

Worshipping The Christmas Child

Matthew 2:1-12

December 23, 2018

There are five truths I want to bring out this morning from Matthew's account of Jesus' birth. 1) Jesus is the Messiah and deserves to be honored. 2) Jesus is to be worshiped not just by Jews but by all the nations of the world. Just as the magi traveled from afar to find the long-promised Messiah. 3) God created and manages the universe to make his Son known and worshiped. It is God's eternal plan that Jesus be known and worshipped. 4) Jesus as the Christ is offensive to people who do not want to worship him and they bring opposition for those who do. 5) Worshiping Jesus means joyfully submitting to his authority in all aspects of life and living for his glory by sacrificial gifts for he is our Lord and King.

Jesus - The Messiah

Verse 2 announces clearly whom this story is really about, [“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”](#) This story is about a newborn child destined before time to be King of the Jews. Now, in itself that would not be a very great thing, but to know this child is the future king, this is amazing. Think about it, somewhere alive in America today there are probably three or four children or young people under the age of 18 who are going to be President of the United States someday. But nobody thinks about this or sets out to find them or honor them.

Verse 4 makes clear what the magi really mean by [“king of the Jews.”](#) It says, [“assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he Herod inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”](#) Herod had been called “king of the Jews” by the Senate in Rome for almost 40 years. But no one called him Messiah or Christ. He was known for the brutality he employed to maintain his position as king. To be the Messiah or the Christ means to be the long-awaited God-anointed Ruler, who would

overcome all other rule and usher in the beginning of the end of history. As history began its final episode the Messiah would establish the kingdom of God and never die or lose his reign.

We do not know how the magi got their information that there was such a king coming and caused them to begin their travel to Israel. But it is clear that Herod got the message - these men are not searching for a mere, ordinary, human successor to him. They are searching for the final King, the King to end all kings and, of course, unlike Anna and Simeon in Luke chapter 2, this is the last thing Herod was looking for or wanted. He was oblivious to worshipping God, for he did not even know the simple Scriptures about where the Messiah was to be born. He orders the scribes to search the scriptures and they quote the prophet Micah, who wrote, **“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah (ef·rawth), who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.”** (Micah 5:2) The answer is the village of Bethlehem. But what if Herod had asked who is this king? The scribes would have continued in verse 2, **But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.** And they would have continued in verse 4, **“And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.”** (Micah 5:2, 4-5) But the scribes only gave Herod the answer he asked for – where? The village of Bethlehem and they did not give him the who. The who should have brought everyone, including Herod to their knees.

The magi know that Christ will **“be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.”** They also understood this king was destined from ancient days – he was not an ordinary king. As the Apostle John wrote, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not**

any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

So, the magi had worship of the new king on their minds and this prompted their long journey, this king they sought would be called by the Lord God of the universe. On the other hand, Herod was concerned with a usurper challenging his throne. Herod’s fear of losing his throne went so far as to have several of his own family murdered. These magi bring us to the second point, which is Jesus was not a king for the Jews only.

Jesus - Worshipped By Nations

Jesus is the king of not just Israel, but the world. He is to be worshipped not just by Jews, but by all nations as represented by the magi from the east. Matthew, focuses on these men from beyond Israel, from the east, foreigners that come to worship Jesus. Please take notice also that unlike Luke, Matthew makes no mention of the shepherds in the field or their visit. Matthew’s focus in the magi and he wants his readers to know that Jesus is the Messiah to all nations. The first worshippers were gentiles – considered unclean by the Jews. Matthew begins with this idea of Jesus is to be worshipped by all nations and ends his gospel with the same idea – In chapter 28, Jesus said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**” ¹⁹**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...**” (Matthew 28:18-19)

God’s intention was for Jesus to be the Messiah for all nations and the magi is proof built upon proof. The Old Testament has a number of prophecies that nations and kings would worship the Messiah and he would be the ruler of the world. Isaiah chapter 60 is one example, ²“**For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.**” ³**And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.**” (Isaiah 60:2-3) From 1 Samuel we read, “**Those who oppose the LORD are broken into pieces. He thunders at them from the heavens. The LORD judges**

the ends of the earth. He gives strength to his King and lifts the head of his Messiah.” (1 Samuel 2:10) Matthew verifies the messiahship of Jesus who is a king for all nations. This proof carries us into my third point.

