

Come to Worship the King

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[0 : 00] Amen. Do keep that passage open in front of you if you can. I wonder if you can remember what happened on the 22nd of July, 2013. Well done if you've got there already. Let me give you some hints, and I reckon most of you will get there pretty quickly. Crowds gathered outside the gates of Buckingham Palace, and a bulletin was set up on an easel just inside the gates. Press from across the world gathered outside St. Mary's Hospital in Paddington.

Marble arch was lit bright blue. I wonder if you're there yet. At the changing of the guard, celebratory tunes were played. In Green Park, a 41-gun salute was sounded. The Tower of London one-upped them with a 62-gun salute of their own. And a few hours later, Prince William and Princess Catherine emerged from St. Mary's with a small little bundle of joy in their arms. Prince George had arrived. At the time, the fourth in line to the throne. And his birth was met with widespread celebration, wasn't it? By the evening of the next day, the queue to take a picture of the official birth bulletin outside the royal residence was still half an hour long. London was covered in a sea of color and sound, along with marble arch, the golden jubilee bridge, the fountain in Trafalgar Square, and many other landmarks were all lit up in blue. Westminster Abbey tolled for three hours straight. Across the Commonwealth, similar celebrations took place. Niagara Falls was lit up in blue. The CN Tower in Toronto. Government buildings across New Zealand all celebrated the birth of William and Catherine's first child. All this fanfare, this celebration, because of the arrival of Prince George, the fourth in line to the throne of a constitutional monarchy.

You can imagine that the Magi were probably slightly confused when they arrived at the gates of Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago. That they'd been traveling for some time. They'd seen the announcement of a royal birth. Not on TV or Twitter, not on the local newspaper or from a nearby neighbor, but the very heavens declared the arrival of this king somewhere in the west. Not everyone has the internet. Not everyone can read the paper. Not everyone would have heard the royal representatives declare the good news. Almost everyone can see the sky, can't they? That's where to put a message if you want everyone to see it. And the orchestrator of creation was announcing in the cosmos the arrival in Judah of a king like no other. This was a big moment, not just for the people of Israel two millennia ago. This was the biggest occasion, and I don't exaggerate here, the biggest occasion in the history of the world.

[3 : 48] The celebrations must surely have been magnificent. But when this company of travelers arrived at the capital city, Jerusalem, instead of celebration, they were met with confusion. They came with a simple question, didn't they? Where is he? But nobody knew. Nobody knew where he was, and nobody knew who he was.

The magi hadn't set off on a lengthy journey on a whim, right? They knew what they saw. The people of Jerusalem believed that they knew what they saw. The magi, they were ancient astronomers, right? They knew the night sky better than I know the back of my hand. Jerusalem couldn't just dismiss them as some wacky astrologists and send them on their way. If the heavens declared a king had been born, then a king had been born. And notice the language of the magi there in verse 2.

This child wasn't in line to the throne, was he? He was born onto the throne. Jesus wasn't born to be king. Jesus was born king. A new king had arrived. And the question on everyone's minds was, well, what now? What we see in the first half of chapter 2 are three different responses to the arrival of King Jesus. We saw last week that Jesus is God with us, didn't we? We see now that Jesus is king. Matthew uses these birth narratives to present us right at the beginning of the gospel with who Jesus is and demands a response from his readers right from the start, doesn't he?

We see here something of how each of the different gospels kind of operate, what their different messages are. What Mark spends his whole gospel trying to convince us of, that Jesus is God and king, Matthew fronts us up with immediately.

As we go on, we'll see that Matthew wants to focus on, in the life of ministry in Jesus, what he has to say to his followers. There'll be five big blocks of teaching in this book where Jesus addresses his disciples, the people who have chosen to follow him.

[6:52] That is the audience Matthew is primarily addressing. So, he brings us up to speed, doesn't he? At the earliest possible opportunity, in the very earliest days of Jesus' life, with who he is. And then asks us here in chapter 2, what then are you going to do with him? How are you going to respond? Will it be like Herod? Will it be like the chief priests and the scribes? Or will it be like the Magi? Three responses to the coming of the king. Let's just take them each in turn.

First, there is anger. First of all, there is anger, right? The Magi go about asking Jerusalem to see if anyone can point them to the place they've traveled so long to get to. But no one has an answer, do they? No one has an answer. And eventually, in verse 3, we see that news reaches Herod. When King Herod heard this, that there's a traveling company from somewhere in the east.

