

## Christmas Unwrapped “The Magi’s Worship” Matthew 2:1-12

### Introduction

- [Slide #1] I came across a recent column on msnbc.com that described readers worst Christmas gifts.<sup>1</sup>
- From [Grapevine, Texas](#). “I have known since I was 17 that I did not want children. My sister never understood or honored that. One Christmas, after I had been married 15 years, she got me a tee shirt that said ‘I can’t believe I forgot to have children.’ It is one gift I threw away and never acknowledged.”
- From [Rhode Island](#). “My sister gave my acne medication for Christmas.”
- From [Las Vegas, Nevada](#). “I received a trash can from my in-laws. It was the only gift I received from them that year and I didn’t ask for it so it was not an expected or needed thing. I thought it sent a pretty clear message on what they thought of my home though.”
- From [Spokane, Washington](#). “On Christmas Day my gift from my in-laws (whom I had paid airfare for the visit) gave me an ironing board. I detest ironing.”
- From [Lubbock, Texas](#). “I received a marriage help book from my mother-in-law one year. None of her other daughters-in-law got one of these... and there wasn’t any sort of trouble in the marriage to prompt this gift, either. Her poor mistreated son and I have been happily married now for 17 years.”
- From [Connecticut](#). “My worst gift ever was from my mother-in-law. A used popcorn popper with old, rancid butter in the melting cup! (And it wasn’t a joke!)”
- From [Godfrey, Illinois](#). “I had a friend who just moved into a new home. I had a piece of pottery custom made for this friend in her home colors. On the back a personal message of friendship was inscribed. In return, I got a plastic package of instant broccoli soup.”
- From [Moorhead, Minnesota](#). One reader received “Queen Size pantyhose from my husband’s female boss. And I am nowhere near a queen size person.”
- And lastly, this shocker from [Billings, Montana](#). “My still-new husband bought me a second-hand, ratty, stained pair of maternity sweat pants when I was six-months pregnant. The sweats weren’t even gift-wrapped. They were still in a bag from the consignment store they were purchased from.”

### Transition

All joking aside, the one person who knows how to give really good gifts is God. The goal for us this Christmas season is to unwrap what Christmas is all about—unwrap God’s greatest gift. Last week we looked at Matthew 1:18-25, that Jesus is Immanuel, the promise of God with us.

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<sup>1</sup> © 2008 MSNBC, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28072114/>

This morning we're going to take the wraps off of Matthew 2:1-12. [Slide #2] Part of what it means to unwrap Christmas means unwrapping the idea that...

### Proposition

- **Jesus is the shepherd ruler of God's people**
- The sad truth is that we all have rejected God by doing things our own way. Or as Isaiah 53:6 puts it, *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.* We are renegade sheep. We don't like someone telling us what to do or how to do it, especially God, and so we rebel against his rule. We do that by ignoring him. By disobeying his instructions for how to live. We are self-sufficient rebels. And this rejection of God's rule makes our lives a mess. The results of our attempts to rule our own lives are misery, suffering and injustice. We have failed miserably at self-rule. What we need most is exactly what God has provided; a shepherd ruler to lead us, to corral us and focus us, to straighten out the mess we make of our lives. God's Christmas gift to us is **Jesus—the shepherd ruler.**
- I want you to turn for a second to Jeremiah 23:5. While Matthew doesn't expressly mention Jeremiah 23:5 here, Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi fulfills God's promise in Jeremiah 23 "to raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely."<sup>2</sup> Look at what God said to Jeremiah. *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.*
- That's the emphasis in Matthew 2:1-12. Jesus is presented to us as a king. He doesn't grow into his kingship and kingdom. He's born a king. From the very beginning he's God's appointed ruler to shepherd and lead his people. **Jesus is the shepherd ruler of God's people.**
- Matthew presents Jesus to us, this shepherd ruler, through the eyes of four different characters: through the eyes of Herod, through the eyes of the people of Jerusalem, through the eyes of the religious leaders of the day, and through the eyes of the Magi.<sup>3</sup> Each of these four characters in the drama responds to the announcement of one *born king of the Jews* differently. Which one best represents your reaction to the news of Jesus' birth?

