

O Come-Let Us Adore Him

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[0 : 00] Well, it's been coming for a long time, but Christmas Day is nearly at an end. The songs came on the radio in October.

The decorations went up in November. Presents brought throughout December. Some of them wrapped last night, perhaps. I'm sure I'm not the only one.

But it's a huge buildup, isn't it? Decorations up, cards sent, families gathered, visits planned, food brought, gifts given. There's so much to get ready for the day.

But for so many months of preparation, in a day it's been and gone. And the countdown begins all over again. 365 sleeps to go, friends.

But do you know the next time Christmas falls on a Sunday? Some of you know, I've told you. Do you know what it is?

[1 : 01] Well, because of the leap years, if you're counting up, you won't quite get there. It's 2033, okay? 11 years. Quite a long time. Okay, just think, how old will you be in 11 years?

Perhaps that feels a long way off. It certainly does to me. And so it's a valuable time that comes once a decade or less for us to come to church on a Christmas Sunday evening and reflect on what it was all for.

What were we preparing ourselves and our families for? Was this day it? Were we ready this Christmas to receive, to delight in, to celebrate the gift from God that satisfies our hearts?

Or are we ending the day wishing there was something more? There must be more to Christmas than this. One of the things that I will miss for the next 12 months is singing carols.

I love carols. And one of the things that comes through in all the kind of carols that we sing over and over is that Jesus is born to be the one true king. We've sung of him this evening.

[2 : 14] Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Hark, the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn king. Come and behold him, born the king of angels.

He is king. And lest that truth wash over us this year, Matthew has put that wonderful truth right at the heart of the passage that we read together tonight.

The truth that Jesus is king is a point that Matthew has made clear to us. It's right in the headline of his book that we looked at a couple of weeks ago. The genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham.

Son of David means that he is God's forever king. He's of the family of David. And God made David a promise. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me.

And son of Abraham means that Jesus is God's promised plan for all the world. He's of the family of the man whom God promised in you.

[3 : 20] Will all the families of the earth be blessed? And so what does it mean for us that King Jesus has come? Well, it means that God's forever king has come.

The king who God promised would reign perfectly and forever over his people. He would bring God's blessing to every family and nation of the earth as he brings people, all kinds of people, into his forever kingdom.

And that is great, good news for us tonight, brothers and sisters. But sadly, not everyone sees it that way. First, tonight, we're going to see a really unlikely group of people, surprising group who are ready and waiting to welcome the new king.

But then we're going to meet, well, a group of people who we would have expected to be ready to welcome God's king, but who were not, as we'll see, watching and waiting.

And for us, as we reflect on the coming of King Jesus today, the question is, are you prepared to welcome him?

[4 : 31] Are we ready to come to Jesus and adore him and worship him? Because as we take time to look at what kind of king he is, we're going to see tonight that he is worthy of our worship, that it is right for us, whoever we are, to come to him, to see him rightly, to give him everything we are.

And so we're going to start by looking at the Magi, or, as we would put it, three wise men, at question mark, who are these guys?

Well, however hard you may have prepared for Christmas, let me tell you, these guys prepared harder than ye. As the carol says, bearing gifts, they traversed afar.

Now, how far did they go? Some people reckon about 800 miles. Okay, that's about 40 days on the road. And what kind of gifts did they bring?

Well, these were not the things that they picked up in the sales. These were precious heirlooms, invaluable items. And what were their preparations for that first Christmas?

[5 : 42] Why did they go all that way? Why bring such precious items? Well, they tell us themselves in verse 2, they ask, Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. They've come to find a king, and they've come to worship that king.

These wise men, indeed, set everything else aside, their time, their travel, their treasures, to find God's king and give them everything.

All their preparations for that day were for him. Now, why is that shocking? Well, who were they? We probably know less than we think.

We three kings doesn't get off to a great start. Firstly, we don't know how many of them they were. I guess three is a guess based on how many gifts that they brought, but there were probably many more than that on the road.

[6 : 44] And they certainly were not kings. They're called magi, who were effectively priests in a royal court, or kind of special advisors to a king.

So these guys were kind of top people in their fields. They studied the stars. They read ancient texts. They interpreted dreams. They wanted to understand the mysteries of our world.

Why are things the way that they are? Now, today, if we read about them in the news, they would be called experts. So there are probably a whole crowd of these experts coming on this special quest.

The only thing that opening line of the carol gets right is that they were from the Orient, the East. And that does give us a clue as to how they knew who they were going to find when they got there. Because nearly 600 years earlier, God's people had been captured and taken East to be slaves in a place called Babylon. And we read in Old Testament books like Daniel, how in their time in the East, God's people became important, influential people.

