

Jesus the Shepherd

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[0 : 00] This morning we're going to be looking at the story in Matthew, and what we see in Matthew that you don't pick up from Luke is the story about the wise men.

So that's where we're going to be centered this morning. The centerpiece obviously is Jesus because it's his birth, but the action, most of it, is going to be around the wise men. And there'll be a few other people that we're going to look at, the chief priests and the scribes and also King Herod himself. We're going to look at their actions to the birth of Christ.

And the reason we're going to do that is because if we look at their actions, you can kind of put everyone that has ever lived and died and will live, their reactions to Jesus will fall in these basic three categories.

And so we're going to see that because I think it's helpful for us as we look at ourselves and ask that question, what do I do with Jesus, especially during this season where we celebrate his birth? And you also might be wondering, as we look at the wise men, what is so important about the wise men? Why are we taking time this morning in this sermon to discuss the wise men?

[1 : 17] And it's important because the wise men represent the Gentiles, or more specifically, they represent us.

They were the ones that were outside of the chosen ones, the family of God. If you remember, Jesus or God first comes to the shepherds and tells them about the birth of Christ and they come to see the Christ child.

Those were the locals, the Jews, the people who were of God. But then they were those who were far off, like the wise men.

They weren't part of the family of God, but they knew about God. They knew about the Jews. And so the wise men, as we look in the story, are going to represent us who were outside, but because of Christ, have been brought in and are able to be a part of the family of God.

So that's why it's important this morning, because it's for us. This Jesus that was born, his life, his death, for us, so that we can be part of that.

[2 : 38] We're going to read Matthew chapter 2, the first 12 verses. Let's pray before we begin. Lord, we come humbly before you and before your word.

And we ask this morning that you teach us, that you open our eyes and our ears and our hearts. You would take away distractions and you would help us to see what you have for us in your word in these verses.

Teach us today, Lord. Encourage us today. And Lord, we give you the praise and the glory.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, who we worship and remember and celebrate today. In his name, amen. Matthew chapter 2, verse 1.

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?

[3 : 49] For we saw his star when it rose and had come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child.

And when you have found him, bring me one, that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went

before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

[5 : 06] Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

I'm going to try to leave out a lot of extra stuff in our messages this morning. Because as I was doing research on some of the things in these verses, it's easy to just keep digging.

And digging and reading stories and finding out more. And so, I'm going to try to do that. But, there are a lot of stories about the wise men.

Who were the wise men. And we're going to get into that. I remember growing up, we had a manger scene that we would set up as part of our Christmas decoration.

And it had this cool roof to the stable, right? So, as a kid, I would use it as like a runway for planes and helicopters.

[6 : 14] They could like bring people in to see Jesus and then take back off. I don't know where that came from. It was just cool as a kid. But I remember when I learned that the wise men weren't there for the birth of Jesus.

They came later. So, you know, when mom would set up the nativity, I would move the wise men further away, right? They had to go to the piano or maybe the other side of the couch.

Because they needed more time to get there. I say that because there are some details about this story that may not line up exactly with what you had in your mind as a child.

And that is okay. There's details that aren't in there that it's okay to embellish or grow or add details to. But there are some details that I want to be faithful to the story that Matthew writes.

So, I want to bring those out. And again, if those details aren't there, then our imagination is free to fill those in. Keeping in mind that Matthew doesn't want us to get hung up on the details.

[7 : 21] The details he wants us to know are the details that he has written for us. So, as we look at verses 1 and 2, it says, Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of hearing the king, Behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.

There's a lot of tradition around wise men. Were they kings? Were they not kings? There is a popular tradition that they were three kings.

They even had names and they came from specific countries. They came dressed up on camels. And it's a really beautiful picture. It makes a really beautiful Christmas card.

And that may be true. It may not be true. Again, without the details, it's easy to, if you're telling a story, to build on that story. And so, over years, those traditions grow and are expanding.

But the names of the kings didn't come into existence until hundreds of years after the birth of Christ. And so, it does lead you to question, were they kings or were they not?

[8 : 30] Matthew doesn't say they're kings. And yet he has no problem calling King Herod a king. Or Jesus, King of the Jews. But wise men, or magi, as some may translate, comes from a word that originally refers to a class of wise men from the area of Persia.

Wise men would be something like a priest or a philosopher. They were educated and respected men that knew about biblical prophecies. They read ancient texts.

They studied stars. They were astronomers as well. And so, it was common for these magi and these wise men to serve under kings for the purpose of counseling them.

For helping them make decisions and even interpreting nature, stars, what was going on at certain times of the year. One example of this we see in the Bible is of Daniel.

Just to give a quick summary. King Belshazzar of Babylon throws a big party, right? And in that party, totally against God, he brings in gold and silver vessels that were taken from the temple.

[9 : 46] And he uses them to pour wine and to party it up with his wives and all the other people in the land. And during this party, a hand appears on the wall.

Just a hand. And it writes a message. As you can imagine, he's a little freaked out. And it says in Daniel 5, starting in verse 7, The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans and the astrologers.

The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, Whoever reads this writing and shows me its interpretation shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be third ruler in the kingdom.

But all the wise men, they come in and they're unable to interpret or know what this saying is. Next, the queen comes in and in verse 11, it says, There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods.

In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers because of excellent spirit and knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams and explain riddles and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar.

[11 : 13] And as you know, Daniel comes in and interprets the dream because of knowledge and wisdom that God gave him. Daniel was named among the magicians, the astrologers.

