

# Worship Bethlehem's King

*From the Gospel of Matthew*

By Dennis Prutow

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Matthew 2:1-12

**Preached on:** Sunday, December 14, 2008

## **Westminster Evangelistic Ministries**

Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

7418 Penn Avenue

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15208

**Website:** [www.wordfortheweek.org](http://www.wordfortheweek.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/rptsprof](http://www.sermonaudio.com/rptsprof)

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter two. And we will be reading the first 12 verses. Matthew two beginning with verse one. Hear God's Word.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 2:1-12

May God be pleased to bless to us the reading of his Word.

Let's pray together.

*Father, again, it is a privilege for us to be able to come together for worship. It is a privilege to come, to bow down and worship before Jesus Christ who is the King. And we thank you and praise you that the things we've just read are recorded for us in your Word and that we may observe them and read them and study them. And we thank you that they are given to us, Father, not just for our enjoyment, not just that we may read and study, but that we might be lead to Christ and to worship him.*

*Work in our hearts now. We pray that this will be the case with each one of us. We ask in the good name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

My first assignment as a chaplain in the army was at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Some of you may be familiar with that place. When winter came, my commanding officer suggested that our unit have a live nativity scene. Well, it was actually a little more than a suggestion. He wanted a live nativity scene. After we had made the preparations for this live nativity scene, there was one thing that we didn't have. It was a star. And using some of our native ingenuity, there among the men, we decided that we would get a spool of communication wire, attach a large light bulb to the end of this spool of communication wire—It was probably a 250 watt bulb—then tie a weather balloon to the end of the wire, and let the weather balloon carry this light aloft.

Now any of you that might be familiar with this spooled communication wire, it is a mile long. We could go way up into the sky with our light. And this is exactly what we did. And lo and behold people from all over Fort Bragg and the surrounding community wanted to know what this light was. They came to find out and thus they visited our live nativity scene.

So it was with the magi. They followed the light in the heavens. They came to the actual nativity scene. They fell down and worshiped the King, the Lord Jesus.

In our case, we have a better light than even that star and certainly that light bulb held aloft by a weather balloon. You and I have the light of the Word of God. And just as the light of that star led the magi ultimately to Bethlehem, and, as we will find out, it was not ultimately the star that led them, it was the Word of God that led them. Just as the magi went to Bethlehem to worship the King, led, I would submit to you, by the Word of God, in the end, so you and I are led by the Word of God to worship Christ. And this is the whole important of Scripture, to lead you to Christ to worship him.

And this is what I want you to see from this text this morning. You are led to Christ, like the magi, by Scripture in order to worship him.

Our story begins with Herod, a rather infamous character. Look at verse one with me. “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.”<sup>2</sup>

Herod was the king during the period. Herod was born in about 73 BC and if the historians have it correctly he died around 4 BC and so we have the time frame, at least from the secular historians. And Herod was, rather, an infamous fellow. He began his career as a general and he curried the favor of the Roman Senate. He was literally elected by the Roman Senate as ‘King of the Jews.’ He was an Edomite by heritage and because he was an Edomite, an Idumean, he was not someone who was favored by the Jews. And yet he was put into place by the Roman Senate as ‘King of the Jews,’ He carried this title, ‘King of the Jews.’ And so it was in the latter part of his reign that these magi came to Jerusalem.

I might just add one other thing with regard to Herod. He attempted to curry the favor of the Jewish people by rebuilding the temple. And this he did. The project began in about 20 BC. And the apostle John tells us it took over 46 years for this project to take place. But early on, the main parts of the temple were rebuilt. But this didn’t help Herod’s standing with the Jewish people.

And so the magi came, verse one tells us. These magi were astronomers and astrologers, those who interpreted dreams. We read about such people in the book of Daniel. They came from the east from the area of Mesopotamia, the area of the Euphrates River around Babylon, the area of modern day Iraq. And Daniel had some dealings with individuals like this, these magi who interpreted dreams and read the heavens.

They came to Jerusalem and it says in verse two they asked this question when they got to Jerusalem. “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”<sup>3</sup>

Here the magi were in the east—and I think this is the best way to interpret the text—while they were still in the east they see this star. Now, we don’t know what this star was. There are no astronomical records that indicate what this star actually was. It may have been what some astronomers call a super nova, an explosion in space of a great star which begins to pulsate and as a result becomes quite visible in the heavens. It could be that this star was of this character. At any rate, the magi see this star.

Now it is not only that they see this star but that the magi also have some other information given to them by a prophet at a much earlier date who was likely one of them. Please turn with me, if you would, in your Bibles, to the book of Numbers and to chapter 24. Here we have the stories of Balaam the prophet. Balaam was an individual who came from the east, from the area of the Euphrates River. He was probably an earlier magi or similar seer. In Numbers 24, beginning with verse 15, you read this.

