

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

“RESPONDING TO THE BIRTH OF CHRIST THE KING”

For individual study or discussion

In Matthew 2:1-12 we encounter the familiar Christmas story of Jesus’ birth where Magi travel from the East to pay homage to the “king of the Jews” as they follow his star. In fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, these unlikely visitors **respond to the birth of Christ the King** with joyful worship. Today’s passage outlines *three possible responses to the birth of Christ the King: hostility to the King, indifference to the King, or joyful worship of the King.*

Hostility to the King (vv. 1-3, 7-8, 12)

Guided by the star, the wise men travel to Jerusalem. While in the capital city of Judea they inquire of Herod, “*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*” (v. 2). Known for systematically killing off anyone considered as a threat to his rule¹, troubled Herod seeks to locate his rival in order to destroy him (vv. 12-13). According to theologian, F. Dale Bruner, “*In Herod we see in person what theology calls Original Sin. Herod is not merely the Gospel villain; he is Everyman. Herod teaches that a reaction of raw human nature to the kingship of Jesus is rebellion. If Jesus is Lord, then we are not.*”¹

- Herod’s fear and trouble resided in the Christ child’s threat to his identity. In the kingdoms of our lives, how can Jesus’ identity as King challenge or threaten you?
- The opening of Matthew’s gospel introduces Jesus as the *Son of David* and the *Son of Abraham* (1:1). Read Genesis 12:1-3. What is significant about God’s promise to Abraham as it relates to the Magi from the East?

Indifference to the King (vv. 4-6)

The foreign visitors seek answers from Herod. They want to know where to find the newborn King. Herod does not have answers but seeks out the teachers of the law who point him to the prophecy of Micah 5. Excited, the Magi leave Jerusalem to seek out the child in Bethlehem. But the response of the leaders of the church is not excitement that the king has finally come to his people, they are indifferent. Bruner states, “*It is precisely now that the irony occurs. The despised astrologers, who have nothing but their natural idols, are led to Israel, who has the written Word of God. And when the Word is heard, it is the pagans who follow it, while the leadership of the people of God sit complacently or conspiratorially at home.*”²

- The star (general revelation) leads the Magi to Jerusalem. But it isn’t enough. What is it that leads them to Christ?
- Both the church leaders and Magi hear about the birth of the Messiah. Compare the indifference of the chief priests and scribes to the respect that the Magi have toward the Christ child. How does this illuminate your understanding of the upside-down Kingdom of God?

Joyful worship of the King (vv. 1-2, 9-11)

When the Magi arrive in Bethlehem, they are overcome with joy. And their response to being in the presence of the Christ child is that they fall down and worship him (v. 11). These wealthy, scholarly men from the East recognize they are not worthy to be in the presence of such majesty and glory. They worship the child by presenting him with kingly gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- Read Psalm 72:10-11, 15 and Isaiah 60:1-6. In these passages we read of prophecies about kings bringing gifts and nations bowing down before Israel’s King. Does knowing that God fulfills his promises lead you to joyful worship of the King?
- Describe the hostility against God seen in our world today. How about indifference? There’s a little bit of Herod in each of us wanting to be king at all costs. Are we willing to sacrifice our time, our treasures, even ourselves so that we can joyfully worship him?

DATE: December 29, 2024

SPEAKER: Frank/Wil

SERIES: Christmastide

PASSAGE: Matthew 2:1-12

RENEW: 31 Days of Prayer

DAY 17: The Fruit of the Spirit—Faithfulness

PRAYER: Faithful God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments to a thousand generations, we honor and adore you. We give exuberant thanks that your never-ending love extends to the heavens and your faithfulness to the clouds. Your character is unchanging and trustworthy. You keep all of your promises and we are glad. We confess that we are not like you. We are promise breakers who struggle to keep our vows and honor our word. Forgive us for the countless ways that we fail you and others in our wavering and wandering. Help us to keep our allegiance to you, day by day and moment by moment, in thought, word, and deed. Enable us to keep every vow that we have taken, whether in marriage, vocation, baptism, or in membership in your church. Grant us faithful friendship in community as we serve others above self and endure together with patience in trial and trouble. Beloved Master, when our race on earth is finished, we long to hear you say to us, “*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*” Please make it so, Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹ Josephus, Flavius. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XV. <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/ant-15.html>. December 19, 2024.

² Bruner, F. Dale. *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12, Volume 1*. 1987, Grand Rapids, MI. William Eerdmans Publishing. 58-65