They were respected, they were wealthy. And they're asking about the whereabouts of Israel's new king. And Herod, straight away, right, Herod gets something right, okay? Herod gets something right because he immediately recognizes, doesn't he, the threat to his own sovereignty that this new king brings. This town is not big enough for the both of them.

But instead of humbly submitting to Israel's new king, Herod is angry, right? He is disturbed by what he hears. We'll see more as the story continues into the rest of chapter 2 next week. Just how desperate Herod was to be rid of this, in his eyes, pretender to the throne. But even in the verses we've read this morning, you get a glimpse of how Herod feels about the advent of another king, don't you? He's disturbed by the news in verse 3, and then sends the Magi off in verse 8 to go and find this king for him. Many of us probably know the story already, but even if you don't, you can probably see where that's going, can't you? He's disturbed by the news and then says, go and find him for me.

Herod responds to the arrival of King Jesus by trying to suppress his rule and by maintaining his own rule. He is angry that someone dares to try and get between him and himself.

[10:02] I am king, and I will not have another rule over me. Herod gets it right, doesn't he, insofar as he recognizes that the arrival of King Jesus means handing over the authority in our life to someone else. Now, we might not live in a world full of royalty living in big palaces, but we do live in a world, don't we, full of individuals who consider the self to be king. They might not have a throne like Herod does, but the self is king, but the self is king, and if I am king, I get to decide what to do with my time and my money, my body, the life within my body. If I am king, I get to decide.

But if Jesus is king, I'm no longer in charge. Jesus, as king, will declare as we go through this gospel, what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong, what we are to do with our time and what we are to do with our money, how we are to speak to our friends, how we are to treat our enemies. If Jesus is king, he rules.

If Jesus is king, I no longer rule over my own life. And the thought of not having that authority yourself is enough to make more than just Herod angry, isn't it?

We live in a world full of Herods. Maybe you are one of them who cannot stand someone else claiming authority over your life. The arrival of King Jesus will anger those who want to be king themselves. That is response number one. Response number two is, in a way, almost worse. Right, Herod is angry, but the chief priests and the scribes are apathetic. They do not care. We've been looking over the last couple of weeks, haven't we, at how long God's people have been waiting for this moment to arrive. Remember that genealogy we looked at at the start of Matthew's gospel? It was generation after generation after generation of God's people for thousands of years who have been waiting for years. They have been waiting for the son of David, the son of Abraham, who would bring all God's promises to fruition. They have been waiting and waiting and waiting, and they know, don't they? They know what they're waiting for. Look at verse 4.

[13:27] Herod brings together all of the religious leaders and asks them, where the Messiah was to be born.

It's an obviously loaded question, isn't it? Herod's not looking for the answers to his Saturday morning crosswords. That these foreign magi wandering around Jerusalem, asking where the king of the Jews is, and Herod immediately knows who they're talking about. It's the Messiah.

That's who they've come to find. And the chief priests and the scribes respond, don't they? They know. Oh, in Bethlehem. It's five miles down the road. Right? You could walk there in an hour and a half.

They know their Bibles. They know their history. They quote the prophets straight back to Herod. This is what the prophets say, But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Jesus, we're seeing again, once again, fulfills everything the Old Testament was pointing to.

[14 : 45] But the scribes and the chief priests, the teachers of the law, the experts in God's Word, they know what they're looking for, the Messiah.

They know where they should be looking for it. Bethlehem, just down the road. They've got their king asking about him, and some random astronomers from a far country searching for a newborn king, having seen an unexplainable star declare his coming in the heavens.

But what do they do? The silence is deafening.

They are not interested. And they would remain uninterested. Until Jesus, in his ministry, 30 years later, starts ruffling some feathers.

Starts disturbing the status quo. Do you see how that's similar to what Herod was doing? Neither of them want their lives disrupted by the arrival of a new king, do they?

[16 : 11] Neither of them want to have anything to do with King Jesus. Herod at least recognizes the threat to his own sovereignty that Jesus brings.

But the chief priests and the teachers of the law, they don't want anything to do with him. Because they're quite happy, actually, with the things, the way things are.

One is angry. One is apathetic. But ultimately, neither of them want to submit and subject themselves to the rule of Jesus. There's a big problem with that, isn't there?

