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Have you ever gone on a treasure hunt? Maybe as a child you set off into the woods with a hand-made treasure map for a day's adventure. Maybe you have actually searched for a hidden cave or searched for a sunken treasure ship. Maybe your parents, when wanting you to discover your best Christmas present, made up a poem of clues to send you all around the house and even outside to try and find your present.

There was a time when my grandfather took me on a trip to the desert in Arizona to look for a special kind of mineral. My grandfather lived in Indiana in the summer but would "winter" down in Arizona. He was what you called a "rockhound" and collected various stones and gems.

On this trip I did not know what I was going to be looking for until we actually went out in the desert, about 40 miles West of Phoenix. We wandered around for a little bit, and he found one! It was called rose agate and it was a small little stone about 1/2 of an inch across (a little more than a centimeter). It was pinkish white and smooth and circular and shaped like a little rose.

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Soon I started in the hunt, and we were able to find maybe 25 of them scattered around the desert floor. My grandfather also gave me some other rocks and I started a little rock collection of my own.

I mention this because it is just a little example of what happens in our reading for today from Matthew chapter 2. There are some guys that had to travel a long way to look for something very valuable, not knowing what they were going to find.

Let's read the passage from Matthew chapter 2. I will read the whole chapter.

## READING

Matthew 2:1–23 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>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,

<sup>2</sup>saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

<sup>4</sup>and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

<sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>“ ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

<sup>8</sup>And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup>After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

<sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

<sup>11</sup>And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup>And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

<sup>13</sup>Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

<sup>14</sup>And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt

<sup>15</sup>and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

<sup>16</sup>Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

<sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup>“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

<sup>19</sup>But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

<sup>20</sup>saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”

<sup>21</sup>And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

<sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

<sup>23</sup>And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

SOME BACKGROUND

Now in most movies there is a time at the beginning when they introduce the major characters in the movie. The idea is to build an emotional bond with the characters and sometimes, and if they aren't tricking you, to see who the good guys are and who the bad guys are.

Last week in chapter one, we saw that Jesus had the right to rule, because he was a descendant of David and also the results of Jesus rule, that he will save the people from their sins.

This week we need to talk about the characters and the setting in the story first before we can talk about its meaning. We need to talk about the Magi, the star, King Herod, the Priests and scribes and the little town of Bethlehem.

### The Magi

The Magi are the guys that set out on an adventure, not knowing what they were going to find. There is a song, "We three Kings of Orient Are." But the Bible does not say that there were three of them or that they were Kings. Now before you start sending "hate mail," for blowing up your image of the Christmas story, hear me out. What we know is that "wise men from the east" came to Jerusalem to inquire about the birth of the Jewish King. The word in Greek is "**magos**" or Magi and they were oriental astrologers; they consulted the stars to learn the future. They were probably rich, upper crust and were counselors for Kings. They had obviously also come across some Jews because of their interest in the King of the Jews. The Jews were probably descendants of the Jews from the captivity by the Babylonians five hundred years earlier. Some Jews were allowed to return to Israel but most stayed behind. Also, the only reason people think there were three is because three types of gifts were given. There could have been a large entourage of them, perhaps hundreds, not just three guys on camels as they made a big scene when they came to Jerusalem. So, no "hate mail" please 😊.

### The Star

Then there is the matter of the star. There has been much theorizing about this. Johannes Kepler, the father of modern astronomy explained that there was a alignment of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 B.C.; maybe that was it. Others have theorized it was a comet that passed by the earth. In any case, what we know from the story is that it led them, rather indirectly to Jerusalem first, verse 2,

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<sup>2</sup> “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

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Verse 9, “And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.”<sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”

So, there was an initial appearance of the phenomenon that seem to have had gotten them started, and they came to Jerusalem. Then, once they started more specifically to Bethlehem, it appeared again and led them directly to the house. This makes some Bible scholars think that this was not an actual star, but a miracle from God to lead the wise men to Jesus; that seems to be how it reads – so I agree.

### King Herod

Let’s talk about Herod. The Magi initially did not go to Herod. But they came to Jerusalem the capital city and a likely place to find a King, and asked, verse 2,

*“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*<sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;”

From history we learn that Herod was a very suspicious ruler. He died in about 4 B.C. and so it is estimated the Jesus was born about 6 B.C. Sorry, not to be sacrilegious but someone made a mistake when calculating when the new calendar system would start BC/AD.

