

Standing in Awe of a Sovereign Savior

Matthew 2:1-12

Intro: The Danger of Boredom

[Taking a break from Genesis. Advent sermon today.

Guest Preacher next week. New Year's sermon Jan 4]

What comes to mind when you consider what is most harmful and dangerous thing to your walk with Christ? Maybe it's the lure of serious sins like pornography or greed or materialism. Maybe it's getting into the wrong crowd and being tempted to partake in their sin. Maybe it's the persuasive sounding arguments of atheism or other beliefs that try to debunk the truth claims of Christianity.

All of these can be serious dangers to your soul, but I wanna throw out another that we often overlook. One of the greatest dangers to your soul is: *boredom*, apathy towards God. When you get bored with God, you end up committing grievous sin because the glory of God no longer captivates your heart. You minimize sins that once bothered you. You get cynical towards people/church. You stop serving the Lord joyfully. You run from one

thing to the next looking for satisfaction. You get lured by persuasive sounding arguments claiming to debunk the Bible because when you lose sight of the *beauty* of the gospel, Christianity gets reduced to a set of intellectual propositions to be argued.

So my plea for you in is this sermon is simple: *Don't lose your awe.* Christmas ought to be a time of renewing our awe of the Lord. What we are celebrating is truly AWESOME. The one true eternal God who created all things willingly clothed himself in humble flesh and was born into this sin-cursed world to take care of our greatest need because he loves us that much. Christmas is truly AWESOME.

Matthew 2:1-12 helps us renew our awe with three AWESOME realities about Christmas.

Awesome Reality #1: God Sovereignly Draws All Peoples to Christ. Don't lose your awe of that. Look how awesome his drawing of these Magi is. [v1] “Wise men,” or “magi,” refers to men who were like astrologers, students of the stars.

They came from east, which means, they're Gentiles, not part of the covenant people of God. And yet, they come to Jerusalem after Jesus is born. Why? **[v2a]** Don't miss how they refer to Jesus. The one "BORN king of the Jews," NOT the one "born TO BECOME king of the Jews." They somehow know that Jesus was born AS the king.

These pagan Gentile astrologers travelled from a distant land (some think Babylon or Persia, which means they could've travelled up to 1200 miles, which would've taken several months, possibly even up to a year). And they come to a small nation called Israel to find, whom they believe to be, the king of this insignificant people. Why would they go to such great lengths to find Jesus? **[v2b]**

This is very odd. They see a star, and from that sight, they draw the conclusion that the king of the Jews was born, and (presumably) this star led them to Jerusalem. (I say that because it seems this same star later leads them to the house in Bethlehem where Jesus was.) What's going on here? What's this star?

Many explanations have been given over the years: a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, an explosion of a supernova, a comet. People have labored for centuries to figure what this star was. *I remember as a younger Christian I would get so wrapped up in stuff like this. I listened to a 2-hour debate on the identity of this star. And I walked away from that debate totally unsatisfied. My curious craving for conclusive knowledge overwhelmed me!*

*And then, I came across a sermon clip from John Piper, a pastor and theologian whom I respect. The sermon clip was entitled: “The Message of the Magi’s Star.” And I thought: “Finally, I’m gonna this out!” Here’s how his sermon clip opens. He said, “**I don’t have a clue how this star worked.**” And I thought, “Great. Thanks for nothing.” He continued, “**It is absolutely baffling to me. I read an article last night with four scientific explanations of how the star might have worked... I [still] haven’t a clue how it happened and it is a non-point.**” That struck me. It’s a non-point. In other words, that 2 hours of listening to that debate was a waste.*

Why? He continues, “I am stressing this because there is a mentality in the church that some people have which I call a mentality for the marginal. These folks...have always got a new tape for you to listen to or an article...or a book to read about some absolutely marginal issue. How did the manna get there? Where did the quail come from? What kind of special winds were blowing about 2,300 years ago to split the Red Sea? How does a man live in a fish’s belly? How does the sun stop in the sky without everybody flying off without any gravity?” *He continues...*

“As I have met a few people like that, the sad thing is they seldom have a capacity for deep joy in central truths. The holiness of God, the glory of Christ, the horror and ugliness of sin, the deadness and barrenness or fallenness of human nature, the beauty of the crucifixion, the wonder of justification by faith alone, the precious work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying through the Word of God, the second coming, ...the judgment of the [living] and the dead, eternal bliss at God’s right hand — if you try to get into a conversation with these people

about these things, nothing. Just go back to the margin and talk about the [star of the magi]. It is sad. It is dangerous...So, if you tend to be like that,...the solution is...to meditate on the cross, to meditate on God.”

And here’s what Piper concludes: “This star, comet, planet, supernova, special miraculous light — whatever — are not doing the stuff of their own accord. God is doing this. And the reason he is doing it is to get pagans to their Savior. That is the point.” <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-message-of-the-magis-star>

Don’t lose your awe of that! God wielded the universe...he arranged the sky...exercised his power over creation as King of the stars because he knows each one by name...to make his Son, Jesus Christ, known to these pagan men from a distant land who would have perished in their sins had God not sovereignly drawn them to Christ.

