

Three Responses to the New Born King

Call to Worship: Psalm 48

1st Scripture: Isaiah 55

2nd Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Hymn #164- *Angels, from the Realms of Glory*

Hymn #168- *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!*

Hymn #147- *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

Introduction

As we consider this narrative, surrounding the wisemen, who seek to visit the young Messianic King Jesus, we will do so, by dividing it into two parts, the second of which, we will consider next time, Lord willing. For this morning, we will work through the general narrative itself, concluding with an examination of the three main responses here revealed, to the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, next time, Lord willing, we will seek to examine verses 5-6, another Old Testament prophecy (this time, from Micah 5), which Matthew reveals as a Messianic text, which the Lord Jesus has fulfilled at His birth.

I. The Narrative

The course that Matthew takes his readers on, as he continues to unfold his narrative is actually quite profound. Unlike Luke, who gives us far more details and information surrounding the actual birth of Christ, including the calling and proclamation of the shepherds, Matthew fasts forward about two years, and takes us to an interesting event, involving a group of foreign wisemen, who come from the East to see the now, toddler Jesus. Apparently, following the birth of Jesus, and the completion of Caesar Augustus's census, Joseph, Mary and Jesus had remained in Bethlehem with some relatives (It would be quite difficult to travel back to Nazareth, at this point, with an infant) until they were forced to flee to Egypt, because of what happens in our present text.

And so, it is while they are still in Bethlehem, that our thoughts are briefly shifted into foreign territory, across the Jordan River, to behold the profound way, in which, God calls these prominent wisemen (some say they were kings, at the least, they were well honored and respected men). Showing up in Jerusalem, the capital city, the wisemen, having travelled a great distance, search for answers that could help them locate the Christ child. And it is in the course

of their inquiring, that we are led to understand how God had signaled them, such that they would come and seek Jesus. And what's even more interesting is that these foreign wisemen had come from so far, to behold the glory of God in the arrival of the Christ, which the rest of the Jews had no clue about, even though He had been present among them for about two years!

And so, we are told that God had signaled these wisemen with the use of an extraordinary star, which appeared in the sky, and led them to seek the Christ somewhere in the region of Judea. And now, they are looking for information, as to the specific location of the child. Now, listen to the wisemen's inquiry, and imagine being a Jewish person in Jerusalem hearing these words, which quickly spread, ultimately finding the ears of King Herod the Great.

“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, 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”* (vs. 1-2).

And so, the wisemen, thinking reasonably, had wrongly assumed that the Jewish people, would certainly have anticipated the coming of the Christ, and would have known where the Christ child could be found. Referring to the child as the “King of the Jews,” whom they had come to worship and honor, ought to have been a normal expectation of the Jews, but it were as if the whole idea were foreign to them. And so, they are utterly shocked and troubled, to say the least. It shows you how far gone the people were, because the Messiah should have been the ultimate hope of salvation for the people, to whom they continually looked, but the promise of His coming, had been all but lost and buried in the self-righteous traditions of the religious leaders of the day. Who needs a Savior, when you think you can justify yourself before God, by the keeping of all kinds of laws. [Note: Matthew wanted His audience to recognize this problem]

And so, hearing of this sign that the wisemen had received (in beholding the star of this glorious King, who had now, allegedly arrived), sends a wave of trouble and fear throughout Jerusalem, not the least of which, fills the heart of King Herod. This then compels Herod to gather the religious leaders together; the chief priests and scribes, to see if they can explain where this Christ was to be born. Now, of course, Herod's interest is in preserving his own reign, and his hidden motive for locating the Christ is to put him to death, as he sees Him as a threat to his throne. We will look at his response more closely, in a few moments. Nevertheless, the

religious leaders do have the answer to the question, in accordance with their understanding of the Scriptures, and they provide it for Herod.

The religious leaders quote Micah 5:2 (which we will examine more carefully, next time, Lord willing), as a means of showing that the Messianic Ruler (King) will come out of Bethlehem of Judah. And then, as we will consider in a few moments, they return back to life as usual, obviously having no desire to seek out the child for themselves. And so, Herod, now having this information and wishing to protect his own throne, to which, he thinks this Messiah will be a potential threat, calls the wisemen aside privately, so that, he can find out when the Star first appeared to them back in the East, which would help him gain an understanding of how old this child now is, and where he might be in the present. And then, he deceptively sends them off, encouraging them to carefully search for the child, and to bring back word to Herod when they find Him, so that he can come and worship the young King, as well. Of course, he wanted to kill the child, as we will see later on.

