

Advent : Joy to the World ▪ Matthew 2:1-12

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Advent; Nativity of Christ

Intro: We probably all have our own Christmas traditions that we love and are unique.

One of ours is the pickle ornament. It may be a German tradition—here is the way the tradition goes. On Christmas morning mom or dad hides a glass pickle Christmas tree ornament. Then the kids come out. Before they can open any presents they need to find the ornament. The first child to find the ornament gets an additional present and gets to open their present first.

It adds an element of surprise. It's not always the oldest child who finds the pickle; some of it depends on where it's hidden.

Although quite familiar to us, this story originally would have been full of *surprise*.

Now let me say up front—that this passage creates a lot of questions; and a lot of questions need to go unanswered, like how many Wise men? What kind of Star? If the Lord wanted us to focus on those details, he would have given more.

—And sometimes scholars spill endless amounts of ink on these things and that can end up leading to skepticism and doubt.

—Even with some unanswered questions, I can come to this text and affirm it is: historical, providential, and supernatural.

Now Mt. 1 is about Jesus's birth; Mt. 2 is about how people respond to his birth.

The first response is troubling.

THOSE WHO ARE DEEPLY TROUBLED BY CHRIST

The narrative begins: “In the days of Herod the King”.

This is Herod the Great—he ruled Palestine from 37 BC-4 AD.

- There is a lot that can be said about Herod the Great—but the most helpful thing for us to know is that he was great at crushing opposing rule.
- It makes sense the Wise Men visit him first; you would expect to find the King of the Jews in the King’s place. So this would be the first element of surprise....the King of the Jews is not there.
- Herod sees nothing positive in this...only a threat - a threat to his power and control.

Apply: Power and control can be a vicious idol—and when the idols of a person’s heart are under threat, reactions come quickly.

Look at his actions:

- He lives in fearful anxiety (v3). Herod was deeply troubled; Jesus was not born *to become* King of the Jews—he was born King of the Jews.
- Contrast that to Herod who became King b/c the Romans made him; there is real reason for him to worry.
- Herod’s life is woven in deception—or “hypocrisy” (v8).
- He does not *desire* the Israel’s True King to rule him (v6).

- Did you notice Herod ask the question of timing and place (when and where)...but never the WHO?

That’s the question that drives the Gospel of Matthew: Who is Jesus?

Instead, Herod asks the questions of location and timing:

—v4 “Where is the Christ to be born?”

—v7 Herod ascertains what time the star had appeared.

We can be like that also. The things that consume and weigh us down – “When will this thing happen?” “How long do I need to wait?” Where will I be in ____ months/years?”

We can tend to be incessant planners and control freaks ourselves.

- But the right emphasis must be on the WHO question.
- The scribes do right to reference a prophecy text that point to the place of the Messiah’s birth, but it does much more. It tells us who the King of the Jews is.
- But at the heart of this passage is a quote from the prophet Micah.

Yet it says something critical about the Messiah.

The King of the Jews; the Messiah is a *Shepherd*.

In Matthew, the type of Shepherd that Jesus is, is a *compassionate one*.

Matthew 9:36 ESV

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Now I think we can look at Herod and see an example of evil; he is a guy whose ego drives him at all times and at all costs.

- But Herod also stands in a *pattern* of cruel rulers—his actions mirror Pharaoh (murdering of innocent Hebrew children, v16-ff.)

Which stretches back to the Ancient Foe—Satan. The King of the Kingdom of Darkness.

- So the question that comes to us at this point is, “What type of leadership are you under?”

If you are not under Christ's rule—then the one who rules your soul is cruel, hateful, and oppressive—much, much worse than Herod.

- We don't just see one man troubled by Christ. (V3b) "And all Jerusalem with him".
- Another surprise is that the title *King of the Jews* is not used for Jesus until Mt. 27 when he goes to the Cross.

Pilate asks him (Mt. 27:11) "Are you the king of the Jews?"

It's the formal charge that is hung over the cross (Mt. 27:37).

This is a different type of King than has ever been seen before—*one whose entire life is wrapped up in humility...from cradle to the cross.*

To understand his kingdom and be part of it—you must understand and prize a humble king. And you must come to his cross humbly.

THOSE WHO TRULY DELIGHT IN CHRIST

Apply: Now for many living during the time of Jesus—apathy had set it.

Apathy—it's one of the greatest challenges to deal with when leading a team. It's one of the greatest challenges spiritually. Most are familiar with Jesus's rebuke to the church of Laodicea—b/c apathy had set in "lukewarmness".

