

"Now After Jesus Was Born"
Matthew 2:1-12

We had a wonderful Christmas Eve service...if you couldn't be here, we missed you...I just want to share with you one great spiritual, biblical insight that revealed itself that night at the end of the service... an amazing lesson on the law. ...a vivid expression of the apostle Paul's words in Romans 7:5

5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death... I would not have come to know sin except through the Law. For I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, worked out in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

It's that idea that... if there is a sign next to a creek that says "No Fishing"...you do what you may not have thought about doing had the sign not been there... you get out your fishing pole and fish there...*if they went to the trouble to post a no fishing sign... the fishing must be pretty good!*... that's our sinful nature and relationship to the law... what do you do when you see a "Don't Touch, Wet Paint Sign"?

We served Wassail at the end of our service out in the narthex... first I was surprised how many had never heard of wassail... [a traditional hot drink that is made with apple cider, spices, sugar, and traditionally... some alcohol...served traditionally on Christmas Eve...a few years ago we introduced "*Baptist Wassail*" eliminating that last ingredient...

Baptist of course...whether it is true or not... is known and even joked about in some circles... especially you Lutherans out there... for not drinking, smoking, dancing and playing cards...in fact... I was raised under those "laws"... I always found it fascinating that my parents would never think of playing "cards"...the devil's entertainment! ...but they would play "*Rook*"...

Did you know that Rook cards became known as "Christian Cards" or "Missionary Cards"... if you didn't know what wassail is, you probably don't know what rook is!...it's a card game]

This year... flippantly I posted a sign next to the "Baptist Wassail" sign on the wassail table "***No Dancing***"... my guess is that dancing would have never crossed the minds of anyone that was at that service.... Had I not put the sign on the table!...THE LAW.

But more than a few broke out dancing in our narthex!!! I even saw Bud and Donna doing some sort of jig....our narthex looked like a scene from *American Bandstand*!...{if you didn't know what Wassail and Rook are... you won't know what American Bandstand was}..... **For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law.**

This morning as you may have sensed... I'm going to keep it fairly light...we are in-between the celebration of our Lord's birth and making resolutions for the next year...maybe we're ready for something lighter... many have wondered through the years what happened after Christmas... after Jesus was born...

The Bible doesn't spend much time on baby Jesus and his childhood... Only the gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us anything specific about the birth of Jesus and anything about what happened after His birth...

Mark doesn't begin his gospel until Jesus is Baptized thirty years later... John gives us that wonderful theological opening passage about God coming to earth in the flesh...**In the beginning was the Word**...but also begins with the ministry of the adult John the Baptist...

But Matthew and Luke give us a blip of what went on after the birth of Jesus... Matthew tells us the new family... Mary, Joseph and Jesus having to flee Herod's regime in Jerusalem.... Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to have the eight-day-old Jesus circumcised.... where they met Simeon who blessed them after saying the famous line: '**Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation.**'

In Luke...Jesus '**will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High**'. The shepherds are told a '**Savior *has been* born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord**'.

Matthew has his full attention on presenting to us Jesus as king....Matthew began by presenting to us the credentials of the King... showing us that Jesus was born of the seed of Abraham and the line of David.... The royal line...fulfilling the prophecies in the Old Testament... that long genealogy in Matthew 1 is there as a legal record.... As historical proof that Jesus did indeed come from the prophesied and promised royal line of David...

The king of Israel... the King of Kings... over an eternal kingdom.... A kingdom that has begun and will go on forever and ever!... we look at that genealogy as proof... proof that what the Bible had promised hundreds of years prior... came to fruition exactly as promised....

Matthew continues his Christmas story continually adding to the validity of God's word... the verification that Jesus is the one promised by the prophets 5, 6, 700 years before He was born... the true Messiah.... The Christ...The ultimate true King... the Anointed One from God...

This morning I want to take us through the first 12 or so verses in chapter 2 of Matthew's gospel...because Matthew lets us see a little of what happened after His birth... **Now after Jesus was born...**

Every year as long as I can remember...In our house at least one nativity scene would be assembled and placed either under a Christmas tree or on the hearth... As a young boy the nativity scenes were enchanting... I would help my mom unpack the nativity scene... the creche... each year... a barn-like stable...a cradle, a baby, a woman dressed in a blue robe...a

young man with a panic look on his face..... two sheep... we had a cow I don't think other creches have cows...

