

Responding to the King's Birth

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Date: 25 December 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] And as you are, it would be great if you could grab your readings because you'll need those to follow along. Hopefully you can all follow along with one.
- If you don't have one, just, and would like one, just put your hand up and Raymond will come and grab one for you. You didn't get an insert? So can we get a couple down the front? Sorry, Raymond.
- All right. Well, let's make a start anyway. I don't know if you've opened presents yet. Anyone opened any presents yet or waiting? Some, some not yet.
- One thing for certain is there are always different responses to presents depending on whether you like them or not. And so this child does clearly not like his underpants for Christmas.
- Of course, we as adults kind of have worked out the fake, oh, that's nice. Thank you so much. I love it. I don't know if you've ever done that. Of course, there's a different response. If we like the presents, there's joy at our plastic dinosaur.
- [1 : 0 5] How cool is that? And even tears of joy if it's a dog. No, my daughter, we are not getting a dog. But today we're going to think about different sort of response, and that is a response to the greatest gift that God has ever given us, which is the Lord Jesus.
- You see, Matthew was an eyewitness to Jesus in history. And at church here on Sundays, we've been looking at his account of Jesus's birth over the last few weeks.
- And the story so far has a certain logic to it. And so a couple of weeks ago, in the beginning of chapter one, we were introduced to Jesus, and Matthew showed us his family tree, how God worked through history to bring about the birth of Jesus, who is the son of King David.
- And that's important because as we saw, being a son of King David means, or in this case certainly, that you are the king, the promised king that would come from David's line. Another word for King in the Bible is Christ.
- And so Christ is not his surname, as many of you know. Christ is a title that means King, Anointed One. And Christmas, of course, has the word Christ in it, doesn't it?
- [2 : 3 0] And so that's why we sing a lot of carols that mention the newborn King, because that's what Christ means. So Son of David means Christ or King.
- But we also saw that he is the son of Abraham. And that, again, is important because he was the one who would bring God's blessings to the world.
- And not just to the Jews, but to non-Jews like us, what the Bible calls Gentiles, or what the Jews call Gentiles. And then last Sunday we saw how this king would bring those blessings.
- And the answer was in his names. And so his name, Jesus, means God saves. Because we're actually told he will save us from our sins at the top in yellow there.
- That's why he's given the name Jesus, God saves. But he's also called Emmanuel, which means God with us at the bottom there. And so God is with us in life to help us through life and to ensure that we get to enjoy God's other blessings in the life to come.

[3 : 40] Not just every spiritual one now, but every physical one later in the life to come. And so having shown us those two things, his family tree, who Jesus is, how he will bring those blessings, today Matthew then asks us to respond to this king.

And he does it by giving us two different, very different responses. One in Herod and one in the Magi or the wise men. So at point one in your outlines and verse one and two, you can follow along on your sheets or on the screens.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 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. Now the Magi were astrologers or sometimes magicians.

What they did, they read the stars and then they advised their king, which explains why they noticed a new star rising, because they're observing them, and also why they're often called wise men, because they're advisors to the king.

[4 : 55] But in the end, this is not much more than simply giving the king his horoscope. I actually checked my horoscope a couple of days ago. I don't think you can see it's a bit small, but it says that you might be feeling a bit psychic.

So you should go with your hunch and not use rational thinking. So perhaps after the service, I'll cross Doncaster Road with my eyes closed. Good idea. How do you think I'll go?

And so this is not really what makes the Magi wise. But we're also told in verse 1 and 2 that they were from the east, probably from the country of Babylon, where the Jews had just spent 70 years.

And this would explain how they heard about a promised king of the Jews in the first place, because that time, that 70 years, they would have heard about it. Either way, God works through this pagan practice of horoscopes to bring these Magi to Jerusalem.

And when they arrive, verse 2, they start asking around for the location of this newborn king. The only problem is there's already a king, Herod.

[6 : 09] There's a few Herods in the Bible, but the history books tell us that this particular Herod, it was called Herod the Great because of his great building exploits. But he wasn't a Jew and he'd actually been made king by the Romans.

And so he's not the real king. But I tell you what, he wanted to stay king. So much so that he became known as Herod the Paranoid.

Paranoid, he would be replaced. So much so that he dealt ruthlessly, actually. He killed his favourite wife and two of his sons, just in case they tried to take his throne.

And so when a real king comes along, one who is king by birth and by God's promise, son of David, well, it's no surprise how Herod reacts.

Point to verse 3. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed and awed Jerusalem with him.

[7 : 13] Disturbed is probably an understatement. This is a real threat to his kingship, to ruling his own life, his own way. And Jerusalem, we're told, is disturbed with him, though probably for different reasons, because they knew how ruthless Herod could be.

And again, history tells us that he did commit a genocide, killed baby boys to try and get Jesus. And so they were proved right to be disturbed. Either way, true to form, Herod begins his secret plan to search and destroy.