I don't know if you remember, at the coronation of King Charles earlier this year, it was a great event, mainly because it provided an abundance of sermon illustrations. But during the procession, as Charles, the newly crowned king, made his way from Westminster Abbey to Buckingham Palace, I don't even remember, but there were a few hundred Republican protesters, weren't there? They probably would have gone completely unnoticed if the police didn't decide to arrest a few of them and bring them to the world's attention. They were clad in yellow and dared to brandish a variety of placards.

[17 : 31] And they were protesting the monarchy's very existence. One simply read, this is all a bit silly, isn't it?

Which I thought was beautifully exemplified British protesting. But the majority of their signs had painted on them three words. Not my king.

Remember that? Not my king. Now, I'm not here to offer my political views on the monarchy. You'll be glad to hear.

And some of you might well sympathize with the sentiments of those demonstrators. But the problem with those three words, not my king, is that they simply aren't true, are they?

You might wish them to be true, but your wishes won't change the reality. You can hold up a sign that says, not my king, but if you forget to submit your tax return, who's going to come knocking?

[18 : 40] His majesty's revenue and customs. And if you point blank refuse, you might find yourself at the mercy of his majesty's courts and tribunal services.

If you're found guilty of tax avoidance, you might find yourself in his majesty's prison. You decide to try and flee the country, you'll need to send an application to his majesty's passport office.

And when you hand over your passport at the border, the border officer would open it up and read that his majesty requests the bearer of this passport to proceed without hindrance. You can hold up a sign all you want, can't you?

Saying, not my king. But if you're a citizen of the United Kingdom, Charles III is your king, whether you want him to be or not. When people respond to Jesus' rule with anger or apathy, with a point blank refusal to acknowledge him as their king, Jesus is still king.

You can reject his rule all you want. You can ignore his rule all the days of your life. He is still king.

[20 : 16] And one day, the king of creation will demand an account of you whatever response you choose now. We saw last week, didn't we, how the coming of Emmanuel, God with us, wasn't a religious option for those who choose it.

It is the reality whether we choose to embrace it or not. And the same, again, applies this week to Jesus' kingship. He is king whether you want to embrace it or not.

Herod and Jerusalem, the teachers of the law and the chief priests, did not acknowledge or accept Jesus' kingship. They did not respond rightly to him, but he is still king.

Herod will be dead by the end of chapter 2. The chief priests and the scribes, nameless then, nameless now, but Jesus, Jesus still reigns.

He reigns yesterday, today, and forever. Hold up your sign all you want. One day, the judge of heaven and earth will bring you before his throne.

[21 : 36] Well, we'll come back to these first two responses in a few minutes, but before we do that, let's just look briefly at the third and final and right response to King Jesus. Because in the Magi, in the Magi, we see how to rightly respond to the newborn king.

Herod is angry. The scribes don't seem to care, but the Magi, the Magi come to the king in adoration. If you want to respond rightly to the king overall, whose throne lasts forever, then follow in the footsteps of these ancient sages.

Just going to pick out quickly three things they do. The Magi leave Herod's presence with the instruction to return once they've found the king. And when they leave, they see once again the star that had led them this far on the journey rise before them, in the direction of Bethlehem.

And what do they do, verse 10? The first thing they do is rejoice. They rejoice. The NIV says they were overjoyed.

I love the Greek here, right? It doesn't just say they were joyful. It doesn't say they were very joyful. It says they were very greatly joyful. It's the Bible's way of saying they were super duper happy. You can see why the NIV went overjoyed.

[22 : 59] But Matthew wants you to know they were really, really excited. They were like children on Christmas morning. They were going to see the king.

I've never met royalty. I imagine it's quite an exciting experience. But the Magi were going to see the king. It's worth getting excited about, isn't it?

You might think, well, that's great for the Magi 2,000 years ago on the way to Bethlehem. What about us 2,000 years later in an often wet and windy Aberdeen? But here's why it's even more exciting for us than it is for the Magi.

So what becomes clear as we go through this gospel is that we don't go to the king. The king comes to us. The king comes to us.

You see a glimpse of it, right, in the prophecy quoted in verse 5. Jesus is a king and a shepherd. The king goes and finds his people and watches over them.

[24 : 19] The last words of Jesus to his disciples at the end of this gospel. I am with you always. I am with you always.

The Magi were very greatly joyful at the prospect of soon being with the king. But the king is always with us and for us in everything at all times.

That is very greatly exciting. While I am standing here preaching to you, Jesus, the king of kings, is with me. And I am very thankful and very excited about that.