The wisemen then depart and the star appears again, leading them to the exact location of the young Messiah, in Bethlehem. And, of course, seeing the star brings them great joy, as they head to the house, where Jesus was staying. When they are welcomed into the house, they find Jesus with Mary, His mother, and they fall down before Him and worship Him. And then, they present Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, precious items, that many believe are representative of the Prophet, Priest and Kingly offices of Christ. Finally, they leave, and they are divinely warned by a dream, not to go back to Herod, whose intentions were to kill the child, and certainly not to worship Him. And so, the wisemen travel back to their home country, taking a different route from the one by which they came.

That then completes our general consideration of the narrative that Matthew gives us, here in Chapter 2.

II. Three Responses to the New Born King

Let us now spend the remainder of our time, considering the responses that are here given, to the arrival of the Christ.

1) Herod: Herod the Great was a man who greatly idolized his throne. In fact, he was so paranoid of losing his throne, that he had anyone killed, whom he thought might be trying to take it from him. There was a lot of bloodshed under his reign. In fact, he killed his own wife and three of his sons, for that matter.

Furthermore, Herod was an Edomite from Idumea, making him not the most favorable candidate for reigning over the Jews. He did a lot to try to merit the Jews favor, particularly with building projects, and especially, in the way that he had built up the temple to its present magnificent state. And so, hearing about a Messianic King, who was going to reign over the Jews, disturbed Herod greatly, even if the threat was prophetic.

Herod's obvious response then, was one of fear, fear leading to rage, as he would do anything to protect his kingdom. And this is why he had attempted to use the wisemen, to get the information that he needed, so that he could have the child killed, and thereby, continue to secure his throne, which was everything to him.

2) The Religious Leaders (Chief Priests and Scribes): When the religious leaders were brought in and questioned about the place of the Messiah's birth, the implication is that, although they knew the prophecies relatively well, there was no sense of anticipation or eager desire to look for the Messiah's coming. They were more than content and happy, having the people look to them as the spiritual leaders and elite of Israel. Unlike the foreign wisemen, there was no sense of diligence to search for the Messiah and the time of His coming. The religious leaders could care less and would much rather leave things undisturbed, so that they could continue to enjoy their position of exaltation, and all of the material benefits that came with it.

And so, the religious leaders respond with a heart of indifference. Even when Herod brings his concern to their attention, which forces the reality of the Messiah's coming, to the surface of their minds, they have no itch to search for Him themselves. They give Herod the news, and then, simply return to business as usual. And it is no wonder then, that the people in general, were only moved by fear; a fear of what such a reality might cause, concerning potential increased tensions with Rome, and with Herod himself, who was clearly troubled. If the religious leaders of the time, have redressed religion in a package of self-righteous observance of laws (God's Laws, added to and intensified), what need is there to really be overly concerned

about that ancient promise of the coming Messiah. And so, by and large, the Jews, in general, return to life as usual, after perhaps a few days of being shaken by Herod's frantic demeanor.

3) Finally, there are the Wisemen, who are the main subjects of this narrative. Again, the wisemen were definitely prominent people from their own foreign countries, who, unlike the natural people of God, were eagerly searching for information about the coming of the Messiah. They had hoped and longed to find Him, recognizing that His glory and benefit were of more value than anything else in the world. And so, when the Messiah's star appears, they rejoice greatly, and travel a great distance to find the blessed newborn King!

Indeed, these wisemen come with expensive gifts (gold, frankincense and myrrh), with the hope of finding the Messiah to offer these gifts to Him. And when they find Him, even in the lowly town of Bethlehem, they bow down before Him and worship Him, acknowledging his divinity and Kingly authority...even though He is but a small toddler. And they leave, exhibiting exceeding great joy, returning back to their own country, no doubt, to share the news of what they had just seen. And so, the response of the wisemen was one of seeking, faith, adoration, worship and exceeding joy.

Three responses: Fear and anger, indifference, and reverential worship and joy.

III. Concluding Thoughts Based Upon These Three Responses

In closing then, let me ask you, which of these responses is most like your own, to the news of the Messiah, who had already come and accomplished His glorious work on behalf of mankind? You see, they are not unlike the responses that have been given all throughout history, since the Lord Jesus Christ first arrived. Only now, we look back to the full gamut of what He has fully accomplished by His righteous life, substitutionary death, powerful resurrection and glorious ascension to the right hand of God on high.

1) Maybe some of you, this morning, respond to the gospel (the good news) of Jesus Christ's coming, similar to the way that Herod did. Now, you can't, and perhaps, would not attempt to kill Him, but the news of His coming and calling upon your life brings a certain degree of fear, bitterness and anger.