- So the arrival of the wise men are a breath of fresh air against the backdrop of apathy.
- › They also challenge us if we start to grow apathetic; they are a picture of what true delight in Christ looks like.

- (V1) “Behold”—just remember, that word is a word of surprise; it’s an attention-grabbing word.

Now there are a few misunderstandings about the “wisemen” .

-First, no indication that there was only 3—may have been 300? Contrary to the Christmas Carol—there were not 3 Kings of Orient; and they did not visit at the manger scene (v11).

- All that to say is that the Bible is historically accurate; our Nativity set and carols may be off a bit.

“Wisemen” - some translations say Magi.

—The word magi has been used to refer to the men of the Persian priestly class. They were religious, but in an Eastern Religious way—dipping into magic, astrology, interpreting dreams, predicting the future.

Some speculate that this group got ahold of some Scripture (Num. 24:17).

- Regardless of the small details—this group knew they were being guided in a supernatural way.

If you’ve ever had the overwhelming sense that God is guiding you very directly in a situation—it’s thrilling.

Sometime in the spring of 2002, with less than a year of marriage behind us, Emily and I drove down here to visit CIU to see if it was going to be in the future. We prayed a lot. Met with admission counselors, academic advisors—but the main purpose was to find housing. This was before those nice apartments were built on campus.

I spent hours calling landlords, apartments, and leaving messages with nothing in return. I even wondered if the housing thing did not work, then maybe the Lord would close the door.

We were leaving campus, ready to make a right-hand turn onto Monticello Rd, when the cellphone (I borrowed from my mom) rang with an 803 area code. An elderly man on the other end said he just listened to my message and had a duplex available if we want to see. He gave me directions—and I distinctly remember turning my from right to left.

Within the next half an hour I had a check written out for our security deposit and first month's rent.

- › *The next 9 hours of our trip north was exhilarating—to know that God is guiding in a very direct way.*
- That's what we have with the Star guiding the wise men. Pure joy and exhilaration that there is divine guidance.

Now for many living during the time of Jesus—apathy had set in.

- › So one of the staggering surprises would be to see the Magi who are the opposite of religiously apathetic.

Apathy—it's one of the greatest challenges in our spiritual lives.

4 Apathy Hacks:

(Hack = a creative way to get past a problem.)

- Emphasize Joy—their initial response is emphatic joy, overwhelming joy (v10).
—Breaking free from apathy means we need to have our highest joy in the right place.
- › Is a relationship with the Lord Jesus truly our highest joy in life? Is our highest happiness the prospect of being with him?
- Emphasize Worship—their worship is enthusiastic (V11)—they were literally on their faces, moved bodily

—Breaking free from apathy means wholehearted worship (ready to give and receive).

- Emphasize Sacrifice— (11b)—We also need to remember the great cost and risk this trip would have taken.

—Breaking free from apathy means intentional sacrifice (consistent tithing; volunteering time).

*As Americans, what we care about most, we end up wasting most - time and money.

So much better to lay our treasures open before Christ

- Emphasize Obedience—the final thing we see is their obedience to the Lord (v12).

There were no doubt many living in Israel who knew the Bible very well—but did not act on it. Obedience was not part of their lives.

Here we have a group with a very limited grasp of revelation, but they obey.

It's not how deep you go in Bible knowledge, but how faithfully you respond to what you know. An apathetic person may have a head full of Bible knowledge, but their heart does not move toward obedience.

—Breaking free from apathy means obedience to what God reveals.

Finally—

To delight in Christ, means we continue to press forward seriously, zealously and obediently *in Missions*.

Emphasize the Nations

The Wise men are in this by surprise; but it is fulfillment that God would draw nations to the Messiah's light (Is. 60:3).

Isaiah 60:3 ESV

And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

The way that the nations are now drawn into the Savior's light is not by following a star, but *by faithful disciples who go, and churches that support.*

The Status of World Evangelization in 2021 (source: the Joshua Project)

- Still 42% of the world remains unreached by the gospel (less than 2% Christ-followers).
- Of the 7.8 billion human souls, 2.18 billion have virtually no exposure to the gospel (28%).

Conclusion: I went to look for our pickle ornament this morning, and for a moment thought that it was lost—or at least hidden so well that I couldn't find it.

Truth be told, I'm pretty apathetic about a pickle ornament, unless I'm using it for a teaching illustration.

We need to guard ourselves against all forms of apathy, and emphasize joy, worship, sacrifice, obedience, and mission.