

Christmas 2023

“The Story of Christmas-Part 5”

Epilogue-The Wise Men

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

12/31/23

Find this weeks' sermon audio and video message [HERE](#).

I know we just celebrated Christmas last week—but I was hoping that you're still in the Christmas spirit. I hope so because I'd like to add one more message to our Story of Christmas series—an epilogue if you will.

If you were here for our Christmas Eve service last Sunday, you heard us talk about the main characters associated with the story of Christmas—Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the angel—and especially the Christ-Child Himself.

As you were listening you might have thought to yourself—*“Good heavens, he forgot the wise men! How could he have left the wise men out of the story?!—They're pretty important to the story of Christmas and he forgot to mention them!”*

Well actually I didn't forget about them—they just weren't there in Bethlehem to witness the newly born Savior as the shepherds were—even though that's what tradition and every manger scene in America has led people to believe.

One movie that I love to watch during the Christmas season is the movie, *The Nativity Story*—it has become my all-time favorite Christmas movie.

I love how the writers and producers portrayed the story of Jesus' birth.

I especially love the scene where Mary has just given birth to the Baby Jesus, the star is shining down upon the stable pointing the way to the shepherds who have come to see the new-born King lying in the manger—as the angel had proclaimed to them of His birth.

Then to see the wise men enter the scene with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh as they kneel before the Babe overwhelmed with awe and wonder at the sight of God made into flesh—it is truly a moving scene for me—even though I know it isn't historically accurate!

➤ *“What do you mean?!”*

Well turn with me to Matthew Chapter 2 and I'll show you—

Matthew 2:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ 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 have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod the King

King Herod also known as "*Herod the Great*" was one of a number of rulers in the Herodian line that were in power before, during and even after the time of Christ. The title Herod the Great refers not to Herod's greatness as a person or king—but to the fact that he was the eldest son of Antipater.

At the young age of 25 he was appointed by Rome to be the governor of Galilee and Judea with the hope that he would control the Jewish population that lived in that area as they had been difficult to govern and somewhat of a thorn in Rome's side.

Later the Roman Senate named Herod "*King of the Jews*," a title that the Jews detested because Herod wasn't even Jewish—he was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau the twin brother of Jacob.

Herod was a cruel, paranoid little man (standing about 5 ft. tall) who held tightly to the reins of power and brutally dealt with anyone he thought might be a threat to his throne. Over the years he killed many people including his brother-in-law, his mother-in-law, two of his sons and even his own wife because he thought they might be conspiring against him!

Five days before his death he had a third son executed which prompted Augustus, the Roman Emperor, to say that it was safer to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons!

Now with that background you can understand why when the wise men came to Jerusalem and asked—"**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?**"—how that troubled Herod and all the citizens of Jerusalem with him (verse 3).

The word **troubled** means to "*shake violently*"—Herod shook with a jealous rage—whereas the people shook from abject terror at what Herod would do in light of this news.

You see after Herod had killed all his supposed enemies and had finally come to a place where he felt his throne was secure—suddenly these Persian wise guys showed up announcing a new threat to his reign.

Wise Men from the East

The term "*wise men*" is the Greek word "*magoi*" from which we get the word "*magi*". Few biblical stories are as well-known yet so clouded by myth and tradition as that of the magi, or wise men, mentioned by Matthew.

During the Middle Ages a legend developed that they were kings, that there were 3 of them, and that their names were—Casper, Balthazar, and Melchior. Because they were thought to represent the three sons of Noah, one of them is often pictured as an Ethiopian—a black man.

However, they are never called kings in the New Testament, but rather are simply called "*magi*" (magicians). We do not know how many magi there were—from the three gifts listed in Matthew 2:11 (gold, frankincense, and myrrh), many people have assumed there were three of them.

But when their caravan arrived in Jerusalem there were enough of them to trouble the whole city (apparently many more than three)—so who were they?

Herodotus, the Greek historian, says that the Magi were originally a Median tribe—the Medes were part of the Persian Empire.

These Magi were Persian wise men—scholars, who were skilled in philosophy, medicine, natural science—and in the study of the stars. Their title connects them with *magic*—but they were probably more like astrologers.

Please understand, their presence in the biblical record is not a divine endorsement of astrology by any means! Historically, they were teachers and instructors of the Persian kings and were looked upon as men of holiness and wisdom.

Matthew 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ 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 have seen His star in the East...**

Actually, they are saying that *they* were in the East (Persia) when they saw His star in the west—this is obvious because they traveled west not east from Persia to Jerusalem.