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 2:1.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 2:2.

He took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,  
And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, The oracle of him who  
hears the words of God, And knows the knowledge of the Most High,  
Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Falling down, yet having his eyes  
uncovered. I see him, but not now.”<sup>4</sup>

That is, I see the One who is coming. He is off in the distance.

“I behold him, but not near.”<sup>5</sup> I see him off in the distance, but he is not near.

A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And  
shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of  
Sheth. Edom shall be a possession.<sup>6</sup>

And so Balaam prophesied—and this is taken by all the commentators as a prophecy concerning the coming of Christ—Balaam who turns out to be an unrighteous man, although he is used by God in this circumstance, Balaam prophecies concerning the coming of the Christ. This happened 1400 years before Jesus appeared on the scene. And this Balaam was no doubt someone who came before and was perhaps in the genealogy of these same magi we read about in Matthew chapter two.

And, of course, we see here in Numbers 24 that his prophecy is recorded for us. It is a Word of God. And no doubt what Balaam had to say was also recorded and remembered by those ancient wise men and magi. And so, when they saw the star, they could go back and look at the records. What is this star? They could determine that one of their ancestors prophesied concerning a King coming to Israel.

Please go back to chapter two in Matthew.

And so it is very logical, you see, that the magi, in verse two, were asking this question. “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”<sup>7</sup> They came to Jerusalem. And why would they come to Jerusalem? Jerusalem was the capital of Israel. And when they saw the star and they connected it with the words that had earlier been spoken about a King rising in Israel, it was only logical that they should travel from Mesopotamia over to Israel and to Jerusalem, the capital, to seek out this new King.

Well, you can imagine when the magi appeared on the scene, Herod was troubled. He heard the question, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”<sup>8</sup> Herod had been given that title. And so Herod was troubled by the appearance of these men. And the city was troubled because a great deal of civil strife could erupt. Look at verse three. “When

---

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 24:15-17.

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 24:17.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers 24:17-18.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 2:2.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 2:2.

Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”<sup>9</sup> And you can understand why.

And so what does Herod do? Look at verses four and five:

Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah [or the Christ] was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet.”<sup>10</sup>

Herod goes to the priests and to the Scribes, those who should be in the know about the future King. And it is not insignificant that Herod asks the priests, “Where is the Christ to be born?” The earlier prophecy in Numbers had spoken of the King who would come. Now Herod very specifically asks with regard to this King. “Where is Christ the King to be born?”<sup>11</sup> He wanted to know.

Of course, we read on in Matthew chapter two that Herod had ulterior motives. He wanted to see the demise, the death, the destruction of this new King. He wanted to preserve his own status as ‘King of the Jews.’

After Herod had been told that the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem, verse seven and following says, “Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.”<sup>12</sup>

Herod wanted to date the time of the star and do a little calculating. He wanted to know how old this infant might be so that he could go to Bethlehem and seek him out, not to worship him, but to kill him. And so he ascertains the time of the appearing of the star.

Verses eight and nine continue.

And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.” After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.<sup>13</sup>

Now there is something fascinating about verse nine and the information Matthew gives us in verse nine. Normally, if I understand this correctly, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. And likewise stars traverse the heavens during the evening hours from east to west. Look again at verse nine. “After hearing the king, they went their way; and the

---

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 2:3.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 2:4-5.

<sup>11</sup> See Matthew 2:2.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 2:7.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 2:8-9.

star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.”<sup>14</sup>

Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem. And this star, it appears, was not going from east to west, at least in this case. It was leading the magi from Jerusalem south to Bethlehem.

What was this star? Again, it is only conjecture. Was this a manifestation of the Shekinah glory of God directing the magi to Bethlehem and then resting above the house where Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living? We don’t know. But this star, in a miraculous way, was confirming to the magi that they were to go to Bethlehem. And they were led by God in this way.

And so in verse 10 you can imagine how the magi were feeling. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”<sup>15</sup> It was on their hearts now. Now they were really going to find the King for whom they were seeking.

Verse 11 then tells us. “After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”<sup>16</sup>

They entered the house. It is no longer the stable. It is no longer a temporary shelter in the stable because there is no room in the inn. This is some time later. Jesus had been born earlier. The magi had seen the star in the east. They had traveled a great distance from Mesopotamia and now they had come to Jerusalem. And in a house in Bethlehem they found the family. And what was their first response? Literally taken, they fell on their faces before the child.

And this was not only the posture of worship, but the Scriptures are very, very specific. They fell down *and* worshiped him. They exhibited not only the posture of worship, but they also exhibited the temperament and heart of worship. In their hearts the magi knew Jesus was the King. And it appears they did worship him from the heart.