[8 : 00] Some of them even became wise men themselves. Daniel, Daniel, actually, at one point was the chief magi in the Babylonian court. And so it's likely that Daniel and others left promises and prophecies of God's word there in Babylon.

And that would explain how 600 years later, the magi come from the East looking for a star that points the way to a king. Because we find a prophecy in the book of Genesis that a star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall come out of Israel.

And so these magi, wise men, knowing God's promise and seeing the sign, they packed up, they prepared, they traveled, they took gifts to meet this new king, to worship him.

Now, when the kids do it in the nativity, it all seems so obvious, doesn't it? The star, the kings, the treasures, the gold, the frankincense, the myrrh.

But this is one of the big surprises in this story. What are they doing there? This bunch of basically pagan priests who travel the equivalent of Land's End to John O'Groats in search of a 2,000-year-old promise to find a king from God and to worship him.

[9 : 25] It's all a little bit bizarre. But it is also beautiful. Why? Because these wise men were outsiders.

The least likely people to be found worshipping Jesus. They weren't born into God's family. If they lived today, they might have said that we are spiritual but not religious.

They turned to all kinds of things to find out what life was all about, perhaps like some of you here this evening. But their great search, their great quest was ended when they came and found Jesus.

They were so far on the outside, they needed some help to find him. Notice they stop and ask directions. But they were pointed in the right direction.

When the Bible was opened, the priests looked it up, how God had said his king would be born in Bethlehem. And so simply trusting God's prophecy, trusting his promise, these guys are led by faith to King Jesus.

[10:30] And they saw the star, they were overjoyed, we read. And when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they bowed down and worshipped him. In that one moment, their centuries-long quest was over.

All the preparation was fulfilled because now they had come to the promised king. How well could they have whispered to this baby the prayer that the church father Augustine later prayed?

For ye have made us for yourself, Lord. And our hearts were restless until they found their rest in ye. Perhaps you are surprised this Christmas.

Perhaps you're surprised at yourself. Perhaps you wouldn't expect to feel underprepared on the day, not quite there, not quite ready. Perhaps you wouldn't think that you would feel like you were missing something, still searching for something on Christmas Day.

Perhaps you're surprised to find yourself even sitting in church on a Sunday, let alone a Christmas Day. We think we know Christmas. We think we get it, don't we?

[11:45] We think we know how to get ready for the day? Well, the Magi remind us that Christmas can still surprise us. They knew so, so very little.

But when the time came, these guys were ready, prepared to set aside everything else and bring their trust, their treasures to worship King Jesus.

Maybe you know people who you think could never be a Christian. Maybe you yourself didn't think that you could ever be a Christian yourself.

Well, let the Magi teach you that God can bring absolutely anyone to Jesus. There's not a certain kind of person God chooses. We have all kinds of stories, even in this room.

The only thing we really have in common is that we have been led by God to Jesus, to see him as he truly is, our true King. And from our hearts to worship him as the one who meets our every need.

[12:51] It's not our upbringing, our education, our families that bring us to him. It is God leading us by his word and his spirit. Just as he led these strange figures from the East through his providence in history, through his word in Scripture.

So he has led every Christian to Jesus. And so whoever you are, wherever you are from, King Jesus is your destination, the terminus, the end point of your search.

Do you hear God showing you even tonight where to find King Jesus? And whoever you pray for to know Jesus, the Magi encourages, don't they, to keep trusting that God can bring them to you, lead them to him.

None of us are likely candidates. The only question is, are we prepared to worship him? And are we prepared to see others worship him with us?

The second thing we see, though, in this passage tonight is that not everyone was as overjoyed as the wise men about the news of a new king. Because secondly, we find not one, but two kings in this story.

[14:10] Verse 3 says, when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. So see the twist here, the Magi come looking for a new king. They go to the palace, but they find the old king waiting, King Herod, who's ruling over Judea for the Romans.

And this king was not happy at all to hear of a new king on the horizon. But weirdly, not only Herod, nobody in Jerusalem at the old royal capital was ready for God's king to come.

And the chief priests, the scribes, Herod's own wise men, I guess, had to be called in to work out where the Messiah was to be born. They are hardly watching and waiting, are they?

They are not ready. See what Matthew's doing. He's turning up the contrast, isn't he? If the guys who hardly knew a thing get Christmas spot on, well, it's the guys who should know better who aren't ready when Christmas comes.

