesus have to do with THAT awful story?

The exile was the darkest time in Israel’s history. And here, Matthew is bringing us back into the dark. Before we can see and appreciate our Saviour, we need to be just how dark our situation really is. We need to see afresh that our problem runs deep. We are sinners, and our sin causes

separation. It caused the Israelites to be ripped from their homes during the exile. It caused Herod to rip the newborn boys of Bethlehem from the arms of their weeping and wailing mothers.

We need to see our situation – we need to see our darkness – in order for us to hear Matthew 4:16 as we should. There, Matthew quotes from the prophet Isaiah:

the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16 ESV)

The weeping and the wailing in Bethlehem reminds Matthew of the exile, only this time, he sees God’s plan to finally bring lasting peace! In the arrival of Jesus, he sees peace for the people of God. I love the way that D.A. Carson says this:

The tears of the exile are now being “fulfilled” – i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah’s day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David’s throne has come, the exile is over, the true son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant promised by Jeremiah.³

The true King – the Prince of Peace – has come! He has entered into our weeping and wailing – he has entered into our darkness – in order to finally and completely bring us peace.

Jesus is our Shepherd King! He is our Ultimate Redeemer! He is our Perfect Peacemaker! Are you seeing all of that this morning?

I hope that you are. But, I also want you to know that simply seeing the King is not enough. Matthew reminds us of that in today’s text. And I feel like each year at Christmas time, I am reminded again of this truth. Not everyone is excited to see the King.

It reminds me of that scene in *Elf* when Buddy is working at the toy store. He hears that Santa is coming and he loses his mind! “Santa! I KNOW HIM!” He’s so excited, and he expects everybody else to be excited too! We’re going to see Santa! But very few folks seem to care.

³ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Matthew-Luke)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 95.

I often find myself feeling like Buddy. Songs about Jesus ring out in the shopping mall and Linus talks about Jesus on the television and I just want to cry out: Jesus! I know him!

But not everybody shares the excitement. Some people look at this King and feel nothing at all. Some people even feel hostility towards him. How can that be?

Every year this phenomenon surprises me. But it shouldn't. Because it has been this way since the very FIRST Christmas. We find it in our text. Three groups of people see the King in this story, but they respond in three very different ways. As we conclude, let's consider these three responses to the King.

Three Responses To The King

The first response we discover in this text is that of Herod. When he hears of the arrival of the King of the Jews, he responds with:

1. Hatred

You see, Herod was considered “the King of the Jews” so, naturally, he was not too pleased when these wise men came looking for the new King who had been born. History teaches us that Herod was a jealous, irrational man. D. A. Carson notes:

In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabeans), and at least two of his sons.⁴

Here we have a man who was willing to kill his wife and at least two of his sons to protect his crown. Herod understood that Jesus was a threat to his power. Herod understood that Jesus would not share his throne. Herod saw that the rightful King had come, and he hated him.

⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Matthew-Luke)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 84.

And we see little glimpses of Herod all around us, don't we? Many people hear the good news, and they see the good King but they HATE what they see. Do you know why? It's because they DO NOT WANT TO BOW. Just like Herod, they say: "If Jesus is the King of my life, then I am not the king of my life. And I WANT to be the king of my life so Jesus has to go!"

Deeply embedded into this fallen world, there is a hatred for the rightful King. We should not be surprised by this – we were told that it would be this way all the way back in Genesis 3 when God said to the Devil:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

There is a battle that is being waged between the children of the devil and the children of the promise. There might just be some children of the devil sitting with us this morning. The Apostle John provides us with an obvious paternity test to discern who our father really is:

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10 ESV)

Look at your life. Who is your Father? Do you obey God? Do you love His children? Or do you do life your own way? You can't hang onto your sin and your bitterness and still claim to be a child of God. To reject Jesus' commandments is to reject his Kingship. It's hatred. It's no different than Herod and it's no way to live.

