

Sunday, December 1, 2024

Good News, Great Joy

Week 1: Matthew 2:1-12

- Don't you miss Christmas as a kid? It was so magical...that is until you begin to expect certain gifts, then Christmas can become a tragic event
- As much as you remember the Christmas' when you got exactly what you wanted, you probably even more so remember the Christmas' when you didn't get exactly what you wanted...
- I'll never forget the first time that happened to me.... It was Christmas 1996:
 - All me and my two older brothers wanted was a Daisy, Red Rider BB Gun.
 - I know every time I tell this story someone wants to say, "You'll shoot your eye out kid!" but this was long before we knew that movie existed.

- But the closer we got to Christmas, the more we would dream about running through the woods of central PA, with our Daisy, Red Rider BB Guns.
- Then Christmas morning came...Both of my brothers got their gifts and they unwrapped their Daisy, Red Rider BB Guns
 - And I was so excited, waiting for mine. As the presents dwindled down, I wasn't seeing any BB gun shaped presents under left under the tree.
- Then finally there was one more present for me...but it was smaller than I expected it to be. In my little 5-year old mind, I was thinking mom and dad may have folded it up or broke it down into smaller pieces to throw me off scent....but then I opened the present and it was a Woody doll....
- **Picture:** Did I like Woody? YES! I loved Woody, he was my favorite Pixar Character...but I was mad, because it wasn't what I was expecting

- Ended up being a good thing...because minutes after my brothers took their BB guns out to play, my brother dewey came running screaming into the house because Matt had put a BB right in his thumb and they got the guns taken away...
 - So if it were me, as the youngest, I would have been the one holding the milk jug for them to shoot at and the BB would have been stuck in my hand!
- So I may not have gotten the present I was expecting, but I got what what was good for me at the time.
 - And it really was such a good gift, but I couldn't appreciate it because it wasn't what I really wanted or expected at the time.
- Now whenever we look back on when Jesus came: which is the day that Christmas is based around, the day that we set our yearly calendar by, and was the catalyst for the largest global holiday of all time...so many people, at that time, missed the GREAT JOY of that season

because Jesus wasn't what the people were expecting.

- You see, the Jews were expecting their Messiah to be this great warrior politician that would overthrow the Roman empire and establish a new world order with Israel as the main Power.
 - However, Jesus didn't come to defeat the Romans, He came to defeat sin and death. He wasn't what they expected but He was so much better.
- I think it's interesting how in so many areas of our lives, that we scrutinize and think through extensively, but whenever it comes to some of these stories in the bible, like the one we are going to read today in Matthew Chapter 2, we just read it and say, "Yea, that's a cute story."
- Especially with these Christmas stories, we just lump them into Christmas tradition, and we don't actually unpack what these writers are really telling us about the birth of Christ.

- So today I want to look at one of the most famous stories in the Gospel of Matthew, when the wise men come to see Jesus, and not look just at what the gifts mean, but everything that is going on at this time.
- And really the GOOD NEWS that the birth of Jesus brought into the world:
- ***“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,”- Matthew 2:1 (NKJV)***
- Now at this time, the Romans are the leading power in the prominent world at the time of Jesus’ birth.
 - So Herod is called “King over Israel,” but he’s really just a Roman Pawn.
 - He is what was referred to as a Client-King. He was allowed to have power, given to him by the Roman Empire but he had to operate within the allowed parameters of the Roman Rule.
- Rome, specifically Mark Antony, allowed Herod to be king over this region because he had a lot of strong qualities.
 - Herod was rich, he was loyal to Rome, he had excellent administrative skills, he was brilliant in his famine relief.
 - He oversaw incredible building projects, built gaudy palaces, he even rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem.
- Now he paid for all of this by placing incredible taxes on the people. At this point, historians say that up to 75% of people’s income was being taken by taxes from Herod
 - Rome didn’t care, because a huge chunk of that was being sent to them.
- Herod was a power hungry tyrant, and a paranoid one at that.
 - You see, he knew that he was a Roman puppet and would do anything to keep his perceived power...but he also knew in the

back of his mind that he could lose that power so easily.