And then they gave to this family and to this King gifts worthy of a King: gold, that precious metal, and frankincense and myrrh. Both the latter are aromatic resins processed for perfume. And, significantly enough myrrh was commonly used for the embalming of the dead. Perhaps this was a foreshadowing of that which would take place in the life of this King.

And then finally, in verse 12 it says, “And having been warned by God in a dream...”<sup>17</sup> They would not have been surprised about this sort of thing. “And having been warned

---

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 2:9.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 2:10.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 2:11.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 2:12.

by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.”<sup>18</sup> They went back another way because of Herod.

But we skipped a couple of verses. Why is it that the magi came first to Jerusalem and then went to Bethlehem? Look at verse seven. “Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.”<sup>19</sup> And look at verse two. “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”<sup>20</sup> It was the star. It was his star, the King’s star, they saw in the east.

And how did they identify this star at its appearing? How did they know it was the star of the King? The only way they knew this, friends, was through the prophecy of Balaam. It was through the words of God. That is how they knew that this star was to lead them to the King who was Jesus. It was ultimately the Word of God that set them on the right course to find Christ.

And then, when they got to Jerusalem, the capital, as I say, going to the capital properly because it was the King of the Jews that was being born, how is it that they found their way to Bethlehem? Well, Herod went to the chief priests and asked them where the Christ was to be born. And the priests came back to Herod with the Word of God, the prophecy from Micah chapter five. “And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah for out of you shall come a ruler, a King, a leader. And this King will be a shepherd for my people.”<sup>21</sup>

So this shepherd King, this Christ, prophesied earlier by Balaam and then prophesied also by Micah was to be born in Bethlehem. And it was because of the Word of God, friends, the prophecy of Micah, that they were led to Bethlehem. And then when they were on the road to Bethlehem, what happened? Miraculously, lo and behold, the star once again appeared to them and they said, “Aha, we are correct. The Word of God is directing us properly.” And this was a confirmation of the fact that they were to go to Bethlehem.

And so, ultimately I say to you, it was the Word of God that led these wise men, these Gentiles from a very far land, to Jesus Christ. And isn’t this what the Bible is all about? It is meant to lead you and me to Christ? Again and again we see this emphasis in Scripture. The apostle John says at the end of his Gospel, “These things I have written to you that you might believe in the name of the Son of God and believing in him have life.”<sup>22</sup>

You see, it is not good enough just to study the Bible and to know the content of the Bible. Oh, yes, this is good. But this is not enough. The Bible has been given to you to lead you to Jesus Christ so that you, like the magi, may fall down on your faces and

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 2:7.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 2:2.

<sup>21</sup> See Micah 5:2.

<sup>22</sup> See John 20:31.

worship him, that you may love him and adore him for who he is and what he has done. This is why the Bible is given to you. This is what led the magi to Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 10 and in verse four “The end of the law, the goal of the law, is Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

And the early Jews did not properly apprehend the use of the Bible. They took the Bible and thought, “Well, if we follow all of the precepts of the Bible and we do what the Bible says we will be right with God.” And they missed Jesus Christ.

And in a season like this when we come together to celebrate the birth of the King what ought to be your posture and my posture? We ought to be on our faces before the King, worshipping him. This is where the Bible takes you and me.

The apostle Matthew in this very passage shows us the proper use of the Bible by quoting from Micah and directing you and me to Christ. This passage in Micah led the magi to Jesus Christ to worship him. And so, once again, friends, I submit to you: The intent of the Bible is to lead you to Christ. Understand the Bible in this way and utilize it in this way.

You see, back there at Fort Bragg when the people saw the light in the sky they came to the live nativity scene. They were curious about the light in the sky. That’s why they came. They were curiosity seekers. We need to be more than curiosity seekers in the use of the Bible. And when you sing the songs about Christ and you have your family gatherings and there is a good bit of nostalgia, you need to remember the center of all this is Jesus Christ. The Bible that is in your hand right now has been given to you by God to lead you to Christ and to life in Jesus Christ so that, like the magi who ultimately were led by Scripture, you too will fall down and worship him, the King. The intent of Scripture is to lead you to Christ, and like the magi, to worship him.

Let’s pray together.

*Father, forgive us where we do not often use the Bible as we should thinking that if we can just get through our devotions, if we can just get through our Sunday school lessons we will be OK. Grant, Lord, that we might see more fully that the reason you have given us this Word is to lead us to Christ the King, to worship him. And I pray, Father, that you will be pleased to so pour out your Spirit upon each and every one of us that we might enter the Scriptures with a new desire, with a new verve, to seek out Christ and to be led by you to him.*

*Would you be pleased Father to work in my heart and the hearts of your people here to this end so that we might see that you do use your Word to lead the likes of us to Christ the King to worship him. Bless us to this end we ask in the name of Christ the King. Amen.*

---

<sup>23</sup> See Romans 10:4.