1. What was this star?

There's been a lot of speculation about this star.

Was it a real star; was it a supernatural star created by God just for these wise men to lead them to Jesus? Or was it really an angel (angels are sometimes called stars in the Bible—Job 38:7; Revelation 12:4)?

I personally think that this “star” was no ordinary star (the Greek simply refers to a luminous light source in the sky)—I believe it was something miraculous created by God for this occasion to point the wise men to the Christ-Child.

But you know what?—it doesn't matter what '*light source*' God uses to bring you to Jesus—a gospel tract, a radio message, a Bible video—or even a co-worker, friend or family member (Matthew 5:14-16).

The light source God uses in your life is irrelevant—all that matters is that you follow the light all the way to Jesus!

2. How did they know it was “His star”, the King of the Jews?

The bigger question is, how did they come to associate a star with the coming of the Messiah—the King of the Jews in the first place? And for that matter how did these Persian wise men even know about the Messiah of Israel?

To answer that question, you need to remember that 600 years earlier Daniel was taken captive to Babylon where he was assigned a place with the wise men of Babylon.

Later Babylon was overthrown by the Medes and the Persians where Daniel once again rose to a place of prominence among the wise men of the Persian court.

Because of Daniel's high position and great respect among them, it seems certain that the Magi learned much from him about the one true God, the God of Israel, and about His promise to send a Man who would be Messiah, Savior and King all rolled into one!

It seems that Daniel shared with them that this Messiah would be the High Priest of a New Covenant that God would make with all mankind—but that first He would need to die to pay for the sins of the world and rise from the dead.

After which, He would return to heaven for a time before He would come again to establish a new world order where He would defeat evil and establish a glorious global Kingdom where He would reign over all the earth from Jerusalem.

All you have to do is read the prophecies that God gave to Daniel to see how much He revealed to Daniel about this coming King and Kingdom—who I believe then passed on this prophetic information to the wise men of Persia.

But to really confirm that Daniel had revealed all of these details to the wise men—all we need to do is look at the gifts they brought to Jesus—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Gold represents His Kingship; frankincense represents His Priesthood; and myrrh His death.

It further seems that Daniel taught the wise men of Persia the prophecies of this coming Messiah from the Jewish Scriptures—prophecies that they then passed down from one generation of Magi (wise men) to the next.

One of them would include the prophecy of the star that would point the way to this Messiah when the time came for Him to be born—

Numbers 24:17

"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel..."

God must have supernaturally revealed to the Magi that the star in the western sky was the very star that God had predicted would point to the birth of the Messiah.

Matthew 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ 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 have seen His star in the East and have come...**"

The events described in this passage probably occurred anywhere from 12 to 18 months *after* Jesus was born—we know the wise men didn't get there at the same time the shepherds did.

We see from verse 11 of Matthew Chapter 2, that by the time the wise men got there, Jesus and His family were now staying in a *house* rather than the *stable* where He was born (Luke 2:7).

Listen, it doesn't matter that these wise men didn't get to Jesus at the same time as the shepherds—it only matters that they came to Jesus!

We don't all come to Christ at the same time, some come to Jesus sooner than others, the important thing is that you do come—before it's too late!

Matthew 2:2

...saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come **to worship Him.**"

The whole purpose for Jesus coming to the earth the first time was so that He could save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21) which was necessary for God's ultimate purpose to be fulfilled—so that we could become true worshippers.

John 4:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus came to save us from sin that's true (and from the penalty of sin—hell)—but that was only a necessary prerequisite to God's ultimate goal which was to gather to Himself a community of people who would worship Him in spirit and in truth forever (Rev.5:8-10).

It began with the Magi who said, "**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star...and have come to worship Him**"—and it continues to the present.

This is the real message of Christmas—God gave to the world the gift of His Son so that we, in turn, could give to Him the gift of worship!

Worshipping Jesus means that we step down off of the throne of our life and allow Him to take His rightful place as King and Lord of our lives.

However, for many that is absolutely unacceptable—as was the case with King Herod.

Matthew 2:4-6 (NKJV)

⁴ And when he [Herod] had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'* "

Herod assembled the Jewish religious leaders to find out where the Christ (Messiah) was to be born.

These priests and scribes immediately quoted the prophecy of Micah (5:2) which identified **Bethlehem of Judea** as the King's birthplace.

Matthew 2:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

Herod pretended to honor the Christ-Child with words of devotion—but it was nothing more than a ruse to deceive the wise men.