- He hated the fact that the people of Israel saw him as an illegitimate king because he had no right, in their eyes, to the throne.
 - He wasn't in the line of any of their kings, and he was only half Jewish. And to the Jews, if you're half Jew, you're no Jew at all.
- So the older he got the more paranoid he got that people were going to try and take his throne.
- One day, he had the idea that his wife was conspiring against him and had her killed, and just to be safe, he killed her mom and brother as well.
 - Even further, a few years after that he had all 3 of his sons killed for the same reason.
- So the Jewish people have this paranoid lunatic that is driving them into poverty, ruling over them, and it's in this context that Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judea

- Bethlehem is significant because that was the birthplace of King David, where the true royal line of the Jewish people comes from. This was also where Ruth met Boaz and Jacob buried his wife Rachel.
- There was a lot of history in this little town, but it was so small that it wasn't even worth counting as a town.
 - In numbers 26 when they are listing the clans of Judah, Bethlehem gets left out because it's too small.
- But Micah prophecies in chapter 5 verse 2 ***“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel”- Micah 5:2 (ESV)***
- **JESUS CAME FOR THE FORGOTTEN**
- There is no doubt that God was intentional about having His Son born in a place that was so small it was seen as insignificant. A town

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that was overlooked. A town that was Forgotten.

- This point is also furthered in Luke 2, when the very first people the angels announce the birth of Jesus too, are shepherds.
 - It didn't get much lower of a job in that society than shepherds. They were considered untrustworthy and unclean. Shepherds were outcasted, overlooked, and forgotten.
- Yet, these are the first one's that God proclaims the Good News too. And not only that, He then compares Himself to this class!
 - Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd, and down in verse 6, the quoted prophecy says that the Ruler will come and Shepherd God's people.
- You see, what we see as small, God can make significant. What we may pass over, God pursues!

- And that point is amplified in the fact that in Matthews account, the first people he mentions coming to seek and worship Jesus, are wise men from the east!

- **JESUS CAME FOR THE FORBIDDEN**

- Now, I might destroy some of your nativity scenes here, but I want to give you an accurate picture of what is going on.
- First off, these "wise men," wouldn't have been there at Jesus' birth: Absolute earliest is 6th months. More likely year and a half-2 years.
- Second, we all know the song that says, "We Three Kings of Orient Are!"
 - No, you Aren't!
 - *Not just 3, there would have been a whole caravan of travelers with them...*
- These guys are not kings. The most accurate translation is Magi. Where we get the word Magic.

- These were guys that dabbled in the dark arts. They weren't kings, this was like Gandolf and Dumbledore coming to seek Jesus
- These were the type of guys that the people of Israel would have been forbidden to be around. They would have been warned to stay away from them.
- They practiced dark arts and pagan worship and yet God met them right in the middle of where they were
- We should never be quick to reject those that God is willing to redeem
- Jesus proved this over and over again in His ministry when He healed the lepers, He protected the prostitute, He set free the demon possessed, He ate with the sinners, He had in his inner circle, fishermen, tax collectors and zealots.
 - Because He came to seek and to save the lost! He said, "Its not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick!"
- Matthew wants us to get this, because he says, "***..behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem***"- ***Matthew 2:1***
 - Behold: PAY ATTENTION DON'T MISS THIS!
 - "Wise men from the east have come," and why have they come? Verse 2 says that came...
- ***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."***
 - Not "born TO BE King of the Jews"...He is already, at His birth, fully King
- They say that they saw His star in the east:
 - Now much speculation has been made about what this star actually was. Some say it might have been a comet, a supernova, or it was the time when Jupiter and Saturn aligned in orbit to make a brighter star.