At first, he calls together the religious experts to find out where this new king would be born. And so we read in verses 4 and following, When he had called together all the people's chief priests and the teachers of the law, the religious experts, he asked them whether Christ, that is the king, was to be born.

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied. For this is what the prophet has written. 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. Herod asked where the Christ or king is to be born, and the religious leaders, quoting Micah, say Bethlehem.

[8 : 40] Now, Micah actually says that Bethlehem is least among the clans of Judah. It was an insignificant nowhere kind of place.

Kind of like Tasmania amongst the states of Australia. I'm just joking. I couldn't get the just joking out quick enough. But Matthew actually changes the quote from Micah.

I don't know if you noticed, he changes it when he quotes it in verse 6. And he says that Bethlehem is now by no means least. Why?

Well, because out of this town will come a ruler, a king for God's people. But this king's birthplace of Bethlehem was humble.

It was a kind of nowhere town. And we all know that the king's cradle was pretty humble too, don't we? It was a manger, a feeding trough for animals.

[9 : 38] You can't get much more lowly and humble than that, can you? And it all points us to this king's humility. One who, unlike Herod, will shepherd his people.

That is, care for them rather than being harsh to them. And unlike many of our leaders today, this shepherd king will lead people for their good, not his own political good.

And he will bring them God's blessings like peace. As Micah said at the end of our first reading, he will be our peace. You see, we all have a bit of Herod in us.

Not that we're ruthless, but that we all like to be king of our own lives. I mean, we all like to do what we want, generally, don't we? And sometimes even rather than what God wants.

And the Bible calls this sin. Sin. And if you write sin with a capital I like this, it pretty much sums up what it's about. Sin is about saying, I am king and I want to do what I want, instead of God being king and doing what God wants.

[10 : 47] And God ought to have this right. After all, he is, well, God. He made us and so he has every right to rule over us. And God's way is actually good for us.

I mean, is not forgiving better than fighting? Is not loving better than hating? I have three teenagers.

And so I can relate to this sign that says, I have no need for Google. I have teenagers that know it all. Of course, I know there's teenagers in the room. You're the exception. But I was the same when I was a teenager, and I'm sure we all were.

But actually, when it comes to God, we're all a bit like teenagers. Because we all think we know better than God. And so often ignore God, or at least parts of what God says.

We want to live how I want, where I am king. Even though God's way is good for us. And like teenagers with parents, this can cause conflict at home, can't it?

[11 : 54] You know, a lack of peace in the house. And even punishment. And it's the same with God, only the stakes are much, much higher. For sin leads to conflict with God, and the punishment is eternal death.

Or what the Bible calls hell, actually. But this humble shepherd king would humble himself further. He would grow up and then go to the cross for us.

And there, naked, humiliated, he bore the punishment for our sins so that we can be saved from them. Remember, his name Jesus means God saves.

As one carol puts it, nails spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you.

He bore the cross for us, suffered hell in our place, so that we could instead have the blessing of peace with God, not conflict. Which comes with the blessing of eternal life instead of eternal death.

[12 : 59] And in fact, this first peace with God actually leads to a second type of peace, that is peace with one another. Because as we're all brought into God's family and have peace with him, we're to then love one another and enjoy peace with each other.

I mean, imagine for a moment if Russia and Ukraine were suddenly all converted and became Christians. All entered into God's family and sought to live God's way of loving one another.

Wouldn't the war end like that? Peace with God leads to peace with one another. I mean, genuine Christians, by the way.

There's lots of people who call themselves Christians and don't actually live it out. But this peace with God also leads, thirdly, to peace of mind, which we all need, don't we? For many of us, this year has not been particularly smooth or easy, has it?

From rising interest rates and cost of living to health concerns and family issues. As I said before, our children's ministry is going through a time right now in hospital with her son.

[14 : 08] And then, of course, there's war in the world and political unrest, along with millions of deaths. But Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, to help us through life's ups and downs.

Indeed, he's the shepherd king who cares for us and leads us for our own good. And he gets how hard life can be. He's lived it before us. And what's more, as king, he'll one day end all suffering, put this world right.

The only reason he is waiting is to give you more time to respond. The point is, what other king offers such blessings of peace and life eternal, not just to the Jews, but to the world?

If we accept him as our king. Unlike Herod, who prefers to stay king himself. And so having heard Jesus is born in Bethlehem, he calls the Magi to find out exactly where he is.

Verse 7 and 8. Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, go and search carefully for the child.

[15 : 20] As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. Lie, isn't it? It's a lie.

Herod doesn't want to worship him. His plan is to search and destroy him. For that's what we're told at the bottom of our reading or on the next slide there.

Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. And so here is Herod's response to the true king this Christmas. That very first Christmas, rather. To search and destroy.