Jesus - Lord Of The Universe

God created and employs the universe so that his Son, Jesus, is established and worshiped. This is the Triune God’s plan from eternity past – that Jesus would be worshipped and bring salvation to the whole world.

Over and over the Bible perplexes our curiosity about just how certain things happened. How did this “star” bring the magi from the east to Jerusalem? Scripture does not say that it led them or went before them. It only says they saw a star rise in the east in verse 2 and the magi came to Jerusalem. Once they were in Jerusalem, how did that star lead them in the short five-mile walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as verse 9 says it did? How did a star lead the magi “until it stopped over the place where the child was”? The simple answer is – we do not know. There were numerous effects taking place in the universe beyond the earth bringing the stars into alignment. How? This alinement of stars happens by God’s power that he does not explain. There are many theories, but they are not important and have little spiritual significance. The question is, “do you believe God has the power and authority to do all these things – does he control every aspect of the universe?” People throughout history have spent a great deal of energy and time being preoccupied with how God did the miraculous things he did – like dividing the Red Sea and bringing manna out of the heavens or how Jonah survived inside the fish and how the moon turned blood red. These are of curiosity but they illustrate the power of God, they verify the power of God, but they are not the primary point – the point is God’s plan from eternity past for the salvation of the world and nothing man or the evil one can do will change his plan. We are to focus on the holiness of God, the ugliness of our sin, our helpless state to fix our sin problem – the answer to these problems is the birth and death of

Christ and his resurrection - Christ is our only hope. We are saved by God's grace through Faith. God as the Holy Spirit is given to every believer to empower them to live holy in a sinful world until Christ returns. Do not let your mind or the theories of others take you down "rabbit trails" that are not the point, that take your focus off of Christ. Believe and enjoy God's wonder! Live for Christ' glory!

What we do know - is this star is doing something it could not do on its own – it is guiding the magi to the exact location of the Son of God in order that they, who are gentiles may worship Him. Certainly, man does not possess the power and neither does the evil one – only God controls the movements of the universe. So, we learn that God is guiding foreigners, who are gentiles to Christ by exerting influence and power over the universe – and for me that is an amazing thought.

In Luke's account we learn of how God influenced the entire Roman Empire to take a census at the exact time God wanted, so that the virgin birth would happen in Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy and Matthew shows God controlling the universe to bring the magi to worship the Christ. This has always been the will of God and he continues to this day and will continue until Jesus returns. As Matthew reveals Jesus' command and prophecy in chapter 24, **"this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** (Matthew 24:14) This is where the disciples of Christ have come into play since the time Jesus ascended into heaven – this is where you and I are to engage – sharing the gospel of Christ in our homes, at work and wherever we are. Jesus taught, **"the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him."** ²⁴ **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."** (John 4:23-24) Matthew writes of Christ's birth that it is a time of "come and see", but by the end of his gospel it is now the time of "go and tell" all the nations. The magi came, saw and worshipped. We are to worship and as a foundational part of our worship we are to go and tell. The reason the earth still exists is for God the Son to

be worshipped and that is why when he returns the earth is needed no more. This is what John saw towards the end of Revelation, “[Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.](#)” (Revelation 21:1)

It is this time between Jesus’ ascension and his return that there remains conflict between the kingdom of God and the prince of this world.