- All of those theories have holes, but either way it's besides the point
- And the point is that- God supernaturally intervened in order to draw a pagan people from a foreign land to Himself
 - Now we don't know exactly where these people are from. But it is likely that they came from the Babylonian or Persian regions, where the Jews had once been exiled.
 - Because while they were exiled, you had those like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were added to the wise men of those regions and the scriptures would have been added to the literature for all the wise men to study
- And in their study, they may have come across Balaam's prophecy of the coming Messiah in Numbers chapter 24: ***"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,"-Numbers 24:17 (NKJV)***
- Whatever it was, they were drawn to come and worship the Infant King, what this tells me that...
- Yes, Jesus came for the Forgotten, He came for the Forbidden, but the reality is:
 - **JESUS CAME FOR ALL**
 - Matthew is intentional about beginning His Gospel with people from the nations coming to see Him, and ends His Gospel with Jesus telling us to go and tell the nations about Him
 - Isaiah prophecies about these wise men coming to see Jesus, in Isaiah chapter 60 when he said, ***"And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord."* Isaiah 60: 3-6 (ESV-Condensed)**
 - God has always been about bringing all people to Himself. He saved and preserved

one nation so that He could bring the King of All Nations into the world

- Like the angels told the shepherds in Luke 2, this is “**good news of great joy that will be for ALL the people.**”
- **2 Peter 2:9 “...not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance.”**
- **Romans 1:16 “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, for ALL who believe”**
- **John 3:16 “For God so loved the WORLD, that He gave his only Son, that WHOEVER believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**
- I don't care where you have come from, or what your background holds. or if you feel like like you have been forgotten or overlooked, or have lived a lifestyle you feel like would be God-forbidden...
 - There is not a single person on the planet that the Gospel is not FOR

- Now, there are many that won't accept Him, but that doesn't mean the Gospel isn't just as readily available to them
- And because of God's heart for the nations, Christianity, statistically speaking, is the most ethnically diverse movement in history.
- Believe it or not, Christianity is not an American institution. We may be arguably the most resourced believers on the planet, but that does not mean that we are the majority of the believers in the Global Church.
 - This is one of the things that separates Christianity from every religion on the planet, because every other religion on the planet is dominated by a specific region. At least 80 percent of the followers of any other major religion are concentrated on a single continent.
- However, **“Christianity has roughly 20% of its followers in Africa, 20% in Asia, 20% in Europe, 20% in North America, and 20% in South America...Christianity, statistically**

speaking, has no dominate culture. It is the most diverse movement in history.”- JD Greear: Gaining by Losing

- We would be remised if we didn't reflect our saviors heart for all nations and all people in our own lives because we know the day is coming when people from every nation and every tribe and every tongue will bow at His Great Name and confess that He is Lord and He is King...
- But the question for us today is, how are we going to respond to His Kingship?
- We see in the coming verses, 3 very different responses to His Kingship
- ***“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 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. So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:***

‘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.’”

- Sidenote: You Cannot Seek God without Scripture
- You see God supernaturally intervned to draw these wise men to His Son, but they couldn't find Him until they consulted the Scripture
- So when we look at scripture, we aren't just looking at a set of outdated stories, we are looking at the very heart and character of God who wants to tell you who He is and where He is
- So the Pharisees told them that they could find Him in Bethlehem and in verse 7 continues..
- ***“Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 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.” 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 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.”
-Matthew 2:3-11 (NKJV)

- So, again, in this passage we see three responses to the Kingship of Jesus

- First, **HEROD OPPOSED HIM**
- Herod had no intention of ever worshipping Jesus, in fact in verse 12, we see God has to tell the wise men, in a dream, to not go back to Herod, and then tell Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and go hide in Egypt.