### Transition

Look at [verses 1-2](#). *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*

### Main Points

- Some time after Jesus was born, maybe a couple of years later, these Magi show up from the east. The word Magi means *wiseman*, someone who was especially acquainted with the interpretation of stars and dreams.<sup>4</sup> They're basically astrologers. *We saw his star in the east* as [verse 2](#) says.
- Let's do a little myth busting for a second. First off, you probably should strike the Magi from your picture of the manger scene. This image we have of three wisemen kneeling in a

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<sup>2</sup> Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, p. 176. I'm indebted to how I've come to see and outline this passage through this work.

<sup>4</sup> Reinecker, p. 2-3.

manger before a baby Jesus just isn't part of the Bible. They arrive probably a year after Jesus is born. [Verse 11](#) says, *on coming to the house*. Joseph and Mary have long moved on from the manger. When you set up your manger scene at home maybe you should put the Magi some place on the other side of the room. Second, the carol *We Three Kings*? The Bible never specifies the number of Magi that show up. Nowhere does it say three Magi show up at Herod's place. Lastly, nowhere does the Bible say these guys were kings. They're Magi. Wisemen. Astrologers.

- And apparently, spurred on by astrological calculations, they show up from the east searching for a place, Bethlehem, and for a king.<sup>5</sup> They make their way to King Herod's court with a very specific question, *Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?* The Magi's question was not, Where is He who has been born *to become* King of the Jews? but, Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?<sup>6</sup> They're looking for a king.
- Can you imagine Herod's reaction? All of his courtiers standing around. The place is hopping. Herod's attendant makes the announcement. A hush falls over the court. The Magi are ushered in. Foreigners. And standing before Herod, the King, they ask to see the *king of the Jews*. Herod probably knows right away he's not the one they're looking for. He knows they're asking for someone other than him. And because Herod is somewhat of a puppet king himself, his reaction is one of suspicion.
- As [D.A. Carson](#) points out, "Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. He was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife, and at least two of his sons."<sup>7</sup>
- Can you imagine the reaction of this paranoid puppet king when the Magi ask their question? Herod's reaction is one of suspicion and paranoia. He calls the religious leaders of the day, the chief priests and teachers of the law, to learn more. He wants to know where this King was born. He feigns interest, [verse 7](#), so that the Magi might reveal the current location of this child King. *Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."* He's not interested in worshiping this king. We know from [verse 13](#), he wants to kill this king. He's trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together so he can carry out the logical result of his paranoid suspicion.
- There are some today, who when they hear of the birth of the King, born to reign as God's shepherd ruler, are suspicious of the idea just like Herod. [[Slide #3](#)] Maybe you're here this morning and you identify with Herod. You're suspicious. Maybe you're even paranoid. Paranoid of the thought of someone other than yourself ruling your life. The thought of

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<sup>5</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

<sup>6</sup> Costable, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

giving up control to another, to Jesus, to allow him to rule your life and govern you, the thought of it throws you into a state of paranoid suspicion. Maybe you've done everything you can to wipe clean from your life this notion that there is a rightful ruler of your life and it is not you, it is Jesus.

- This Christmas God is asking you to stop being suspicious of his gift. His gift is not for your harm it is for your benefit. What he's asking you to do is hard. Incredibly hard. He's asking you to give up and admit that as the puppet king of your own life you've made a mess of things. He's asking you to admit that you have no right to the throne of your life. He's asking you to admit that Jesus is your true King and that God can rule your life through Jesus far more effectively than you can yourself. Giving up control to this shepherd king Jesus is part of what it means to unwrap Christmas.

### Transition

I want you to see a [second reaction](#) to the news of the birth of King Jesus.

