

Matthew 2: v. 1-12 - "Fools & Wise Men "

Read Matthew 2: v. 1-12.

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. ⁴ And when he 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.'" 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." 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. ¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Introduction

Last week from Matthew chapter 1: v. 18-25 we discovered a number of things about the Virgin Birth.

We discovered that the most important thing about Christmas is not KFC or Christmas cakes or presents but the "Virgin Birth". By that I mean God leaving the Glory of Heaven and coming to this earth in the form of a tiny seed. This was implanted into the womb of a virgin called Mary, the seed grew in the normal way and became a baby.

Mary had a sinful nature just like everybody else who is born into this world. If Joseph was the real Father then Jesus could not be the sinless Son of God. However Joseph was not the Father of Mary's baby. It was a miracle performed by the Holy Spirit.

We discovered the purpose of the virgin birth was to bring a saviour into the world to rescue men and women from their sins. We are all born into this world with a sinful nature because the first man Adam, disobeyed God, and because of that, sin and death entered the world. (Romans 5: v. 12)

None of us are going to live forever and all of us are condemned to receive God's wrath for our sins. (Romans 5: v. 17-18) Therefore we need someone to rescue us from the punishment of our sins. Jesus was God's rescue mission from Heaven. It was a great act of humility on the part of God.

We also discovered that this event was prophesied over 750 years before it happened. (Isaiah 7: v. 14) God had planned this event well in advance. In fact in Genesis chapter 3 after Adam sinned God promised to send a saviour.

We also learnt that we must trust in God's word, like Joseph trusted in the words from the Angel Gabriel concerning Jesus. We will not have any real JOY this Christmas unless we believe that Jesus is our own

personal saviour and that He came to rescue us personally from God's wrath, by dying on a cross for our sins and being raised from the dead.

We now move on in the Christmas story as told by Matthew. (Matt. 2: v. 1-12)

In the passage that we read there are two very clear points that we need to draw out.

These are the Anger and deception of Herod and the Adoration and gift giving of the Magi.

As we only have 20 minutes this morning I'll do my best to pack in as much as I can, without leaving out the important applications for our lives this Christmas.

1. The Anger and deception of Herod. V. 1-8.

First of all we need to know something about this King Herod and why he was angry. It will also help us to understand why people get so angry about Jesus and the Christian Gospel today.

This Herod, known as Herod the "GREAT" is the first of several Herods that are mentioned in the New Testament.

Originally he was appointed in charge of Galilee, by Julius Caesar's Father.

While he was in that office he was successful in quelling the Jewish guerrilla bands who continued to fight against their foreign rulers.

However when the Parthians invaded Israel, Herod went back to Rome.

This was about 40 B.C.

He was declared by the Roman senate to be "King of the Jews"

He invaded Israel the next year and drove out the Parthians after several years of fighting. (He was very popular for a while)

He then established his Kingdom in Israel.

Because Herod was not Jewish, but an Edomite, he married "Marianne", who was an Heiress to the Jewish "Hasmonean House"

Herod did this to make himself more acceptable to the Jewish People that he now ruled.

Herod was a very clever and capable warrior, orator and diplomat.

On the one hand he had some good points, during economic hardship he gave back money to the people as a sort of tax rebate, he began the reconstruction of the temple and provided places for recreation etc.

He even built the fortress of Masada. I visited it when I went to Israel, it is an amazing place.

However on the other hand Herod was cruel and merciless.

He was incredibly jealous, suspicious, and afraid for his position and power.

He had his wife's brother drowned, he had his wife killed, and three of his sons were killed by his authority.

He was not a nice man, his final barbaric act was to have all the male children who were in Bethlehem from 2 years old and under killed.

Herod was Angry when the Magi rode into town because of v. 2

Matthew 2:2

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."

Herod feared that he would lose his power and authority and there would be another King of the Jews raised up in his place.

He was very crafty in trying to deal with the situation.

Matthew 2:8

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."

However God had the final say in v. 12

Matthew 2:12

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Herod tried a deception that didn't work because God knew his heart.

Truth & Application

Herod got angry when his position was threatened. He didn't want Jesus to be the King of the Jews because He was the King of the Jews.

It is the same today when people are challenged about Jesus and putting Him as the King of their lives, trusting Him for Salvation and submitting to the authority of the Bible, God's word.

Today the media and the society tell us that we can live our own lives how we like.

We are told we can set our own standards. If we want to be GAY then that is OK.

If we want to disobey the Bible and God's word that is O.K.

We are told that there is no moral right or wrong, it is what suits you.

We are told that there is no creator of the world, and that there is nobody we are accountable to upon our death. We are told that there is no Heaven and no HELL.

So when people are faced with the challenge of the claims of Jesus, they naturally get angry.

There are usually two reactions to the message of Jesus when the Holy Spirit is working with power.

People either get angry or they become interested.

I hope that this Christmas you will not get angry but you will become interested in discovering more about Jesus.