But in this story we find another response that is perhaps even more dangerous. When Herod heard about this King, he didn't know what to think. He wasn't familiar with the Scriptures, so he called on the men who were. He told the chief priests and the scribes all that the wise men had said, and they told Herod: "Oh yes, this King will be found in Bethlehem."

And then the magi went to Bethlehem to find the King and the religious leaders went back to their home. These religious leaders responded to the King with:

2. Apathy

Isn't it odd that they didn't go with the magi? The chief priests were the top ranking priests in the temple! The scribes were like Jewish lawyers – they were the experts of the Law. They knew their Bibles forwards and backwards and it took them no time at all to determine where the King would be found. The magi didn't know. They came to Jerusalem because they assumed that's where the Jewish King would be, but the religious leaders immediately pointed Herod and the magi to Micah 5:2. "The King will be in Bethlehem" they explained.

And then the magi travelled expectantly to Bethlehem to encounter the King but the chief priests and the scribes went back to their homes. Can you believe that? These men devoted their LIVES to studying the Scriptures and now the promised Messiah has come! Why wouldn't they go to worship the King?

Perhaps they were afraid of Herod. They knew that he was an egotistical murderer so perhaps they decided that it wasn't worth the risk. Better to stay in right relationship with the world than to risk it all for the King of Heaven. Many have robbed Jesus of glory in their attempts to make peace with the world, so maybe that was the case here.

Or perhaps they had grown comfortable in Jerusalem. Why go through all the trouble of uprooting their families? If the King really has come, then surely he will make his way to Jerusalem. Let somebody else take the risks. Many have robbed Jesus of glory in their attempts to store up treasures here on earth. This wouldn't be the first time, nor would it be the last.

Or perhaps, like Herod, they had grown rather fond of the power they possessed. Would the new King eclipse the authority of the chief priests? Probably. Would he ascertain more respect than the scribes? Almost certainly. Perhaps it would be best to leave that King in the obscurity of Bethlehem then. That seems to have been one of the reasons why the religious leaders were bent on resisting Jesus later in his ministry. Perhaps it is the case here.

The King of glory was on their doorstep, but for reasons unbeknownst to us, these religious men chose to stay home.

Let this be a warning to us that mere knowledge of the Scriptures is not enough. You can have a Master of Divinity and you can teach a Bible study, but if you do not bow before the King then your knowledge means nothing. If your knowledge – if your faith – doesn't MOVE YOU TO ACTION then it is no faith at all. The Apostle James said:

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:17 ESV)

Apathy is a silent killer in the church. I wonder if there aren't some stale hearts here this morning. Repent! The King would love nothing more than to give you a new heart today!

Finally, Matthew would have us see that there is only one appropriate response to the King and that is:

3. Worship

Scholars suspect that these magi came from Babylon, where there would have been some familiarity with the Jewish prophecies.

Did these magi understand who Jesus really was? Did they know that he was the Son of God? Did they know that he would take upon himself the sins of all his people and that he would pave the way for us to return to the perfect presence of God?

Certainly not.

But with their limited knowledge, they saw enough to decide that Jesus was worthy of their worship. They travelled afar to bow themselves before the promised King. Matthew presents them to us today as an example.

Some of us in this room have more knowledge of the King than these magi could ever DREAM of having! We have heard the good news of the Gospel, and we have watched as he has transformed the lives of the people around us. But, like Herod, we are hesitant to surrender control. Like the chief priests and the scribes, we are too comfortable, too familiar, too apathetic to be moved by the King.

Jesus is the Shepherd King who lifts up the weak and the lowly. Bow before him. Jesus is the Ultimate Redeemer who conquers the enemy outside and the enemy within. Surrender to him. Jesus is the Peace-maker who meets us in our tears and who brings us back home. Follow him. There is no one like him.

Jesus deserves your praise. Does he have it? Jesus is worthy of your life. Have you surrendered it to him? Come with the magi and lay down your time, your talents and your treasure.

Because he is the King of Kings and this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.