- Look at verse 3. [Verse 3](#) says, *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.* The word *disturbed* means to be thrown into confusion.<sup>8</sup> When the citizens of Jerusalem heard the report about Jesus, about *one born king of the Jews*, they were disturbed—literally thrown into confusion.
- [\[Slide #4\]](#) There are some today, who when they hear of the birth of the King, are confused just like Jerusalem. Maybe you're here this morning and that's you. You've heard the Christmas story countless times but you still don't get it. You're looking for God to do something in your life other than a baby in a manger. You're looking for help from him in some other form. The kind of miracle you need doesn't wear diapers.
- This Christmas God is trying to clear up your confusion. His gift is not meant to cause you scratch your head. God's gift is meant to bring you peace and joy and hope. In the words of [J.I. Packer](#), "The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father's will Jesus Christ became poor and was born in a stable so that thirty years later he might hang on a cross."<sup>9</sup> His gift is meant to end the confusion about what life is all about and how you should live it. God has provided you a shepherd ruler to guide you through life. Understanding this and yielding to his rule is part of what it means to unwrap Christmas.

### Transition

There is a [third reaction](#). And it comes from the religious leaders of the day. Listen again to verses 3-6. *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."*

- The religious leaders of the day, *the chief priests and teachers of the law*, are called in to clear up the confusion surrounding the location of Jesus' birth. Herod asks them where the Christ, where the Messiah, Israel's savior was to be born. Bethlehem is the answer. And then as proof of this unlikely choice, the religious leaders quote the Old Testament, Micah

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<sup>8</sup> Reinecker, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 63

5:2. "For this is what the prophet has written, 6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

- Micah prophesied in 8<sup>th</sup> century BC that God would one day raise up a ruler, a leader for his people who would tend to them, lead them, shepherd them, guide them. "Micah consciously predicted that the tiny city of Bethlehem would produce an Israelite king."<sup>10</sup> The religious leaders know that. And yet, don't you find it intriguing that they do nothing? They know where the Messiah was to be born. And yet they're content to quote scripture and do nothing.<sup>11</sup> They don't go looking for this King like the Magi. They make no effort to check out Jesus' birth. They give their report and then they're gone. We hear nothing from them again.
- [Slide #5] There are some today, who even though they know a great deal about the birth of Christ are apathetic in their knowledge just like the religious leaders. Maybe you're here this morning and that's you; that's your reaction. You know lots about the Christmas story. You may think you know everything there is to know about Jesus' birth. But you've done nothing with that knowledge. You know what? Formal knowledge of the God's word is not enough. Just knowing what Scripture says doesn't cut it.

### Transition

There is only one **proper reaction** to the birth of the King. [Slide #6] And we see it in the response of the Magi. It's worship. Look at verses 9-12. *After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

- The news of Christ's birth evokes many different kinds of reactions. Suspicion. Confusion. Apathy. There is only one reaction fitting for the *one born king of the Jews*. Worship. The worship of the Magi here fulfills God's word from Psalm 72:10-11 which says, *The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. 11 All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.*
- The Magi are an example for us. They responded to the birth of Jesus Christ, God's gift, the way God wants us to respond. Their reaction is how we are to react. They worshiped and we are to worship. They brought gifts worthy of a king. We are to bring gifts in worship worthy of a king.
- Ironically, the Magi knew less than the other characters in the story. But they acted on what they knew to the fullest. God is not asking you to figure everything out. But he is asking you to act on what you do know. As one commentator points out, "The Magi will be like the men of Nineveh who will rise up in judgment and condemn those who, despite their privilege of much greater light, did not receive the promised Messiah and bow to his reign."<sup>12</sup> He's

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<sup>10</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Doriani, p. 177.

<sup>12</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

asking you, maybe or the first time, to bow to the reign of the shepherd ruler Jesus. Part of what it means to unwrap Christmas is to worship **Jesus the shepherd ruler of God's people.**

### **Conclusion**

- We are all great worshipers because we were made to worship. And so we all worship something. The question for us this Christmas season is what are we worshiping? This Christmas God is asking you, pleading with you, wooing you to worship Jesus. Worshiping Jesus means his agenda becomes your agenda. His priorities become your priorities. His way of life becomes your way of life. His attitude about things becomes your attitude. It means daily offering your body as a living sacrifice to do the bidding of the King. [Slide #7] If you have never been moved to the point of worship by the Christmas story then you have missed out on what Christmas is really all about. Because without worship Christmas remains wrapped up, an unopened box, an undiscovered gift. Open the gift. Let's pray.