Jesus - Greater Than Any Opposition

Jesus is a source of trouble to the fallen world and those who have chosen not to worship him. In order to deny Jesus, they have to oppose those who believe in him. I think this may be the main point of concern for Matthew. It is unavoidable as we continue reading – there are two kinds of people who do not want to worship Jesus as the Messiah. The first group is small, for them Jesus does not exist or has no place in the world. The chief priests and scribes in verse 4 provided Herod the location of Jesus’ birth and then it was back to life as they viewed it. The silence and inactivity of the Jewish leadership at this point is overwhelming when one considers what is happening to the world by the birth of Jesus. Their silence is deafening. Consider verse 3, “[When Herod the king heard this \(the birth of the rumored Messiah\), he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.](#)” The disinterest of the Jewish leadership leads me to believe they did not worship the true God, but their concern was their own power for they did not see Jesus as prophesied in the Old Testament.

The second kind of people who do not want to worship God and His Son are those who are threatened by Jesus. They are represented in this story by Herod. He is afraid of losing his throne, his power. So, he schemes, lies and then commits mass murder to rid himself of the threat and maintain his power. Today nothing has changed – there are still groups of people who oppose God. They are either indifferent or hostile. This Christmas let us consider who we are in Christ and how we will battle those who oppose Christ, as Paul instructed, “[In all circumstances take](#)

up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one ... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:16-17)

What does Christmas mean to you and how are you to share the gospel of God’s Good News this season? We are to stand firm for God’s eternal truth and do so with his grace and mercy.

Let me close with my final point – what is true worship as seen in this text?

Jesus – King and Lord

Worshipping Jesus means to ascribe him the authority of God and do so with a joyful heart bringing sacrificial gifts in our worship. There are four aspects of genuine worship that comes from our passage in Matthew.

First, Matthew indicates that the gentile magi ascribed authority to Christ by calling him “[King of the Jews](#)” in verse 2.

Second, I see the magi ascribe dignity and kingship to Jesus by falling down before him in verse 11, “[going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.](#)” Falling to the ground lowered their position and exalted Jesus’.

Third, the magi had joy in verse 10, “[When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy](#)” and they had joy in recognizing Jesus as “King of the Jews” in verse 2. They quote the prophet Micah in verse 6, “[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.](#)” A few verses later in Micah chapter 5, verse 5 Micah writes, “[for now he the Messiah shall be great to the ends of the earth.](#)” If they knew verse 3 of Micah chapter 5, they surely would have known verse 5 – Jesus shall be great to the ends of the earth! What was the foundation of their exceeding joy? It was that they had traveled a long way and were now going to

see their Messiah. Not just the Jewish Messiah, but the Messiah of all peoples. Their joy is an expression of hearts in true worship.

The final point is that true worship of submission and ascribing glory is also accompanied by sacrificial gifts. The magi gave their time, energy and wealth to find and worship the Messiah. We know from Luke's writing that God in the person of the Father or the Son is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." (Acts 17:25) The gifts of the magi are not given because Jesus needs them. They were not bringing the Messiah "care-packages" or bribes to gain favor. Deuteronomy teaches, "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe." (Deuteronomy 10:17) Well then, what is the purpose of the gifts? Why do I say they are part of worship?

These gifts are meant to show one's willingness to give up things of the world in order to focus on God. Just like when one fasts, giving up food and uses the time to seek God. Just as tithing is not needed by God, but is a sacrifice of joy - saying I value you Christ above the things of the world. I have not come to you to get things, to get rich, but I have come for you alone, Christ you are my treasure, not the things of the world, this is why I think the magi in verse 11, "fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

It is my prayer that God takes the truth of this passage, this account of Christ's birth to awaken in each of us a desire for Christ and for him alone. My we say from the depths of our heart and soul "Lord Jesus you are the Messiah, the King of Israel, the King of all people, of all nations and I believe and will come and bow before you. I now bow before you my King and Lord. I believe you control the universe, this earth and history so that you, Jesus the Christ will be known and worshipped. I bring myself and my gifts to show that you alone, have eternal authority and deserve

worship. May my life bring you glory and pleasure for you bring me joy that the world does not know.

Jesus you are the Christ child, you are the Messiah and you are my Lord and Savior – my life belongs to you – direct me as you will. Amen and amend!