You see, Herod planned to do away with this Child as soon as He could be located.

Matthew 2:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His

mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Greek word translated "**young child**" refers to a *toddler* or *small child*—not to a newborn baby.

Again, notice that the Magi went to the "**house**" where Jesus was—there's no mention of a *stable* or *manger*.

As we just said—the wise men brought to Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—all costly gifts because the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to be worshipped with what is most precious to us (as with Mary who gave to Jesus the most precious thing she had—oil of spikenard).

The word **worshiped** here means "*to make obeisance,*" "*to reverence,*" or "*to pay homage to.*"

Matthew 2:12-15 (NKJV)

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. ¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." ¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, ¹⁵ and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*" [Hosea 11:1]

Egypt was a natural place for the family to escape to—it was not far away (the border was only about seventy-five miles from Bethlehem).

Besides, Egypt was a well-ordered Roman province well beyond Herod's jurisdiction, and it had a large Jewish population—roughly one million strong.

The treasures given by the wise men would have been more than enough to finance the trip and provide the money to pay for lodging, food and other necessities while they were in Egypt.

Matthew 2:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁸ "*A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.*"

The prophecy that Matthew quotes in verse 18 is from Jeremiah 31:15

This quotation from Jeremiah originally referred to the mourning of Israel's mothers during the Babylonian conquest and captivity of the nation as some of their children were killed and others taken away.

In the prophecy, '*Rachel*' represents the nation Israel—the grief of the nation is attributed to Rachel, who was buried in Ramah (near Bethlehem, where the massacre took place).

As the bereaved parents passed her tomb—she is pictured as '*weeping*' with them.

The wise men must have told Herod that the star proclaiming the Messiah's birth had appeared more than a year before their arrival in Jerusalem—which would have been about right.

They would have needed time to make preparations for a journey of roughly 1000 miles across the desert—and when they finally did leave it would have taken them 4 to 6 months to make the journey. By this time Jesus was about a year and a half old and living in a house in Bethlehem with His mother and stepfather.

Insane with fury that the wise men had betrayed him—Herod decided to kill all the male children in Bethlehem and its surrounding districts two years old and under to ensure that this Child—this “King of the Jews” would never ascend to the throne.

You see Herod was king, not only of Judea and Galilee but also and especially of his own life—and as such he was determined not to let anyone, or anything remove him from that place of absolute rulership.

There are many like Herod today who reject Jesus because they’re not going to turn over control of their life to anyone—they alone are going to reign over their life as king no matter what!

You may not realize this but in some ways the Christmas story being presented here by the Holy Spirit in Matthew chapter two—is the tale of two kings.

First, we see King Jesus presented—He is the true King, the King of kings and the Lord of lords who has the divine right to reign and to receive worship and honor. The other king we see presented here is a usurper to the throne, someone who has no right to reign and receive worship—his name is Herod.

Herod represents every stubborn rebel that has ever lived who refuses to yield to Christ’s reign over their life.

This is exactly what Oswald Chambers meant when he said, *“Sin is blatant mutiny against the rule of God.”*

At His First Coming Jesus came to save us from our sins—and the greatest sin man is involved in is the sin of *“self-deification”* coupled with *“self-worship.”*

What that basically means is denying Jesus His rightful place on the throne of your heart as you continue to make your plans, do your thing and rule your life with absolute authority and autonomy.

Rebellion against God is at the heart of all of man’s problems.

Heaven will be a place free from all rebels and all rebellion—a place where only true worshippers will live—it starts right now by surrendering your life to Jesus as your Savior and true King.

The wise men were really wise because they bowed the knee to the King of kings and worshipped Him—Herod, well he played the fool as he refused to bow the knee to Jesus’ rule over his life.

Who do you identify most with—Herod or the wise men?

Herod lived two-thousand years ago—do you think he regrets today the decision he made back then?

More importantly two-thousand years from now how will you feel about the decision you’re making today as to whether or not you are going to let Jesus be King over your life?

God’s Word tells us that someday every knee will bow to Jesus, the true King and proclaim He is Lord—if not now here on earth—then someday on the Day of Judgment.

Jesus will be one of two things to every person who has ever lived—loving Savior or righteous Judge—and what you do with Jesus now will determine what He becomes to you then.

Don't give Jesus lip service (like Herod) pretending to love and worship Him.

Don't just call Him Lord—make Him the Lord of your life by surrendering your life fully to Him!

And then you will become a true worshipper—the very purpose for which you were created!

“WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM!”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— *you can experience the richest Christmas of your life!*

Please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).