

Good morning, Fellowship! My name is Christopher Young. I'm the preaching intern here. It's great to be with you on this day after Christmas.

"So, how was it?! Did you like what you got?! (for Christmas) Were you surprised? No, another tie huh! Did he propose? Did your in-laws come into town? (are they sitting next to you) Did you get that bike, car? Nice. You weren't the only one surprised last week. I'm really not one for surprises, but I guess I don't mind them. I'm at the dry-erase board working hard at my sermon outline when my daughter delivers breaking news. "Daddy do you like her hair?" London and Madison say excitedly as they stroke their doll's hair with one of mommy's combs. "Yes, sweetie she's beautiful!" Two minutes later, "Daddy!" London exclaims. "Look at my drawing... (she describes it). Do you like it?" "Yes, sweetie it's nice." This went on, it felt like for 15 minutes. I'm growing more frustrated with each interruption. London walks in again, "Daddy!" (my mind wants to say "I don't have time for this London, cant you see I'm trying to figure out this sermon for Sunday?!") But I didn't say it. I lifted my right headphone cuff and said [firmly] yes dear! London looks me right in the eyes and said, "Daddy I accepted Jesus into my heart today." My eyes try to reprioritize focus from the board to London as my brain processes her words. (did she just say...)

What a pleasant surprise! The Lord formally introduced Himself to my daughter and she trusts in Him as her Savior. Little did I know that while I was preparing a sermon to inspire others to follow Jesus, my daughter, London (7) surprises me with the greatest gift she could ever give her Dad. How ironic that God would use a child's confession of faith to spur my sermon along.

It's a pleasant reminder of how **God often uses surprises to accomplish His purposes.** We serve a God who likes to use surprises. Hopefully, by the end of today's message you'll discover a surprise, just for you.

We're going to visit a very familiar part of God's story. So familiar, Kurt just preached it a couple weeks ago. The reason I want to look at this passage again, is because although we've all opened our surprises yesterday, there's still has one more surprise for each of us in this story, and since this is the final message of the year it's important that we know this.

Turn with me to Matthew 2:1-12. I'll read the story first and then we'll discover the three surprises in this story.

It's about 6 months to 2 years after Jesus has been born. So, it's very appropriate given our celebration of His birth on yesterday.

(NIV) After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem (the capital, and the place where a potential “king” might be expected to be found. It was only through local information that they could discover the “correct” birthplace of the son of David.¹ The magi were presumably aware of Herod’s royal position, and perhaps assuming that a birth had taken place within his family they had come to find out more.²) 2 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.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah (Hebrew form of Judea Greek), are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him (the duplicitous, deception).” 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The first surprising irony in this story is that...

The most powerful fear the powerless

1b Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born (keyword to remember) king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod, the most powerful man in Judea was troubled by a toddler. And yes Herod loved power, He was a politician who got appointed king after a successful 10-year

¹ R. T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 68.

² R. T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 68.

governorship in Galilee due to his ability to collect taxes and repress revolts. Yes Herod was ruthless. Herod had murdered his favorite wife, three of his sons, various in-laws, prominent citizens, some of their families and countless others. He needed to protect his throne. But Herod was also 70 years of age and probably wouldn't live another year because of declining health issues. He had domestic issues with his 10 wives all wanting their son(s) to succeed him. He had issues with Rome as neighboring regions were complaining about him. His reign is about to end, compounded with all these issues and yet Herod is disturbed by a 2 year old toddler king. This is the first surprising irony in the story. If anything it shows how hard Herod's heart really was toward Jesus.

Now we know in retrospect as Matthew writes this gospel that kingship only happened through bloodline or divine right and Matthew uses most of the previous chapter to establish the kingship of this baby, Jesus in a summary statement in chapter 1:17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. So Jesus' kingship is legitimate while Herod kingship is not, he being appointed by Rome. But Herod probably didn't know all of this. He wasn't that familiar with Jewish law and traditions. After all he has to ask the religious leaders for information. Yet, Herod is disturbed, unsettled, upset. The most powerful king in Jerusalem fears this powerless toddler.