An angel in the background... a few shepherds A brilliant star was glued to the peak of the stable roof...

Really magnificent if you think about it... a visual beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.... Then....There were three figures that were steeped in mystery and intrigue... just outside of the creche were three colorful majestic figures I knew as kings....sitting on camels... with Christmas packages in their arms.

We just sang about them....

*We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star...*

Chapter two reveals something..... *that is...* we really don't know much about these guys... in fact... **what we know about these guys is more than the Bible tells us!**... *we* know that there are **three** kings... the Bible doesn't know that!

We know that they are kings.... The Bible doesn't say that.... My Bible says they are "magi"... my mom called them "wise men".... Some people know so much more than the Bible does about these guys that they even know their names!

Balthasar [Bal-thuh-zar]... Melchior [Mel-key-ore] and Gaspar.... Or Casper... some even know that Balthasar was a king from Arabia... or Ethiopia....Melchior was a king from Persia.... Gaspar a king from India.... And some even think they are in possession of their bones.....

If you visit the Cologne Cathedral in Germany... a large gold...gilded and decorated triple sarcophagus placed above and behind the high altar is claimed to contain the bones of these three kings...you can go visit them!...but... [the bones have been dated through science more recently] from the 5th century making all this a bit difficult...

What Mathew also shows us...is that our nativity scenes are not completely accurate representations of the complete Christmas story as detailed in Matthew and Luke...I certainly do not want to deflate any merry you got this season by telling you that our nativity scenes are wrong!... but I would like for us to consider these magi from the east with what we do know...

I think we look at the Christmas story... the creche as it must have had a schedule of events.... The baby Jesus is born in the morning... Mary and Joseph stand there looking at Him for a few hours never moving... ... the angel shows up at noon... the shepherds arrive at 8:00 after they had a visit from the angel of the Lord... and I think we can conclude the dark sky was illuminated by God's glory....

And in that they had to travel from afar.... The three kings show up at 12:00pm midnight? Maybe?..... In their beautiful robes carrying magnificent gifts for the baby.... All ready for a group picture that will be the standard for every creche for centuries to come....everybody makes it to the birth.

As I said...the fact is... we really don't know that much...pretty sure the wise men never saw the stable...the newborn baby.... So what do we know?... what can we put together to understand this great happening in human history?.... let's go through it...

verse 1... **Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea... this is the next of the fulfilled prophecies in Matthew after the virgin birth...**the king would be born in Bethlehem.... Who prophesied it?.... one of the minor prophets Micah who lived about 750 years before Jesus was born... considered a minor prophet not because his prophesy was of minor importance but because his book was short... just 5 pages in my Bible...

Micah had a message of judgement given to him by God to be delivered to the people of Israel...specifically to the leaders of Israel... His is a message of impending doom and destruction due to God's people consistently and constantly pursuing evil...most of the prophets of the Old Testament had a similar message...

After king Solomon...Israel splits into two kingdoms... the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom... both kingdoms constantly strayed from God... Micah is pronouncing judgement on both...attacking specifically the corrupt leaders of both kingdoms....

Listen to a couple of verses from Micah.

Micah 2:1-3

Woe to Oppressors...woe to the leaders who are oppressing God's people....

**2 Woe to those who devise wrongdoing,
Who practice evil on their beds!
When morning comes, they do it,
Because it is in the power of their hands.
2 They covet fields, so they seize them;
And houses, so they take them.
They exploit a man and his house,
A person and his inheritance.**

3 Therefore this is what the Lord says:

**"Behold, I am planning against this family a catastrophe
From which you cannot remove your necks;
And you will not walk haughtily,
For it will be an evil time.**

These are very powerful people who can spend all their time doing what they want... what they please... they have all this free time... so what do they do with it?... they sit around and plan evil schemes...

Some very graphic pictures are painted in chapter three which are not suitable for Christmas... but the chapter concludes... **Therefore on account of you (pathetic rulers) Zion will be plowed as a field... Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins...**

And it was... just a couple hundred years later by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC... so that's the context of Micah.... But there is eventual good news...even though God carries out His judgement on His people... Micah reveals in his prophesy a time in the future where there will be a great peace.... It is found in chapter 5:2...