Herod had his favorite wife murdered, and her two sons, then murdered his son Antipater because he was bragging a bit too much about being the heir. Before his death, he planned for his men to kill thousands of the leading citizens of Israel after his death, so that there would be great mourning in the land upon his death. Fortunately, they did not carry out that last wish.

In any case, when this King is “troubled” everyone is troubled because they knew of his ruthlessness.

### The Priests and Scribes

Next is the priests and scribes. Somehow, the wise men were not able to get the answers they needed easily, but instead stirred up Jerusalem to such an extent that Herod and the priests and the scribes were troubled; but they gave the correct answer when Herod summoned them...

*<sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”*

### Bethlehem

Bethlehem is known as the city of David because his family is there. This is where Ruth met Boaz and they became the ancestors of David. David would have been a shepherd on the hills surrounding Bethlehem when Samuel, the first prophet, asked his father Jesse about all of his sons and finally came to David, the youngest and said that the Lord had chosen him to be king and anointed him there.

### What is this all about?

Now that we see the characters and setting of this story, we can see the real significance of what is happening here. It was not all made up so that there could be a gazillion Christmas cards made of the magi on camels on a star lit night in Bethlehem.

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As always, God gives us this account, and made all of the events happen, because it serves a special purpose; First, to bring glory to his son, and then also to meet some need within us. We need to spend time thinking about what the passage does for us. I also hope you are reading through Matthew each week as we progress through the book. It is likely that reading on our own will be more valuable to you, through the Holy Spirit, than just hearing the sermon. Be sure to pause and ask yourself, “what effect is this passage having on me?” Is it causing me to trust God more? Is it causing me to worship? Or to be thankful for God’s goodness? That is what the Bible should be doing if we are engaged with it.

#### OUR CONDITION

This passage is basically about two differing responses to the coming King. Some come to worship, some try to eliminate him.

**The fact is, we need to be wise in our response to Jesus as our King. This is made easier as we see who he is and what his heart is toward us.**

#### PROPOSITION

There are a few key messages in this passage that help us to respond correctly to Jesus.

- 1.) God draws us to Jesus.
- 2.) The wise draw near while the foolish draw away.
- 3.) Jesus the King is a shepherd of his people.
- 4.) God protects those near to him.

#### GOD DRAWS US TO JESUS

God drew these wise men from far away. Hundreds of miles, riding on a camel. That is not an easy trip and would have taken months and probably filled with hardships.

But God drew them to know and worship Jesus. Some have come to the place of faith far from their home. There are some here that may have come to faith in Christ from another religion. Some have had to overcome abuse or even a bad church experience to come to faith. Others have had to overcome their own selfishness and pride.

In any case, all that come to faith in Christ have come a long way. But no matter how far it was physically or emotionally or intellectually, if you have faith in Christ it has been because God drew you from a long way off.

When Jesus was speaking to the woman at the well, he said this, listen to God's heart...

John 4:23 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup>But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

Jesus also said this of the journey to faith in him,

John 6:44 (ESV)

<sup>44</sup>No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

The Apostle Paul shows it in different words,

Ephesians 1:3–4a (ESV)

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

God desires people to come to know and worship his son. He is not above using strange phenomena like the alignment of planets, or even superstitious beliefs like astrology. He plants vestiges of truth in false religions, to bring people to seek.

He uses our own personal needs to draw us too. For me, God used loneliness and desire just to have some friends to bring me to church and finally to faith. Think for a moment, how did God draw you? It would be beautiful to see and hear all the ways that God has done that.

God seeks people to worship him and Jesus, and Jesus also in like manner seeks people to worship him.

Luke 19:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

You can be sure that if you have faith in Christ, God drew you. You are “the chosen!” He drew you to be a worshipper of Christ and has called you to a special purpose in your life. You may not have your journey written in the Bible like the Magi, but it is written in heaven. We love him for that mercy and grace!