You know, that to receive Christ, you will have to let go of your own little kingdom of living life how you want to live it. You know that repentance is necessary, and that the hope of the gospel is for those who are willing to let go of this life, with the heart fixed on glory. You know that submitting to Christ means submitting to His Kingdom and rule, being determined to put away your sins and your lusts, so that you might now live in obedience to Him. And you don't want to make such a necessary sacrifice. You want your sin, and to cling to the things that you know are unlawful in God's sight. You know that to embrace Christ as Savior, requires embracing Him as Lord, and that, you cannot receive the glorious benefits of His salvation, while continuing to walk in the very sins for which He died. You're convinced that the temporal lust of sex outside of marriage is just too precious to give up. You might want to continue to enjoy drugging and partying with the world. Perhaps, some of you are involved with illegal activities and scams, or you just don't want to lose your God-hating, Christ-denying friends, who would certainly think less of you, if you embraced Christ as your Lord and Savior. Whatever the case might be for you, there is some sin, that you want the freedom to continue to enjoy, and you want to continue to remain dominant over the governance and direction of your life, and this leads you to fear the temporal repercussions of coming to Christ, to the point that you despise and hate His gospel. It threatens your freedom and ability to be your own god and king.

2) Still others of you might not be so bitter toward the gospel, but instead, you are just indifferent. It just doesn't faze you. You have very little thought or concern for where your life is heading and where you will wind up in the end. You are perhaps, willing to give some mental assent to the gospel; you even have a degree of religion in your pocket, but it has little to no affect on your heart or the direction of your life. Like the religious leaders and the people of Jerusalem, you might even know a lot of what the Word of God teaches, concerning God, man, man's fallen condition and need for the Christ, but you have no real concern about appropriating any of these truths into the reality of exercising an active faith, that properly responds to them. You come to church on Sundays, but that's it. Then God and Christ get tucked away in the closet, like a bookmark in a book, until you take Him out again, next Sunday. And then, it's back to the real world and the busyness of life, which really matters. Christ is not the source of your

worldview, but rather, He's the side of coleslaw on the plate; irrelevant, compared to the juicy burger that drains your real interest.

Sports, hobbies, school, college, job, politics, family, life...life...life, and all of its trimmings are what govern your heart and swallow up your time. And so, all in all, you are not troubled by the gospel. You're just indifferent to it, in truth. And Christ is okay, as long as He sits nicely on the shelf until next Sunday, not getting in the way of "real" life. The realities of the gospel and the Christian life are fine, so long as they remain in the realm of the theoretical and dare not enter into the realm of the practical. [i.e. bearing a cross and following Christ...etc]

If either of these first two responses (or any derivatives that can be taken from them) are yours this morning, I want to exhort and encourage you; I want to plead with you to stop and consider the direction, toward which, your heart and actions, are presently taking you. You must understand that you are on a path that will, that absolutely must, lead to ultimate and eternal destruction! The temporary joys and lusts of this life are just that...temporary.

You were created and designed by God, and for God, and you are presently living in rebellion against your Creator. And that cannot end well. You desire the things that God hates because you have a fallen, sinful nature, that has been passed on to all of us, from our first parents. Isn't it amazing that we have no natural desire to know and please the God who created us, from birth? Isn't it amazing that we are born into this life and existence with no natural desire to seek God? You see, we are all born, fallen, enemies of our God. And that enmity has grave consequences in this life (separation from the enjoyment of God) and especially in the next life, beyond the grave. We will all stand before the judgment seat of God, and you will give an account for how you have lived this short life. And the consequences of dying in your sin, separated from God, are eternal in their duration. Left in your present condition, you will experience the unending wrath of your holy and eternal God.

But, there is yet, presently hope for you. And that hope is found in the last response, given by the wisemen.

3) You see, these wisemen knew their desperate need of this glorious Savior and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that need, drove them to travel far and wide to get to Him. They

were pleased to leave everything else behind to see this Jesus. And when they found Him, they worshiped Him and praised Him and rejoiced over Him. And you can bet that their lives were never the same after that! They experienced the power of the Gospel.

Now, the good news is that you don't have to go to Jerusalem and Bethlehem to find King Jesus now. He has already accomplished His redemptive work here on earth and ascended to the right hand of God. But, you can seek Him now, in prayer. And you can turn from trusting in your own righteousness (which is filthy in God's sight), and you can turn from your sins, and put your trust completely in this Jesus now. You can speak to Him in prayer. You can ask God to forgive and to save you from your sins, and to provide you with the free righteousness of Christ, which He offers to all who come to Him in truth. But, you must submit to His rule now. You must turn away from ruling your own kingdom, and submit yourself to His eternal reign. And in Him, you will find free, eternal life! And He will direct your life through His Word. And you will never, ever regret it! Seek Him while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near!

And so, which response is yours? Which response will be yours today? If your response is like these wisemen, then you have every reason to rejoice this morning, no matter what your present, outward circumstances may be.

Amen!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25