The guys in Royal David City had the books. They just hadn't opened them. God had given them his promises. The priests were meant to teach God's people what he had said, but clearly no one was ready when he arrived.

[15:28] More than not ready, when we do find they found out he was to be in Bethlehem, none of them actually bother to go and see him, do they? Instead, they send the Magi and say, well, when you found him, come back and let us know, will you, where you spotted him.

The Magi knew next to nothing about Jesus, and yet they crossed borders to worship him. Herod, the priest, describes the people knew exactly where Jesus would be, but they had no desire even to pop down the road and see him.

And this is perhaps the danger for some of us on a day like this, I imagine. We've seen a few Christmases. We know the story.

We've sung the carols. We get Christmas. And yet we can easily, can't we forget or neglect the king? We enjoy Christmas, but I wonder, do we stop short of enjoying Jesus on Christmas? Could it be for some of us perhaps that our familiarity with the old, old story has become a kind of watered-down substitute for devotion to Jesus?

[16:44] Friends, the chief priest, the scribes, remind us that our knowledge is only worth anything if it does lead us to Christ. In the midst of the day, the fun, the family, the food, are we remembering the reason why we celebrate?

We prepare to worship Jesus. But King Herod's heart went further than that, didn't it? Further than not wanting to worship him, he wants to seek and destroy him.

Now, God overrules, of course. The Magi are warned in a dream to go back another way. Joseph is told in a dream to take the family into hiding down to Egypt, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.

I don't know if you've seen Nativity. You caught that this year. It's a great film. Perhaps you remember the bad guy, Gordon Shakespeare, racks his brain.

What am I going to do in the Nativity play this year? He decides, well, nobody does Herod. And so he makes Herod the key character, kind of Greek tragedy feel, I guess.

[17:50] Nobody ever does Herod. Now, the play is a disaster, okay? But it's true, isn't it? This is a part of the Christmas story we don't know what to do with.

You're a kind of genocidal killer in the Nativity. Now, Herod isn't the main character here of the two kings. He is the imposter. But his rage does tell us something, doesn't it?

It shows us so clearly the world that Jesus was born into. A world where he was not only ignored, but not welcome. Because a king from God was a threat to people everywhere who wanted to hold on to their crowns.

Anyone with a kingdom to defend, Jesus came to challenge. Whether that's nations and empires, or for us, our homes, jobs, families, lives.

If Jesus has come as the one true forever king, well, what does that make us? There's a verse in Psalm 68 that speaks tongue-in-cheek of our heads as hairy crowns.

[19:00] I wonder if you've ever thought of yourself as a king, a queen with something to lose. Because Jesus came to be your king. Because we see down through the ages, all the way down to today, this same anger inherited in our world.

Whether it's the Communist Party in China trying to choke off the Christian church, water down the exclusivity of Christ. Or perhaps those in our own lives who don't want to hear what you did on Sunday.

Or make life just that wee bit more hard for you because you are a Christian. Friends, Jesus' birth is wonderful good news for those who long for a righteous king to rule over our world.

But his birth is bad news for those who want to rule their own lives, their own world, their own way. And Herod reminds us it's been that way since his birth.

And so that anger, when we come across it, shouldn't surprise us. We do live, don't we, in a world of would-be kings. You do not want the baby in the manger to rule over them.

[20:07] But perhaps you feel that tension in yourself this evening. You see joy all around you at the birth of Jesus.

But there is part of you, perhaps, that doesn't like this talk of a true king. One to rule you. Well, if we feel that rebellion in our hearts, let's remember whose birthday this is.

It is not Herod's birthday. It is Jesus' birthday. We would not know the name of King Herod at all were it not for the story of King Jesus and his part in it.

Herod's plan to kill the baby in the cradle failed. In fact, when Herod died, it is Jesus who comes back. His enemies put him to death on a cross.

But he rose to life again, ascended to his throne where he reigns. And despite the hostility to him in the world today, it is King Jesus who rules.

[21 : 07] Over a third of the world's population, his coming is celebrated by two and a half billion people on earth today. It is him who is king, whose kingdom stands firm in the face of hostility.

In the places that Ashorus mentioned in prayer, places like Afghanistan, North Korea, where his kingdom is assaulted. He is king. His kingdom will never end.

And so, friends, if Herod could not compete with this king, there is simply no contest, is there?

Between me or ye and Jesus. In the words of Paul Tripp, this isn't your party.

It is Jesus' party. It is his kingdom. And we, our world, we rightfully belong to him. So, if that is you, you feel that stirring of rebellion in your heart, Jesus calls you to put down your weapons.