Think of how this would’ve been received by the original readers of Matthew. This gospel was written to churches formed AFTER Jesus already rose from the dead; churches filled

with Gentiles who have come to embrace this Jewish Messiah! Think of how this sovereign drawing of the Magi—these Gentile men from a distant land—would've encourage the early church. “Jesus is our Messiah too! He came for us! He accepts our worship too! We are fully and completely part of his people.”

And that's true for you! Jesus accepts ALL PEOPLES who come to him in faith. **[Gospel Appeal]** God sovereignly draws all peoples—all kinds of people—to Christ. Don't lose your awe of that!

Awesome Reality #2: God Sovereignly Fulfills Prophecies about Christ. Many of you have heard this a million times and you've lost your awe of this fact: hundreds of years before Jesus was born, prophets predicted the place Jesus would be born. **[v3]** Word spread that these magi are looking for a newly born king and it reaches the ears of Herod, who was “troubled” by this news. Why? Herod the Great was obsessively suspicious of anyone whom he thought might be a threat to his reign. That's the kind of king he was.

For example, to protect his rule, he ordered the execution of many of his family members, including two of his sons and his wife! He was obsessed with recognition, such that, towards the end of his life, he feared that no one would mourn his death, so he ordered that, after his death, various nobles and respected elders be executed...to ensure the people of the land would mourn in conjunction with *his* death, even though they wouldn't mourn him. Thankfully, the order wasn't carried out.

Though he was a king over the Jews at the time of Jesus' birth, he wasn't the rightful king. He was an Edomite, from the line of Esau (remember from Genesis?), NOT from the line of Jacob (or his son Judah). But he aligned himself with Rome (the political powerhouse) so he could be king, but he was basically a puppet of Rome.

So you can see why Herod is troubled when he hears that the true king of the Jews has been born. To his ears, this means, when this baby grows up, he will seek to dethrone him. So what does Herod do?

He tries to figure out where this king was born, so he gathers the experts who would know.

[v4] The word “inquired” is a tense in Greek that implies bombarding with questions. He’s obsessed! And it says he gathered ALL chief priests and scribes to get this information. That’s about 70 guys. He’s so paranoid! He could’ve just asked one, but he must be sure.

And there’s a reason he asks the chief priests and scribes. They knew the answer because they knew the OT like the back of their hands.

[vv5-6] Now, the way the chief priests and scribes give their answer to Herod is meant to be a stark contrast to the Magi who travelled many miles eagerly to find the king. These religious leaders seem so indifferent!

One person said, “They knew their Scriptures and had no problem in answering Herod when he wanted to know where the child would be born...But did they go to greet him? Did they lift a sandal? Not at all. They knew it all, but they did nothing. *That* is the characteristic danger for clergy and scholars of any age... knowledge is no substitute for obedience.”

(Green, 68)

Those in this story who knew the Bible best were most lost. Paul Tripp gives a warning to those in ministry in this regard (but I think it has application to all of us): “Familiarity with the things of God [can] cause you to lose your awe. You've spent so much time in Scripture that the grand redemptive narrative, with its expansive wisdom, doesn't excite you anymore. You've spent so much time exegeting the atonement that you stand at the foot of the cross with little weeping and scant rejoicing. You've spent so much time discipling others that you're no longer amazed at the reality of having been chosen to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. You've spent so much time unpacking the theology of Scripture that you've forgotten the end game of personal holiness. You've spent so much time in strategic local church ministry planning that you've lost your wonder at the sovereign Planner who guides your every moment. You've spent so much time meditating on what it means to lead others in worship, but [you spend] little [time in] private [worship]. It's all become so regular and normal that it fails to move you anymore...How many of us in ministry need to cry out for rescue that our eyes would be opened once again and our hearts enthralled once again? How many of us are in need of being revived by the very grace that doesn't move us like it once did?”

<https://www.paultripp.com/articles/posts/no-longer-amazed-by-grace>

Beware of becoming like a scribe or chief priest who knows the Bible really well, but doesn't see the glory of Jesus Christ in it! Don't let your Bible reading become an exercise in filling your brain with more facts to *know ABOUT* God but leaves you devoid of truly *knowing* God. There's a big difference between *knowing about* God and *knowing* him. Those who KNOW him stand in awe of him. Those who know ABOUT him...*don't*.

Have you lost your awe? Before you pick up the Bible or before you listen to a sermon, pray, "Lord, show me your glory through your Word that I may know you more." Listen, don't just wait for AWE to come. Pursue it! First confess and repent of your indifference and then plead with God to show you himself.

These religious leaders knew a lot about God and his ways, which is why they were able, without hesitation, to point Herod to Micah 5:2. That's what they quote in v6...a prophesy, written 700 years before Jesus was born, predicting the very birthplace of the Messiah. 700 years! Don't lose your awe of that!

This is proof of the meticulous, specific sovereignty of God down to the detail in fulfilling prophecy. (If you are skeptical of the Bible, let me encourage you to consider studying all the fulfilled prophecies in the Bible.) The Messiah was predicted to be born in Bethlehem. Why there?