Micah 5:2

2 But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Bethlehem this little insignificant backwater town whose name means “house of bread” because it is in the middle of a wheat producing region... Ephrathah which means “fruitful”... many vineyards were in the region...

The only really significance of Bethlehem Ephrathah was that it was the town where David... 1000 years earlier was born.... Insignificant town otherwise...

Too little to be among the clans of Judah,

From you One will come forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.

His times of coming forth are from long ago, descendent of David?... that long ago?....

YES!.... but even further back...

From the days of eternity.”

In the future will come a leader...a leader who will lead for God...a leader who is just... a leader who is from eternity!...A King!...YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED HERE!...not only does Matthew connect the birthplace and lineage of David to Jesus!...just as it was foretold 700 years before!....He connects this king to God Himself!

We go back to Mathew 2...

So... what about these three kings?

Matthew 2:1-2

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem...fulfilling Micah's prophesy... of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

That kind of just flows right on by us... we've sung the song every Christmas... they're the subject of our Christmas cards... but think about it...

Mathew doesn't tell us anything about these guys really... we know they came from the east... we know they came looking for the new king of the Jews... the birth was marked by a special star... and eventually they follow the star to find Jesus...

We don't know when this happened... we don't know how many...the only reason people think there were three is because there are listed three gifts... we don't know their names... we don't know exactly where they came from we definitely don't know how they even heard about this birth!...we don't even know why they would go looking for this newborn baby king...

We **do know** it would have been very, very unusual for magi from the East to travel to Judea... Bethlehem....

That would be like traveling from San Francisco to Troy... why would you do that as a Magi?
...But

We do know some things about magi in general...We do know that the Magi were in Babylon as well as some other far eastern places...They probably began in the Medo-Persian region eventually ending up in Babylon...think about this... Babylon was about 800 miles from Jerusalem... so if these magi in Mathew were from Babylon, which is highly likely... that is no short trip....

They have a history going possibly as far back as the days of Abraham... originally magi was a name of a tribe... they were a very advanced tribe in the ancient world... they were very educated for their day...they were the intellectuals of the day...

They were gentiles.... Non-Jews... but their religion had many similarities to the Jewish faith...

They believed in only one god...mono-theist... they were very religious...devout... they had priests... they offered sacrifices to their god...they believed in angels...they even believed that the world was an evil place in need of a savior and that one would come eventually....

When we think of the word magi we *conjure* up the idea that they were magicians (no pun intended)...the word magician comes from the word magi....but they weren't really magicians... they were more like scientists of the day.... astrologer/astronomers.... They were the intellectuals of the day... they were the science of the day... and the science of the day was a blend of the spiritual... with the physical...They represented the known wisdom of that day...

[Take away from that?.... wisdom of any day will change!...put your faith in science?....but God doesn't change nor does His gospel of Jesus Christ!.]

They were the intellectual authorities on science, agriculture, mathematics, history and the occult... the most prominent and powerful group of advisors in the Babylonian empire... probably where they later earned the description as "wise men".

Historians tell us that because of their vast knowledge... that no Persian was ever able to become king without first mastering the scientific and religious disciplines of the magi.... In fact... no one could become king without the approval of the magi....

Isn't that interesting in light of the birth of Jesus!... the magi were king “**verifiers**” and they did exactly that!

This is not just in history books this is in the Bible.... In the book of Daniel we see that the magi were the highest-ranking officials in Babylon during the time of Daniel... if you remember... Daniel was able to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams... which no one else in the court seers were able to do... **WHO WERE THE COURT SEERS?** The court seers being magi....

Because of that... Daniel was placed over all the wisemen of Babylon... Daniel 2:48 **Daniel was appointed as ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wisemen of Babylon....** The magi!

The magi highly respected Daniel... **the reason this is so important** is that it is most likely through Daniel that the Magi knew so much about the God of the Jews... the true God... Daniel actually became *prime minister*, and for over 60 years he had a prime minister role in the Middle East that transcended several of those empires during the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians, he was there.