Bow your heart to him. Come to him. Submit to his loving rule. Know that he is the true king. Come into his kingdom as he calls each of us to do.

[22 : 15] Because the third and final thing we see this evening is that there is only one Savior.

Now, of course, this is only chapter 2 in Matthew's gospel.

If you want to know how the story ends, you'll have to keep reading. But he's already hinting at where he's going. Because I wonder if you see a pattern here. Matthew highlights it for us there in verse 15.

It's a pattern that God began in the very first book of the Bible. His chosen family went down to live in Egypt. And then, in a great rescue, he brought them out of Egypt.

We call that the Exodus. And here, that pattern is being repeated. The chosen family goes down to Egypt to fulfill, says Matthew, what the Lord said to the prophet.

But out of Egypt, I called my son. Now, the prophet in question is Hosea. The son in question is the people of Israel.

[23 : 14] But Matthew's point is to alert us to the fact that Jesus is reliving the story of his people.

He is a new Israel. He is the true son.

And so, this is a new Exodus. God is doing a new rescue. He is doing it through King Jesus.

Because his people were in need of saving once again.

Not this time from physical slavery, but from spiritual slavery. They were trapped in sin, stuck in their rebellion. And they needed a king, a representative, a head to come and do it all again for them.

A champion, a substitute to start their story over and this time get it right. And that is exactly what Jesus came to do.

See, it's no coincidence. It's no act of convenience that took the family down to Egypt. Rather, it was God's providence. His overruling plan to save his people from our sins.

[24 : 23] And this is how Jesus, our King, would relive our story perfectly and completely on our behalf. So that his righteous life could be counted to us.

But in the end of the story, instead of being crowned and glorified and praised for having done this, he was crucified and killed. Because not only was his perfection counted to us, but our sins counted against him.

Such that as we receive what he deserved, so he received what we deserve. And so it is as if in God's plan we have swapped lives with Jesus.

He was punished for our sins. We are rewarded for his goodness. And that is how our King saves us. See, sometimes people see God's grace as God kind of giving us a second chance to do it right. And sometimes even as Christians we talk about God as a God of second chances. But the reality is that it wouldn't matter how many chances God gave us.

[25 : 29] We would ruin them all. If a second, a third, a fourth chance is our best hope of salvation, then we are really doomed. We cannot get it right.

Which is why God's grace is not in giving us a chance to do it again, but in sending Jesus to do it again for us. The only possibility for us to be saved is in Jesus, having lived the perfect life for us, having lived our story, and dying to take away our sins committed in the one and only life that we have.

And we receive that rescue from him, our King, when we respond to him with the faith of the least likely people in the Christmas story, the wise man.

Faith in God's promised King to rule over us. Faith in God's promised rescuer to save us. Faith in God's Word to lead us to him.

Faith in God's promised grace. Faith in the newborn and reigning King, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, what has this day all been for? For all of the getting ready, all of the preparation and the

build-up, what is it that you are celebrating today?

[26 : 50] What is it that you are overjoyed by today? Is it the coming of this one true King from God come into the world to save rebels like you and me?

Are you prepared today to trust him, to worship him, to submit to him? Are you prepared for him to save you?

For today, a Savior has been born for ye, who is Christ the Lord. A Savior for ye.

Will you rejoice in him? Trust him, worship him, adore him as he alone deserves. Come, let's adore him now as we pray together.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we do come in awe of you, that you, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, would leave your glory, your majesty in heaven, and come down to be a newborn King, weak and vulnerable.

[28 : 03] Lord, we praise you that you were King from your birth, that you are worthy to be worshipped in your cradle. For it is not for what you did, but who you are, that we love you and praise you and worship you.

For you are Lord of all. And Lord Jesus, we pray that you would draw us to yourself, that you would lead us by your Spirit, by your Word, to ye.

Lord, we pray that our hearts would be full of you. Lord, we pray that you would take away our every distraction, that you would be everything to us.

Lord, we pray that you would have us worship you. Lord, we pray that you would be the Lord of all. And Lord, we pray for any here who, as yet, do not know and love and trust and worship you, that you would draw them to you.

Lord, we thank you for your great power and grace in having drawn people from so far, the Magi, to your cradle, to your throne. Lord, we pray you would do it once again.

[29 : 12] Lord, for any here who need for you to do that for them. Lord, save, redeem, we pray. Lord, we ask that you would be among us, that you would bless us as we go, and that we would continue to praise, worship, and thank you throughout this day and for the rest of our lives.

For this we pray in your precious name. Amen.