THE WISE DRAW NEAR WHILE THE FOOLISH DRAW AWAY

We see that God draws us to Jesus, **the wise draw near while the foolish draw away.**

Herod went the opposite direction. He tried to foolishly eliminate the Christ as if he could! Was he so foolish to think that a prophesied King could be eliminated by some soldiers before his time?

The priests and scribes were also remarkably obtuse. They did not recognize their King being born. There is no record of any of them accompanying the Magi when they went to see Jesus. Did they think, “these guys are just “wackos! They believe in astrology and stars! What do they know!” They knew the prophecies, and maybe pridefully, they did not go and see. Sometimes those that are “closest” are the most blind. We need to be sure that we, likewise, do not fall asleep now that we are close.

Ezekiel 34 is a very important passage about God’s view of the shepherds (or teachers) of Israel. Because of their failure, he came.

Ezekiel 34:7–12 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

<sup>8</sup>As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep,

<sup>9</sup>therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

<sup>10</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

<sup>11</sup>“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

<sup>12</sup>As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

So, when Jesus says in John chapter 10,

John 10:14–15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

He is fulfilling Ezekiel 34 and also the passage quoted in this second chapter of Matthew, verse 6,

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*6“‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

JESUS THE KING IS A SHEPHERD TO HIS PEOPLE

And so, we also see that Jesus the King is a shepherd to his people.

This is remarkable. Compare the type of King that Jesus is to Herod, or maybe some of the politicians of our day. Herod killed people and had no regard for them. They were just to serve him. He did not care if he slaughtered perhaps 30 babies in Bethlehem for his own ends. How foolish he was going to die in just a few years anyway. What did he hope to accomplish by eliminating the true king?

In God’s kingdom, though the King has absolute rights to dictate his law and expect unwavering obedience from his subjects, rather the scripture says that Jesus “will shepherd his people.” And elsewhere that he will lay down his life for his sheep.

We know the rights of the King. This is a statement of the “heart of the king.” God’s heart, and Jesus his Son’s heart is that he seek and save the lost so that they would love him and know that he loves them.

Earthly kings, use and abuse and exploit, for their own power and to stay in office.

But the kingdom of heaven is no ordinary kingdom with no ordinary King! What God is seeking are subjects that will be loved, and love him, and others in return. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of love!

GOD PROTECTS THOSE THAT ARE NEAR TO HIM.

We need also to see that God protects those that are near to him.

God used some ordinary and some special means to save Jesus. It could have been that God sent an angel with a flaming sword to protect Jesus from Herod’s soldiers, but that is not what happened. We need to recognize that God prefers to usually stay within the bounds of nature – he respects it, because he made it.

So, he used Joseph a man dedicated to God and the work God called him to be a protector and provider for Jesus. This was usually within the normal bounds of nature; Joseph cared for his family and moved them to where it was safer and worked a job.

Now God sent him an angel in his dreams a few more times to direct him to move to Egypt and when to come back and when not to stay but go to Nazareth.

But it is clear that God protected and that he also used Joseph. God protects us too. Continuing in the theme of a shepherd from John 10 we see God's protection through the ministry of Jesus the great shepherd,

John 10:27–29 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

We are thankful for God's protection for us through both ordinary and supernatural means!

#### OUR RESPONSE

God has put all of us on a path to seek for him. He has given us signs in our hearts that we are searching for him. When you find him, do what the wise men did, give yourselves to him and give gifts to him.

If you are just at the point of finding Jesus, give yourself to him. We are commanded to put our faith in him. Pray in this way,

“Lord Jesus, thank you for leading me to faith. I need to know how to find you in my heart. I have followed many foolish ways, now I want to find you really in my heart. Save me Lord from my sin, be my shepherd and lead me so that I can serve you my whole life – amen!”

If you have already found Jesus or should I say that he has found you, let us be conscious of worshipping him this week. When the wise men came, they came not empty handed, but with gifts for a king; Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh – all suitable gifts for a King. Maybe you need to worship by giving money to his work. We need to regularly be giving as an act of worship.

We also need to give time and attention to him. God finds us to be a very distracted and distractible people. We flitter away very quickly. This is something that I, and I suspect you also, need to work on. Spend some time this week reading his word and asking, “how is this affecting me?” And worship and thank him for his goodness in seeking and saving you!

Please pray with me!