Daniel being a prophet of God, exposed the magi to the truth about the coming great King Messiah. He wrote a lot about Messiah in his prophecy, including the time that Messiah would come... Even details that in chapter 9, something of the character of Messiah, something of the accomplishments of Messiah; Daniel laid that all out....and the magi of the day soaked it all up!

It was possible if not likely that it was through the teachings of Daniel that the Magi learned about this coming of a glorious king... that there would be a sign in the sky that they should keep an eye out for...and they were waiting for it and it came!

A good description of the Magi might be that they were “*sky watchers*” for that is what they did... their science and religion culminated in signs in the heavens... so they watched the sky... interesting that ancient historians recorded an “**odd conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn**” around the time Jesus was born... and the “astrologers”... Magi went crazy over it!... they were sky watchers and they linked important events to strange sightings in space....

Read Matthew verses 1-2

There's Herod... we should say something about Herod... Herod **considered himself** King of the Jews... not short of modesty... Herod called himself **Herod the Great**...Herod considered himself King of the Jews... a position given to him by Rome...but Herod wasn't a jew...far from being a jew... he was an Edomite...

If you go back to the story of Jacob and Esau... Both Jacob and Esau were considered as **fathers of nations**. God changed Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:28), and he became the father of the 12 tribes of Israel.... Esau's descendants were the Edomites (Genesis 36). Edom was a nation that plagued Israel in later years and was finally judged by God (Obadiah 1:1-21).

Herod was an Edomite... not exactly a friend of the Jews!... He was a great builder, and this is probably what history will know most about him... He built a theater in Jerusalem... he built what's called an amphitheater or a hippodrome... which is a racetrack, outside of Jerusalem....

He built a magnificent palace for himself... the Herodian Palace... And in 19 B.C. he began to build the temple, not because he was honoring God, but because he was a builder, and it was going to be an honor to him. Not God...it was all overlaid with gold by the time we see it appear during the time of our Lord's ministry.

He started building the temple in 19 B.C.;... 50 years later it wasn't finished. He spent his whole life building it, adding to it, embellishing it for his own reputation's sake..... **He built one of the most magnificent port cities in the Ancient World, the city of Caesarea**, and named it after Caesar. (My favorite place in Israel)

But Herod considers himself the Jewish King.....but I think he was a bit insecure in his kingship... as we will see....

These magi... by the way... they didn't travel in threes!... we don't know how many there were....likely many.... But for sure the entourage could have been in the several hundreds.... Maybe a thousand... they would have taken with them an army for protection....

they would have been accompanied by animals and animal keepers, and servants, and all kinds of cooks...

And travelling 800 miles probably on camels they weren't wearing beautiful women's robes!... they arrive in Jerusalem and they ask around **where is this king of the Jews?... for we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him....**

A star... again... Matthew doesn't give us any details about the star... so we don't want to add to scripture... so many have... but something that makes sense... if you go to Luke chapter 2:9 the shepherds are out in the field... the angel comes and Luke says **and the glory of the Lord stood around them...** you may have heard the term Shekinah glory as in the Shekinah glory of God... The word shekinah does not appear in the Bible, but the concept clearly does....

The Jewish rabbis coined this extra-biblical expression, a form of a Hebrew word that literally means "*he caused to dwell*," signifying that it was a divine visitation of the presence or dwelling of the Lord God on this earth...a link to the temple... for that is where God dwells.... It is associated with the bright, bright brilliance of God's glory when He shows up here on earth....

The Hebrew word that describes this is *kowkab*...(Ko-Kawb)...it is used to describe this amazing brilliance of God's Shekinah glory.... Ko-kawb literally means "star"...In Numbers 24:17 it says **There shall come a ko-kawb, a shining out of Jacob...a scepter shall rise out of Israel....** Jesus Christ is THAT ko-Kawb!

I think that is what we have here in Matthew 2..... His star... His ko-kawb... it was HIS star... no other star... HIS star... **for we saw HIS star in the east and have come to worship Him....**See why they came?.... They came to worship Jesus!

Read verse 3

See... I told you Herod was a bit insecure!... there were a lot of reasons why Herod was troubled... we won't go into them but let's just say his politics had gotten in the way of Judea's

relationship with the far east... and to have this huge entourage of far easterners show up was not good news for Herod....