- Because, once Herod realized that he had been tricked by the wise men, he ordered that every male child, two years old and under, in Bethlehem and the its surrounding area to be killed.
- This paranoid lunatic was terrified and absolutely opposed the Kingship of Jesus, because... Jesus was a threat to His Throne.
 - And he was right, Jesus absolutely was a threat to his throne
- And further than that, we should all unequivocally understand that Jesus is a threat to our Throne as well
 - Because when Jesus comes into our lives He comes to be Master, Ruler, and King to sit on the throne of our hearts
 - And He is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all
- And that is the number 1 reason why people will adamantly opposed His Kingship because they would much rather be king of their own

lives and make up their own rules rather than submitting to His divine authority

- But if we are to learn anything from the O.T., if history shows us anything, it's.... that. doesn't. work.
- The ONLY path to a fulfilled, purposeful, eternal life is found in submitting to the Kingship of Jesus
- Herod opposed Him and:
 - **THE PRIESTS IGNORED HIM**
- When they inquired of the priests and scribes as to where they could find the Baby Messiah, they knew right away, that He would be in Bethlehem.
- They already knew, they had been trained their entire lives in the scriptures, they knew them frontwards and backwards, but we don't see them making the 5 mile journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to seek the King
- In fact, verse 3 says that Herod was troubled, and all of Jerusalem was troubled with him

- Now the rest of Jerusalem was most likely troubled because they were afraid that their paranoid, lunatic of a king was probably going to lose his mind
- But nonetheless, there is no record of any of the Jews or the priests going to look for their Messiah
- They passed it off as fake news, probably a false alarm, they thought, *"there's no way that these foreigners would know about Him before we did"*
 - There's no urgency, there's not much care
- In the same way today, many people hear about this King and this Savior but it's not a big deal
 - It could be fake news, it could be true, but either way its whatever..
 - To which CS Lewis replies, ***"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance, the only thing it***

cannot be is moderately important.”

— C.S. Lewis

- If there is the slightest chance that it is true, that the Messiah has come, that God really has come down in the person of Jesus Christ, lived on this earth and died and rose again so that you could have the opportunity to have a relationship with Him and be with Him for all eternity...this is the most important news that you could ever come across in this life!
 - It cannot be ignored, it cannot be nonchalantly talked about
 - It is either complete lunacy, or it is the greatest truth ever known to mankind!
 - The King Cannot be ignored
- Herod opposed Him, the Priests ignored Him, but...
- **THE WISE MEN WORSHIPPED HIM**
 - God supernaturally drew them to Jesus, the scripture pointed them to Jesus, and their response was to worship Jesus

- This mysterious star led them to Israel, their common thought would be that the King was born in the palace, so they check there and realize that He was actually in the small town of Bethlehem
- And when they begin to make the extra journey, this star miraculously appears before them again and leads them straight to Jesus
- And they get to the house and see Jesus, and not only do they posture themselves before Him to pay homage and respect to the King, but then they give Him their best
- They followed the prophecies in order to find Him, but little did they know that the gifts that they presented to Him would be a prophecy in and of themselves!
- Real quick, let's look at what these gifts mean
- **The Gold** that they presented **represented His Royalty, His Kingship**
 - Gold was the most prominent gift that would be presented to any king and it was the most

intellectually fitting and culturally appropriate gift that they would give to one that they recognized as King

- So that one makes the most common sense
- However, the next two weren't as typical gifts... and most likely the wise men didn't even understand their deeper meaning, they just knew that they were very valuable and practical gifts.

- **Frankincense represented His Priesthood**

- In the Israelite culture, for generations, the priests would use the oil called frankincense while they were performing sacrifices
- The priests, in the Old Testament, would once a year make a sacrifice as a temporary payment for the sins of the collective people.
 - This was the Day of Atonement, or Yon Kipur
- On this day, the priest would sacrifice an innocent animal in the Holy of Holies, and then would light some frankincense that allowed the

smoke to rise to the heavens that represented the cries of the people for God's mercy.