The response of the Magi, though, is the complete opposite. So more briefly, point 3 and then verse 9 and 10. After they had heard the king, they went on their way and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they, the Magi, saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And so here we see God's guiding star continuing to guide them to the place Jesus was.

[16 : 25] And I assume it shone down on the house so they knew which one to go to, which always reminds me of the beginning of a Mr. Bean episode. You know Mr. Bean where the light shines down on him.

I don't know if it was exactly like that or not. Either way, they find Jesus, who is much more than Mr. Bean, because you notice how they respond.

They believe Jesus really is the king, so much so that they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

I mean, that's a lot of joy, isn't it? Kind of reminds me of this child's response to his Christmas present. Take a look. Yeah! What's in there? Flip it over. What's in there?

Open it up. Open it up. Put the other thing out. What's in there? Yeah! Pajamas! Woo! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

[17 : 20] I If only kids still got always that excited about PJs. I think the dad's actually more excited. But these Magi believe Jesus is the promised king so much so that we were told that they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

I don't know if Matthew can be any more clearer. It's lots of joy, isn't it? They really believe he's the promised king. And then, verse 11, they treat him as the king.

And so, verse 11, On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Here they treat Jesus as king in two ways. Firstly, they worship him, which means to bow down face to the ground in front of him. I mean, not even King Charles gets that kind of response, does he?

But the Magi do this to Jesus. They treat him, in other words, as the real king. And then, second, they give gifts to him. Not nappies or a dummy or a onesie, but gifts fit for a king.

[18 : 34] I I mean, myrrh is an oil derived from tree resin, and at the moment, you can buy 100 mls for \$209. I mean, that's more expensive than my wife's perfume, isn't it? And even more expensive is frankincense.

So, for 100 mls, it's \$350. So, half a litre is almost \$2,000 worth. And for half a litre or half a kilo of gold, well, at the moment, it's tracking at \$44,333.30.

I mean, it's expensive stuff, isn't it? But that's the point. These are gifts fit for a king. You see, the reaction of these Magi is not only to believe and rejoice, but to treat Jesus as king, by worshipping him and giving to him gifts fit for him.

And this is actually what makes them wise. And not horoscopes or asking a paranoid king where the real king is. I mean, that's not very smart, is it? I mean, what do you think Herod's going to try and do to you guys?

No, no, what makes them truly wise is by believing, rejoicing and treating Jesus as the true king. And then in verse 12, just as God worked through the star to bring them to Jesus, the true king, so God works through their dreams to keep them safe from Herod, the false king.

[19 : 58] And because they believed, these non-Jews, Gentiles, from different parts of the world, return home, having peace with God and life eternal.

I don't know how God has worked in your life to guide you here this morning, presumably not a star. I doubt a dream, although I've heard of God working in that way from others.

Perhaps for you, it's your conscience or tradition or your family who's dragged you along. Whoever it is or however you are guided here, the question for us this Christmas is, how will you respond to Jesus?

That's what Matthew's shown us, two different responses. How will you respond to this humble shepherd king who died to save you from your sins so that you could enjoy God's blessings of peace and life eternal?

Will you reject him like Herod because you want to stay king of your own life? Or will you be wise like the Magi and believe in him?

[21 : 06] We have loads of historical evidence for Jesus. It's not blind belief. It's actually reasonable belief. If you haven't yet and would like to, then I'd love to speak with you after the service.

But for us who do believe in Jesus, then this Christmas we're to do those two other things that I've underlined at the end of your outline. The two things that the Magi did, if you remember.

Firstly, will we continue to rejoice over Jesus this Christmas? Perhaps not as crazily as that little toddler in the video, but surely Jesus is better than PJ's, right?

And so will you take a moment, perhaps before Christmas lunch or dinner, to remember what a great gift Jesus is? The one who died to bring you blessings of peace and life eternal.

And will you perhaps say a prayer of thanks with a joyful heart for the gift of Jesus this Christmas? And lastly, will we continue to treat Jesus as our king this Christmas?

[22 : 14] And not by bowing our face to the ground, but by bowing our lives to him as our king. And not by giving him gold, but by giving him our allegiance as our king.

Following him above all others, letting him shape our priorities, our decisions, our behaviours, which are in the end for our good anyway. As our next carol will say, so bring him incense, gold and myrrh, not literally, but by owning him as our king, as the next line says.

And so come, whether you're a peasant or a king or whoever you are, to own him. The king of kings salvation brings. Let loving hearts enthrone him.

Let's pray that we would. Let's pray. Our gracious father, we thank you for the joy of Christmas. We thank you for good times and food and family and friends and for presents.

But we especially thank you for the gift of Jesus. We thank you that he is a humble king who died to save us so that we might have peace and life eternal.

[23 : 25] Help us, we pray, to rejoice afresh this Christmas and to follow him as our king in life. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.