And these guys show up wanting to see the newborn **King of the Jews**.... Herod was sure HE WAS the King of the Jews!... it says that all Jerusalem **was troubled with him**... of course they were... if their king isn't happy.. they won't be happy!... they weren't worried about the magi as Herod was.... They are worried at what ruthless Herod's reaction and actions will be because of the threat of the magi to his throne!

So... **Read verse 4**

Herod asks the people... the chief priests... and scribes... where is this Messiah to be born?....

verse 5: **They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For from you will come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"**

The fulfilled prophesy from Micah 5:2

Herod knew the prophesy... He knew that the Jews had been waiting for their coming Messiah... **the real threat to Herod was not the Magi.... It was this new born baby!...** so he launches a plot...

Read verse 7

If you can determine the exact time the star appeared... you could determine the age of the child who was born...

Read verse 8

Riiiiiiight!.... worship Him indeed.... We know that was balloooey.... Because of what Herod does do... later in verse 16 it says

16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, because the magi did not go back to Herod and report anything... in verse 12 we learn that they had been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod... **he became very enraged, and sent men and killed all the boys who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.**

He's not interested in worshipping Jesus... He wants to kill Him!... by the way.. this gives us a clue as to when the magi visited the young Jesus... not at 12:00 midnight the day of His birth!.... probably closer to two years after His birth (above).

Read verses 9-10

Another reason why this isn't your day variety star is that it moves and ends up sitting right over where Jesus is....more support for ko-kawb..... God's glory!... This is so wonderful. **"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."** Many think that is the verse of the Christmas carol!..... **"Joy to the world, the Lord has come."**

That's the sentiment of the magi, not Israel, not the leaders of Israel, not the people of Jerusalem....it is the response of the Gentile magi. ...This is true worship.... when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy...

True worshipers should be marked by joy.... This should be the theme of our entire life!... It'll be the theme of heaven.... If any one thing marks heaven... joy is it – joy, joy, joy, joy, joy. It should mark us here, because our Redeemer has come and saved us from our sins, and is making a place for us in the glory of His eternal heaven – joy, joy, joy.

..Notice...the star doesn't rest above a stable where a manger contains a newborn baby?

Read verse 11

They were no longer in a stable... they were in a house... with... most likely an infant Jesus... somewhere near two years old!...

Read verse 12

They worshipped Him.... Not *them*.... Not Mary... Not Joseph... **But HIM...** Jesus Christ. They worshipped Him.... And notice... a part of worship is offering gifts... part of our worship is giving of our gifts....

Gold—the most precious of metals.. represents royalty... nobility

Frankincense—a most costly beautiful smelling incense used only for the most special of occasions... like the coronation of a king....

Myrrh—interesting... not as valuable as Frankincense...it was considered a humble perfume... some suggest Myrrh represents the humbleness of Jesus.... His humanity alongside His deity...Myrrh was also one of the ingredients of embalming chemicals they put together to preserve dead bodies for burial...

Myrrh would help with the odor... some make a link with Myrrh and the prophesied death of this new baby king... who would go to the cross.... Through the giving of His life... pay the perfect sacrifice for our sins...

An interesting story!... it really is a joyful story...it confirms prophesy...it shows this birth of Jesus is a true story... it identifies who Jesus Christ was and is...it points us all to the great hope we have in God who came to earth as a real human baby boy... light to darkness...dispelling fear and giving true joy...

Everywhere I look I see fear in people... I sense a hopelessness in people ...joy-less-ness... it is not difficult to point out all that is wrong with and going wrong with the world...

If you cut the reality of the Christmas story from life... it indeed is all truly hopeless.... Are you tired of all the bad news?.... are you tired of talking about the same stuff everyday...

listen to this... your thoughts... **where you place your minds have a huge impact of how you will see the world**... if all you listen to... watch is negative news... if all you feed on is the bad news and the plethora of negativity the world keeps pumping out...then you will be full of hopelessness, fear, worry and sadness... your joy will turn to sorrow....

Joy, hope....and life came down from heaven 2000 years ago...

John 16:20 Jesus talking to His disciples about His leaving them and going to the cross....

Truly, truly I say to you that you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy!