



#9 in the Vintage Series God with US

Forest Park Church

December 24th 2023

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It was the most anticipated event in history.

All throughout the old testament God is announcing the coming of the Messiah

His story is sprinkled in to almost every major story of the Old Testament.

In the Beginning in Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^l and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

In Gen. 9:26, Noah, by inspiration signaled Shem to be the line from which the Messiah *would come, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem!"*

Job saw into the future, to a time when his redeemer would stand upon the earth and that he (Job) would be resurrected:

Job 19:25-27

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

In Gen. 22:18, Abraham is told that his descendants will be a blessing to the world.

Jesus Turned to David's book of Psalms Psalm 110, in which David, the king of Israel makes reference to two Lords.

- In the original Hebrew of the psalm, the first "Lord" translates the Hebrew word Yahweh, God's covenant name.
- The second "Lord" translates the Hebrew word Adonai, a title usually given to Yahweh in the Old Testament.
- **There is only one answer: Jesus is both the son of David and the Son of God. Jesus is God.**

Daniel saw visions of the coming savior in Daniel 7. He recorded, *“He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all peoples, nations, and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be”*

And Isaiah and the other prophets vividly announced His coming, with prophecies so precise they demand consideration.

But what was it that came into the world that night so long ago?

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus would himself say that

John 8:32,

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”

It is the truth that sets us free, not our opinions about the truth.

Pontius Pilate and Ernest Hemingway, although separated by millennia, have much more in common than we might guess!

Pontius Pilate asked Jesus a question that resonated across the centuries:

“What is truth?” John 18:38

- Little did he know that the Truth was standing in front of him.
- Jesus himself had earlier declared,
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“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”

John 14:6

Truth is personal.

If you want to know the ultimate truth about life and death and the way to the Father, you need to know Jesus Christ.

- To know him is to know the truth.
- If you miss him, you’ve missed the ultimate truth of the universe.

Matthew 2:1-6 tells the mysterious story of the visit of the Magi to King Herod in Jerusalem.

On one level this text is a very familiar story that most of us have seen in every Christmas pageant we’ve ever attended.

- We know all about the “Three Wise Men” because we grew up singing “We Three Kings.”
- And we know they found Jesus in the stable because that’s the way it is in every pageant: shepherds on the left, baby Jesus in the middle,
- and three nervous little boys dressed up like oriental punk rockers bringing gold and two other gifts they can’t pronounce.

But the real story was probably very different.

The Bible doesn’t say there were only three Wise Men (or Magi).

- That number comes from the three gifts they brought—gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Perhaps you’ve seen the “Far Side” cartoon that shows a fourth Wise Man being turned away because he brought fruitcake as his gift.)
- And Matthew 2 makes it clear that the Magi found Jesus in a house in Bethlehem, meaning that they arrived sometime after his birth, perhaps a few days but likely a few weeks or even up to a year later.

The main purpose of our text is not to debate details.

Matthew 2 is all about truth.

It brings us face to face with how different people respond when confronted with the truth of Jesus Christ.

- Some are positive,
- some are negative,
- and some people simply aren’t interested at all.

I. Some People Seek the Truth.

The story of the visit of the Magi is found only in Matthew’s gospel. All that we know about them we find in Chapter 2.

They show up in verse 1 and disappear in verse 12, leaving behind many unanswered questions:

1. Who are they, and where did they come from?
2. How many were there?
3. What is the star they saw, and how did it lead them to Bethlehem?
4. How long after the birth of Jesus did they arrive in Jerusalem?

5. How did they know that the baby was going to be the king of the Jews?

Because of the mystery and the unanswered questions, great legends grew up about them.

Matthew 2:1-2

“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?’”

Notice that the Wise Men are called the “Magi from the East.”

“Magi” is a Persian word that refers to a particular class of priests in the Persian Empire.

- We know from other sources that the Magi had existed for hundreds of years before the time of Christ.
- They had their own religion (they are usually thought to have been followers of Zoroastrianism), their own priesthood, and their own writings.
- The book of Daniel makes it clear that they existed in his day, and it even seems that Daniel was appointed head over the cast of the Magi in the time of King Darius.

Who were the Magi? They were the professors and philosophers of their day.

They were brilliant and highly educated scholars who were trained in

- medicine,
- history,
- religion,
- prophecy
- and astronomy.

The ancients studied the skies in order to find the answers to the great questions of life—

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- Where am I going?

The important fact for us to know is that they were highly influential in Persia.

- They were in fact advisors to the king.
- Finally, they were highly educated men who thought deeply about life and consequently it is perfectly legitimate to call them “Wise Men.”

A: Looking for a Baby

It was 1,000 miles from Persia to Israel.

Why have they made such a treacherous journey?

- The answer is that they have come to see the baby born king of the Jews.
- They knew a baby had been born, but they didn’t know where.
- They knew he was a king but didn’t know his name.
- So they come to Jerusalem—the capital city—seeking help.
- They also assume that everyone must know about this baby. But a great surprise awaits them.

We know that the Jews and Persians had intermingled for at least 500 years.

- It seems that the Magi considered Daniel (who was a good Jew) as one of their own.
- Since the time of Daniel, the Persians had known of the Jewish expectation of a Messiah.
- It is possible that they even knew from the prophecy of the “70 weeks” in Daniel 9 the approximate time of his appearance. What they did not know was the exact time. When they saw the star, they knew the time had come.

Now lest that seem like mere speculation, let me put it this way: Everything we know about the Jews, the Magi, and the history of the ancient Near East makes this story very likely:

- * We know that the Jews were looking for a Messiah.
- * We know that the Magi looked to the stars for guidance.
- * We know that the Jews and the Magi had intermingled for at least 500 years.

* We know that the Magi would notice any new sign in the sky.

* Therefore, it should not surprise us that the Magi would travel to Jerusalem to greet this new Jewish king.

Most of our pictures of the Magi show three guys riding three camels across the desert. It is not likely the Magi traveled 1,000 miles across the desert by themselves.

- In those days, a large caravan was the only way you could travel in the desert.
- The Magi would have swept into Jerusalem with pomp and circumstance and covered it with 1,000 miles worth of dust.
- At a minimum, they would have brought with them a whole military escort along with their servants.
- The total party could have amounted to more than 300 men. No wonder all of Jerusalem was buzzing.

The Magi are pagans who have been drawn to Jesus. Consider how little they possibly knew.

They had seen a star, and they knew a baby called “the king of the Jews” had been born.

- And yet, with nothing more than that, they risked everything and left their homeland to find the baby, bring him gifts, and worship him.
- This is one of the most significant examples of true faith in the entire Bible.
- They didn’t know very much about Jesus, but what they knew spurred them to action.

When they got to Jerusalem, they assumed that everyone would know where the baby was. But they were in for a great surprise as they discovered that not everyone shared their desire to find Jesus.

II. Some People Fear the Truth.

The reaction of Herod is fascinating.

Matthew 2:3

“when Herod heard the news, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”

The word “disturbed” really means to “shake violently.”

It will help you understand what happened if you know that Herod the Great is very old, very sick, and very nearly dead.

- He is a dying man tottering on an unstable throne.
- He has been in power for over 40 years and has proven to be a clever and cruel man.

Like all despots, he held tightly to the reins of power and brutally removed anyone who got in his way. Over the years he killed many people:

- *His brother-in-law
- *His mother-in-law
- *His wife.

It was the murder of his wife that drove him mad.

- He killed her because he thought she was a threat to his power.
- But he never got over her.
- Even though he was only 44 when he killed her, and even though he lived to be 70, her murder was the beginning of the end.

Herod the Great was a killer. That was his nature.

- He killed out of spite and he killed to stay in power.
- Human life meant nothing to him.
- The great historian Josephus called him “barbaric,”
- another writer dubbed him “the malevolent maniac,”
- yet another named him “the great pervert.”

Perhaps his basic character can best be seen by an incident in the year 7 B.C.

- ❑ Herod is an old man now.
- ❑ He has been in power 41 years.
- ❑ He knows he doesn't have much longer to live.
- ❑ Word comes that his sons are plotting to overthrow him.
- ❑ They are sons by his late wife Mariamne.
- ❑ He orders them put to death ... by strangulation.

No wonder Caesar Augustus said, "It is safer to be Herod's sow than his son."

He had been given the title "King of the Jews" by the Roman Senate, but he was no Jew.

- ❑ By birth, he was an Idumean, a descendant of the ancient Edomites whose father was Esau.
- ❑ The Jews hated him and chafed under his brutal rule.
- ❑ The notion of a baby "born" king of the Jews was a direct threat to Herod's throne.

No wonder he tried to kill Jesus. In his eyes, he had no choice. It was kill or be killed, and now, in the twilight of his life, he is ready to kill anyone who threatens him, even a tiny, helpless baby.

Herod stands as a symbol for the kind of world Jesus entered.

John 1:11

"He came to what was his own, but his own did not receive him" .

Herod died but his spirit lives on. To this day there are those who are offended by Jesus, even by the mere mention of his name.

III. Some People Ignore the Truth.

Before Herod can get rid of the baby, he must put on a pleasant face. He has to seem interested in helping these strange visitors find the Christ child. So he turns to the scribes and priests for advice. He has only one question:

Where is this child to be born?

- The scribes don't have to look it up.
- They already know the answer.
- Seven hundred years earlier the prophet Micah had predicted the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem.
- That was common knowledge in Israel.
- Little children learned that in Sabbath School before they were six years old.
- It's hard to believe that Herod didn't know it.

If you add what the scribes knew to what the Wise Men figured out, you surely conclude that the signs of Jesus' coming were clear enough for anyone to see.

- It is sometimes said that God always speaks loud enough for a willing ear to hear.
- He certainly did that here.

A: The Magi knew and did something; the scribes knew and did nothing.

This fact is all the more shocking when you consider that the scribes were the professional students of the Torah of God, the part of the Bible we call the Old Testament.

From youth these men had spent their days reading, studying, memorizing and debating it.

- Some of them knew the first five books of the Bible by memory.
- Others had memorized the Psalms.
- Still others memorized the prophets.

- ❑ They knew every prophecy of the Messiah’s coming by heart.
- ❑ And they even knew what Rabbi so-and-so had said about this verse and what Rabbi this-and-that had said about that verse.
- ❑ And they could even quote the comments of the rabbis about what other rabbis had said.
- ❑ The scribes knew the Old Testament backwards and forwards.
- ❑ They had it down cold. It would be like gathering the theological faculty of
- ❑ Here in Jerusalem you had the finest Bible scholars in the whole world.

So when Herod asked, “Where is the Messiah going to be born?” they Knew without question:

- ❑ **Micah 5:2** said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
 whose coming forth is from of old,
 from ancient days.*

B: Six Miles from Jesus

Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem. So close that you could walk it in less than two hours.

- ❑ Today Bethlehem is like a suburb of Jerusalem.
- ❑ Back then people lived in Bethlehem and went to Jerusalem to buy and sell and to go to the Temple.
- ❑ It was an easy journey on good roads.

Six miles. And none of the scribes cared enough to go and check out the rumor that the long-awaited Messiah had been born.

- ❑ Six miles from Jesus.
- ❑ Six miles from salvation.
- ❑ Six miles from forgiveness.

- ❑ Six miles from eternal life.
- ❑ They were too busy studying the Bible to see for themselves.

Six miles isn't very far. **That's about the distance to the other side of Crowley!**

But the scribes didn't care enough to get involved. They wouldn't even go six miles.

- ❑ Come, Thou long-expected Jesus ... Only six miles.
- ❑ Born to set thy people free ... Only six miles.
- ❑ O come, all ye faithful ... Only six miles.
- ❑ O come, let us adore him ... Only six miles.

So close, yet so far. All that knowledge did them no good.

The Magi knew so little, yet traveled so far. The scribes knew so much, yet they wouldn't even venture six miles down the road.

C: Who is Worse?

The scribes represent the religiously indifferent.

- ❑ These are the insiders who know all the facts and do nothing about it.
- ❑ They don't care enough to get excited.
- ❑ When Herod asked where the baby was to be born, they knew the answer.
- ❑ They told him where to look, but didn't care enough to investigate for themselves.
- ❑ Bethlehem was only six miles from Jerusalem but even that was too far to go. It was all academic to them. "Hope you have a nice trip. If you find the Messiah, let us know."

As I read Matthew 2, one fact strikes me above all others.

Everybody involved had the same basic information.

They all knew a baby had been born in Bethlehem and they all knew who the baby was.

- Herod knew and tried to kill him;
- the scribes knew and ignored him;
- the Wise Men knew and worshipped him.

For all those who feel they are too busy to join the search for Jesus, C. S. Lewis wrote these words:

“Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”

Jesus stands at the end of life’s road for all of us. In the end there can be no middle ground.

To ignore him is the same as to hate him because you end up without him either way.

- And perhaps hatred is more noble than casual disinterest because when you hate, you at least must pay attention to the object of your hatred,
- that very attention may lead someday to a change of heart.
- To ignore Jesus altogether means to live as if he doesn’t matter at all.

But no one can ignore him forever. We all have an appointment with Christ sooner or later.

IV. What will you do with Jesus?

- Some hate him.
- Some ignore him.
- Some seek him.

The ultimate question is not how someone else responds but how you respond to Jesus. That's really the only thing that matters. Are you with Herod or with the scribes or with the Wise Men? Are you hostile to Jesus? Are you too busy to get involved? Are you coming to worship him as Savior and Lord?

Conclusion:

We are told that the average American will spend \$920 on Christmas gifts this year. Why? To demonstrate their love for someone else?

- Truth be told, some of those gifts were probably purchased out of obligation.
- How many of us have an Aunt Mabel that we forget to buy something for, only to have to grab something last minute, because we don't want to show up empty-handed?

God's gift to us didn't come out of obligation, but out of love, with no expectation of repayment. God has provided the gift of grace to your life through Jesus Christ. You cannot and should not repay him for this gift. Your service in life is just a thank-you note to Him.