As you sit and listen to the word of God, Jesus is with you. The king is with you on your good days and he's with you on your bad days.

He's with you in the highs of your faith and he's with you when you struggle to get to church on a Sunday. He's with you at work, he's with you on your holidays, he's with you when you're young and he's with you when you're old.

[25 : 31] The king is our shepherd who never, ever leaves his sheep. And that is very greatly exciting.

We too, like the Magi, can respond with very great joy. The Magi rejoice and secondly, they humbly worship. When they arrive in Bethlehem, verse 11, they find the house where Mary and Jesus are dwelling and they come in and see the child and what do they do?

They bowed down and worshipped him. They came to worship the king. Right? You see it all the way back there in verse 2.

Why have they traveled all this way? They have traveled to worship the king. And they do it humbly, don't they? Right? They bow themselves down before Jesus.

It's a posture of humility. humility. They are lowering themselves before him. Remember Herod's response? Right?

[26 : 44] He didn't want Jesus to be king because he wanted to rule himself, didn't he? But the Magi come lowly before Jesus.

We don't have to do that physically. We've got nothing against it if you do. But we come lowering ourselves, our egos, our prides, our determination to be king of our own lives.

We lay it down and come and bow before the king. If we recognize him as king, we recognize the authority in our life is him.

And so we humbly submit to him. It is a posture of humility and it is a posture of praise. They come to worship the king as we come to worship the king here every single Sunday.

To confess that he is Lord, to join our voices together in singing his praise, to listen humbly to his word, to bring our needs before him. That is worship.

[27 : 49] This, right now, is worship. The magi rejoice, they worship, and thirdly, and perhaps most famously of all, they give.

They open up their treasures. Middle of verse 11 there, right? They open their treasures and they give gifts to the king. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were all valuable items, right?

They give to the king the best of what they've got. Whether that's your time, your money, your friendship, your hospitality, give the best of what you've got in service of the king.

We follow in the footsteps of the magi by rejoicing that the king is coming, by bowing down and worshiping him and giving him the best of what we have. Three responses we've seen, haven't we, to King Jesus.

Anger, apathy, and adoration. And as we finish up, let me just take a brief moment to take in the big picture, right, of what Matthew's saying here.

[29 : 02] Who responds rightly to Jesus? It's magi, isn't it? Where have they come from? And where have the ones who have rejected him come from?

The magi knew nothing about Jesus, presumably very little about Israel and the Messiah. They needed to go and ask about the prophecies concerning Bethlehem. They knew very, very little of what was going on.

Herod and the chief priests and the scribes, right, they knew it all. They knew their Bibles.

They knew about the Messiah. They knew about the Messiah. They went to the synagogue every Saturday. They studied the Scriptures.

But what did they get so wrong? What we're seeing, what Matthew's getting across in this first part of his Gospel, the genealogy, the fulfilled prophecies, the whole point of the Bible is to point us to Jesus.

[30 : 26] The whole of the Old Testament looks forward to him. The whole of the New Testament goes back to him. It's all about Jesus.

It's all about him. You can come here every Sunday. You can spend your whole life reading the Bible.

But what matters immeasurably more than everything else is how you respond to him, to the person, to the king.

There is nothing to be gained in being an expert in the Scriptures if it doesn't make you a worshiper of Jesus. There is no value in coming to church church if you do not join in humble praise of the king.

If your Bible study doesn't end with you loving Jesus more, you've wasted your time. Far better, right, and this is what the first half of Matthew 2 is teaching us, far better is the one who comes in here without ever having stepped foot in a church before, hears the gospel and responds in praise.

[31 : 57] Far better are they than sitting here Sunday by Sunday and never responding in personal worship of the king born in Bethlehem. God. So I beg you, right, follow in the footsteps of the magi and adore the king by rejoicing at his coming, by bowing down in worship to him and giving him the best of what you have.

It is wonderful getting to unpack God's word every Sunday. It is wonderful to study it through the week, but it is worthless if we don't get to the place and the person that it is all pointing us to.

There is only one right response to Jesus, and I hope and pray it is one we shall all join in on now as we respond to God's words in prayer and praise.

let me pray for us all. Our Father in heaven, we thank you and praise you and rejoice that you have sent your Son.

Help each and every one of us now to bow down and worship him as our king, our savior, our shepherd, who is and always will be with us and for us.
[33 : 41] In his glorious name we pray. Amen.