2. The Adoration and the gifts from the Magi v. 9-12.

Q. Who were the Magi? The story of the Magi is well known, but it has been corrupted over the years. I want to try and un-corrupt it, give you some historical facts which come out of the Biblical references for these people.

The only legitimate facts we know about these Magi are the ones given to us by Matthew. We are NOT told their number, it was unlikely that there were only three, most people at that time travelled in small convoys for protection.

There was probably a group of about 30 people, including guards and servants.

We are not told their names or their means of transportation.

We are not told the specific country they came from.

However we are told that they came from the EAST.

They lived to the EAST of Israel

However what we do know about the MAGI is that they first appeared in the 7th century B.C. as a tribe within the Median Nation.

The name became associated with the priesthood within that tribe.

The Magi became skilled in Astronomy and Astrology.

Astronomy is the scientific study of the stars and planets.

However Astrology is an art or practice of determining the supposed influences of the planets and their motions on human affairs.

Today we find these people getting centre stage in women's magazines, newspapers and in Japan you find them sometimes in shopping malls.

These people had a sacrificial system that was similar to the one God gave Moses.

They were involved in various occult practices, and they were especially noted for their ability to interpret dreams.

We learn from the book of Daniel that the Magi were amongst the highest ranking officials in Babylon.

Because God gave Daniel the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and none of the Magi were able to interpret his dream, Daniel was appointed over the whole nation and over the WISE Men. (Daniel Chapter 2)

So these highly regarded men, qualified in Astronomy, travelled hundreds of miles from the East, because they had seen a new star that had not previously been recorded.

God had created something that looked like a star, which was visible to these astrologers, but because it was visible right over the house it wasn't a star as we know today, millions of miles into space. It was different and miraculous.

There is also no evidence that it continued to shine, the wise men had to come into Jerusalem and ask where the King of the Jews was to be born.

When the scribes were consulted and they discovered where the Christ was to be born, then the star re-appeared and they were guided to the place where Jesus was. (v. 9)

God wanted the wise men to be guided to the place and Not Herod.

Joseph and Mary and Jesus were no longer in the stable but in a rented house.

In v. 11 it clearly tells us that when the wise men came into the house, they fell down and worshipped Jesus. They worshipped Jesus, the baby, not Mary the mother.

"John Macarthur says in his commentary that Right Worship is always, and must be, the only basis for right giving, right learning, and right service."

Giving that is generous but done apart from a loving relationship with God is empty giving.

Learning that is orthodox and biblical, but is learnt apart from knowing and depending on the source of truth, that is God Himself, is empty knowledge.

The chief priests and scribes were giving a service to God that was demanding and sacrificial, but done in the power of the flesh and for the praise of men.

This is empty service. You must know God, personally through Jesus, if you want to give, learn and serve.

So what about the gifts of the Magi?

1. Gold - The Gift fit for a KING.

The Saviour of the world is also the true king of the world.

He will not be SAVIOUR, to those who do not accept Him as King and Lord over their lives.

Is Jesus your Saviour King this Christmas, or is he just like a lucky charm, someone to bring you health, wealth and prosperity?

Gold is also the most precious metal and was a practical gift which was going to provide the finance needed when the family had to escape to Egypt.

2. Frankincense - The Gift fit for a Priest

It was a most beautiful smelly incense. It would make the most expensive perfume seem second rate. At Christmas in England lots of men buy perfume for their wives and girlfriends. The best perfume is very expensive.

Last Christmas I bought Wendy some expensive French perfume. I noticed this week that she has only used about 10% of the bottle, so I am O.K. for the next 9 years. Although it is lovely perfume, it is not as good as frankincense.

Frankincense was used in the Tabernacle and Temple, and in Royal Processions, it has been called the incense of DIETY, mainly used by the Priests.

The priest in the Old Testament was the go-between (intermediaries) between man and God. Jesus was the baby born to bring mankind back to God.

In Hebrews 2: v. 17 and 4: v. 14-15 Jesus is described as a high priest to illustrate to the Jewish people about His role in providing access to God.

Frankincense was the perfect gift for Jesus.

3. Myrrh – The gift for the DEAD.

This was also a perfume but not so expensive. It is mentioned quite a lot in scripture. Mixed with wine it was used as an anaesthetic (Mark 15:23)

Used with other spices it was used for the preparation of bodies for burial, we see that in John 19:39.

This may seem a strange gift to give a baby at his birth. Why this gift?

I don't know if the Magi realized the real significance of this gift in connection with Jesus but we do and it needs to be connected here with Him.

Jesus was born to be a "Saviour" as we learnt last week. It was by His death that He would achieve the most miraculous thing in all the world, for all eternity. It was the perfect gift for the perfect sacrifice.

John 3: v. 16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

2 Corinthians 5: v. 21.

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The greatest gift that you can receive this Christmas is not Gold, Frankincense or Myrrh, but Jesus Christ Himself.

John 1: v. 12.

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Will you receive Him into your heart this Christmas?