Now, God uses Herod's response in legitimizing the birth of His son, Jesus being the Messiah. After all Matthew is capturing this story to prove to us that Jesus is King. God uses this surprise to accomplish that purpose.

But that isn't the only surprise in this story. Not only does the most powerful fear the powerless, the second surprise is that...

The most educated are the least responsive

Those who knew the most about this anticipated Messiah to be born in Bethlehem, they weren't the least interested or concerned with seeing Him. They simply were indifferent or unresponsive to the child born king.

4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "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

The religious leaders, most educated people in this story are the least responsive to the news. What irony! There's the second surprise. They later would be antagonists to the

gospel and crucify Jesus. But here the child born king should have been good news. After over 400 years of silence over the exiled, Israel, they should have been the first to at least go and see him.

But we see that after verse 6, there's no more mention of their response to Jesus being born. These were experts in Jewish law and religion, scholars in scripture, and yet no response.

It almost feels as I did when I proposed to my wife, Deana. Here I am with this ring that I'm afraid to leave anywhere because of how much I paid for it. I'm trying to find the right place the right time the right words. Finally mustering up the courage to do it, I leave Deana with HGTV, give some excuse on why I had to go to the car, go to the rest room to get myself together. It felt a little lame getting on my knees. But after finally saying the words, Will you marry me? She goes, "Sure." Talking about a letdown. (Now eventually she processed the news and got excited. It took a good 5 minutes) That's how these religious leaders' response feels.

It's a surprise to say the least. Yes it's surprising that the most powerful fear the powerless. Yes its surprising that the most educated are the least responsive. But that's not even the biggest surprise in this story. The most shocking surprise is that...

The least likely are given the most important role

God uses the least likely characters in this story and gives them a lead role.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed (overwhelmed/overtaken w/ joy).

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

Here we see non-Jewish, non-Israelites, this isn't supposed to be their king, pagans who are geographically the furthest away from the manger, yet they are the closest to the truth.

We aren't given much information about the magi. They were probably men who practiced astrology, dream interpretation and other forbidden arts. They were probably not kings. We don't know the number of magi. The least likely in the story that we would expect to worship the Jesus. And here they are.

The Jewish religious leaders who knew the prophesy of the Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem didn't come and worship Him. Herod who some thought to be half-Jewish he didn't come to worship him. No, pagans from the east came to worship Him.

God uses this surprise to accomplish His ultimate purpose. We know that Jesus wouldn't just be king of the Jews, He would be king of all. And here we see a foreshadowing of that truth as pagans come to worship Him. What a surprise!

God often gives the least likely person(s) one of the most important roles.

I'm reminded of one of the roughest times in my life, perhaps the roughest. I'm standing in an empty parking lot. It's close to midnight and I'm shouting at the sky. I cannot believe where my life is at this moment. I'd lost my job. Just been betrayed by my now former wife, lost my apartment because I'd lost my job and I'm in disbelief that my life had devolved to this point. I'm shouting at God, "where are you?" What now? What do you want from me? My life felt like a movie.

And out of nowhere a white car drives up to the unapproachable Chris. You all get to see the smiley Chris today, but I didn't smile back then. He pulls up on the passenger side and says, "is everything okay? I saw you from across the way and God led me to come see how you were doing. In that moment, God didn't use my family or friends. He used a man in a parking lot to encourage me. He would go on and do more than that. He helped me with a place to stay while I found a job. Thanks to this surprise, I'm here sharing God's word with you, today. I can't share my story without him.

If God can use a non-related man in a parking lot, give him a lead role at a crucial point in my life... if He can use non-Jewish pagans to be one of the first, the only to worship His son... God can use you and me, the least likely of people in someone else's story to accomplish God's purpose for them.

God is in the business of drawing people to Himself, and He often gives the least likely of people some of the most important roles.

Let's posture ourselves in expectation that God would use us in surprising ways in 2022. That he would use us to bring people to Christ at work, within our families, at the local gym, throughout our neighborhood.

That's the surprise. You may feel like least likely, but you are the person that God wants to give a major role in His story. Be willing as the magi were to be used by God in 2022, to worship Jesus our Lord.