Bethlehem was the city where David, the greatest king in Israel, was born. And the promised Messiah—the King Savior—was predicted to come through the line of David (2 Sam 7). So it makes sense that Jesus, the true Davidic king, would be born in Bethlehem.

Because God sovereignly fulfills prophecies about Christ. Don't lose your awe of that.

Awesome Reality #3: God Sovereignly Creates Worshippers of Christ. [v7]

Paranoid Herod is up to something. Why does he want to know when this star appeared to the magi? This would help him discern the age of the child (which will come into play later on when he orders the execution of all male children in Bethlehem, two and under).

So the magi, unaware of Herod's scheming, tell him when they saw the star. So Herod tries to deceitfully use them for his own wicked purposes. **[v8]** Baloney. He's lying. BUT GET THIS! The means by which God sovereignly leads these magi to Jesus is through the paranoid deception of Herod! See that? They were first led by a star and came to *Jerusalem* looking for Jesus. But Jesus is in *Bethlehem*, 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

How do they end up going to Bethlehem? Paranoid Herod gets biblical intel from unbelieving OT scholars. So *Herod* sends the magi to Bethlehem *deceitfully*, so they could bring back word of exactly where this child is in Bethlehem, so he could kill him.

That's how the magi get to Bethlehem! God sovereignly works through the paranoia and deceit of Herod...because God sovereignly seeks worshippers of Christ. **[v9]** There's that star again! How it went before them and how it guided them and how it stopped over the house where Jesus was...is all mystery! But it happened! Don't lose your awe of that!

God sovereignly led these former pagan idolaters to his Son so that they could become worshippers of him. **[v10]** That's quite the description of their emotional state. "They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." One person said it's like they are deliriously happy! (Morris, 41) They are uncontrollably happy!... because they recognize God is sovereignly leading them to the King.

Look what happens when they find him. **[v11a]** Notice, they worshipped *him*, not *them*. Don't let anyone tell you that Mary is worthy of worship. Only Jesus is worthy of worship...because HE is the King, the Messiah who came to save his people from their sins. He is God in the flesh. He alone is worthy of worship. That's why the magi worship only him AND they bring him gifts. **[v11b]**

These gifts are costly. These are gifts appropriate for a king. You know what's significant about this? It was predicted in the OT that when the Messiah comes, kings and wise men from far off lands would bring him gifts to show him honor.

Psalm 72:8-11 says, “May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust! May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!”

God sovereignly created worshippers out of these magi AND he sovereignly protected from Herod. **[v12]** Which means, they went back to their home country no longer as star worshippers, but as Son worshippers (S-O-N).

God sovereignly creates worshippers of his Son. You know that's true for you, right? You weren't led by a star to Jesus, but you were led! You didn't find him on your own! God sovereignly brought you to Christ and he sovereignly created a worshipper out of you.

Just think of where you would be if God left you to yourself. Some of you would be dead! Some of you would still be strung out on drugs. Some of you would be chasing a career

to make more and more money, and make a name for yourself. Some of you would still be a scribe or chief priest, filled with lots of knowledge *about* God because you grew up in a Christian home and learned all about the Bible but would have no love for the Lord had God not sovereignly led you to his Son and made you into a worshipper of him.

Conclusion

Have we lost our sense of awe of these things? Have we let familiarity lead us to boredom? Think of how prideful it is to get bored with Christ. You're saying you've got nothing more to learn about him...you've got everything you need to know. You're saying what you do know about him is no longer thrilling because it doesn't thrill you. Doesn't that reveal more about our own hearts' ability to be thrilled than it does about the inherent thrilling-ness of Jesus Christ?

What is stealing your awe? For Herod it was a craving for power and recognition, which are joy-killers! You gotta be seen. You gotta be recognized. You gotta be exalted by people.

That craving kills joy in Christ! Because joy in Christ is all about satisfaction in HIS exaltation, not my own! So you gotta kill that craving! Confess it, acknowledge it for the wickedness it is, and plead with God to show you the inherent awesomeness of Christ.

What is it for you? What's stealing your awe? Some of you need to consider fasting from social media. Fasting from whatever consumes you on your phone. Fasting from video games...work....crazy busy schedule...a hobby that draws your affections away from Jesus. What is competing with your awe?

Jesus Christ is truly AWESOME. Think about what we celebrate around Christmas and how AWESOME it is. The eternal God the Son, willingly and eagerly became human so that he could have a head for a crown of thorns to be shoved upon...so that he could have a back to be lashed and ripped apart...so that he could have hands/feet for nails to be driven through... so that he could have a body that could be hung on a cross...so that he could die FOR YOU. That's why he became a man.

AND you do realize that he took on flesh, not only so that he could die and be buried, but also so that he could have lungs for air to come back into...and so that he could have legs to stand up from the grave...and so that he could have feet to walk out of a tomb. He became human so that he could rise *bodily* from the dead, proving he defeated your sin at the cross and giving you hope that one day, if you're trusting him, you too will rise.

Christmas is truly AWESOME. Don't lose your awe of it.