- Then the priest would take the blood of the animal, and sprinkle it onto what was called the Mercy Seat, to symbolize the death of an innocent one in place of the guilty ones... in place of the sins of the people.
- Why would God do this?
- What we have to understand that while God is Merciful, He is also just, and because God is just, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished
 - So He set up this temporary system where His Justice could be satisfied but at the same time could still show Mercy to the people that He loved, in this temporary atonement for their sins.
- But now, Hebrews tells us, ***“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.” -Hebrews 4:14 (ESV)***

- ***“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” -Hebrews 10:11-12, 14 (ESV)***
 - The Frankincense represented the priestly service that Jesus would provide for all who would accept Him, and the Myrrh represented the sacrifice that He would make
- **Myrrh represented His Death**
- Myrrh was a very expensive oil, actually would have been more valuable than the gold at this time, and it had 2 major functions. For perfume, and for embalming.
 - The next time that we see Myrrh mentioned is in John 19 when Nicodemus is burying Jesus in a rich man’s tomb, after He came off

of the cross, and he applies Myrrh and mixture of aloes to His corpse.

- Little did they know, that 3 days later, He would walk out of that Tomb and change the course of history and eternity FOREVER!
 - Herod opposed Him, but He was the True and Greater King
 - The Priests Ignored Him, but He was the True and Greater Priest
 - And not only would He facilitate the sacrifice, but He would be the True and Greater Sacrifice Himself
- That gave His life for you and for me...
 - When we were Forgotten, He found us
 - When we were Forbidden, He forgave us
 - And now He freely offers His love for all
- He is Emmanuel, which means GOD WITH US
 - Which means you don’t have to go looking for Him because He came looking for you

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Don't you miss Christmas as a kid? It was so magical, because very rarely did we ever question the gifts that we got. It didn't matter what we opened up on Christmas morning, it was the greatest thing ever! You could give me a pine cone and a paperclip and I was gonna have a blast unwrapping it and a blast playing with it somehow. That is before we get to the age, and scholars and theologians cannot agree when this exact age is for the human being, but there does come an age where we begin to scrutinize the gifts. Have you noticed this? There comes a point in time in our childhood where if the gift isn't exactly what I wanted, I don't want it. And then that boils over into the teenage years where nothing is impressive, and then whenever we get to the adult phase, we have to learn how to interpret what the gift means. This is why I do not miss the dating process, whatsoever. Especially at the beginning, gift giving can be a difficult and dangerous process. Especially whenever you don't know the person that well yet, a gift can be interpreted a number of different ways. And this goes for men and women. Say a woman gets a guy that she recently begun to see, a new wallet. What's that supposed to mean, are you trying to say that my financial situation isn't up to your standards? Are you trying to say that I am an unorganized individual and I need to get my life together?? What are you trying to say??? Now, say the guy, gets the girl, some article of new clothing...This

can go very poorly. First, you run the risk of them thinking that you put no thought whatsoever into the gift, even if you did. Also, because of how complicated women's clothing is, you run the HUGE risk of getting the wrong size. THEN, what's that supposed to mean? You get a size too big, "What are you trying to say, I'm overweight?!" You get a size too small, "What are you trying to say, I need to lose weight?!" It's just better, just to....not.

And it's not just in gift giving, in the beginning of the dating process, every single move has to be carefully calculated and navigated because there are so many unsaid assumptions. For example, a few months before I met Rachel I went on a legitimate blind date...and normally on the first date, you are going to think through carefully what you are going to order because you don't know that it could say about you. You don't want to get something too much or too messy so you don't look like a pig, and you don't want to get too little so you don't look cheap. But I was in a different frame of mind on this date, I'm thinking, "I'm in my upper 20's, I'm over playing these little dating games, I'm gonna get what I want. And you know what? I want a steak!" I'm looking at the menu, I find the steak section, and oh, this one comes with cauliflower. I like cauliflower, my mom used to make the best cooked cauliflower, so I ordered the cauliflower steak. However, when I received my food, there was no

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steak. There was no meat, there was no flesh of any kind, I was literally paying upwards of \$20 for a hunk of grilled cauliflower! What kind of sick world do we live in! And there was nothing I could do, I couldn't send it back, because I ordered it. I was so in shock that I couldn't find anything witty to say about it, so I just let it go and pretend that, "Yep, this is what I wanted." I and noticed the eyebrows from the girl who had to be thinking, "Oh, he's one of those guys..." Needless to say, I never saw that girl again. But i met my wife a few months later and I ordered well on our first date...