He was chief of the wise men. And so you can see from this story how wise men were prominent and influential. If they were kings, they could have easily been connected to kings and came with that power as they traveled around.

Where did they come from? It says in verse one that they came from the east. Not a lot of detail there. There's a lot of countries that are east. If you look at Jerusalem and you go east, obviously there's a lot of countries there.

Popular thought is that it was from Babylon or Persia. Both were east of Jerusalem. Babylon being where Baghdad is now.

If you continue to go east, you'll hit Iran. So in either case, Balor being the closest, that would have been roughly a 40 days journey to get from where they were to Jerusalem.

[12 : 29] And so that also tells us that they wouldn't have been able to get there for Jesus' birth because they were too far away. And we also know from later in this passage that when they showed up, they came to the house where Jesus was.

And they didn't come to the manger where he was born. So a lot of what we don't know, who exactly they were, where they came from.

But there is a detail that is important that Matthew tells us. That's in verse two. Why they came. They were looking for the one who was born king of the Jews because they saw his star when it rose.

Some of your Bibles may have a foot, a note there for when it rose. It could be translated his star in the east. Basically, they were east and they saw a star.

And so they came to Jerusalem. Notice, too, that Matthew doesn't see that the wise men followed the star to Jerusalem. But that they saw a star.

[13 : 41] See, the star, like at other times, a star was an astronomical sign of something. In this case, signifying a royal birth.

A birth that the wise men had been waiting for. And through their knowledge of scripture, they connected it to the promised Messiah, the king of the Jews.

So when they saw it, they knew what it meant. Not knowing where to go, the first obvious choice is Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where the center of Jewish worship took place.

So that made sense. Let's go to Jerusalem. But imagine their surprise when they show up. But see no one expecting a king.

They see no one looking for a king. Imagine if, and this doesn't apply for everybody, I know it's a very small example.

[14 : 43] But think about if you were in your workplace and you have a specific title. And some, a group of people show up and they're looking for that title. We're looking for, in my case, I'm a systems administrator.

They're looking for the new systems administrator. Well, that's me. No, no, no. We've been told that there's one that's been born. We're looking for him. Or someone comes and tells Sean, we're looking for the lead elder for Trinity Community Church.

Or Trinity Cambridge Church. Have you seen him yet? He's been, no, no, no. There's someone else. That would be a little troubling to think about. So you can imagine as the news that there's a group of people looking for the king of the Jews.

When that news gets to King Herod, he's troubled by that. What do you mean? I am the king of the Jews. Rome assigned me this position of the king.

It is also interesting that Jesus was born king. Most earthly kings are chosen or elected.

[15 : 56] Or if they're born in a royal line, they start out as a prince and then turn into a king. Jesus is born a king. So as you imagine, Herod is troubled because he fears losing his power, his place on the throne.

And we know from some of the details that Sean has shared in weeks back that Herod is already a troubled king.

He's very jealous. Even to the point of killing people to maintain his status. Known to have killed several of his children and a wife because of fear of losing his kingship.

Fear that someone else was planning something against him. So their arrival to Jerusalem stirred up trouble.

With the king. And you can imagine that if the king is troubled like that, the people under him are troubled as well. It's also why I think there was probably more than just three wise men coming by themselves.

[17 : 15] Three maybe with a larger caravan. Or maybe more wise men altogether. But to come in and to have this effect on the king and its people would have been troubling.

In verse 4 it says that Herod assembled all the chief priests and the scribes of the people. Notice that in verse 4 that Herod said he wants to know what Christ was born.

Herod makes the connection between king of the Jews and the Christ. And so he then asked them, where is this king of the Jews, this Christ to be born?

And there's no discussion. There's no huddle time. At least not that Matthew records for us. It's almost as if it is blurted out without hesitation. In Bethlehem of Judea, for it was written by the prophet.

They knew this. This was common knowledge for the religious elite, those who knew the scriptures. And in verse 6 Matthew gives a quote.

[18 : 24] This quote is taken from two different passages in the Old Testament. So I wanted to look at these two just so it didn't, so that it makes more sense if you look at that.

If you want to put that up. I'm going to share the two verses from the Old Testament. You can stay here and see the quotation as Matthew gives it. They don't exactly line up. But I want to help us understand it a little bit better.

Micah 5.2 is known as a messianic prophecy. And it says, But you, O Bethlehem, Ephraim, you are too little to be among the clans of Judah.

From you shall come forth for me one who is to be the ruler in Israel. This question that he poses, Who are too little to be among the clans of Judah?

Is actually a way of saying the opposite. Judah, aren't you little? And yet you are not too little to have been the birthplace of Israel's king.

[19 : 29] And Matthew wants to emphasize that. And so that's why there is a little bit of a rewording that we see in Matthew 6. You are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

Pointing to the line of David and reminding them of the prophecy that this one being born had to come from the line of David in Judah.

As it was prophesied ahead of time. And then he also quotes 2 Samuel 5.2. The last part of that verse. He says, This is to emphasize that the ruler, this king of the Jews, would also shepherd the people of Israel.

Not like Herod and how he was to rule over his people. But a king who loved his people and shepherd and protected them.

But these passages, while we might have to dig in to exactly see where they come from, they weren't lost on the Jews.

[20 : 37] They understood this to be about the Messiah. John 7.42 says, Before we move on, I just want to draw your attention to the chief priests and the scribes here.

When they give Herod their answer. They're the religious. They're the educated. But here, talking about the king of the Jews, they were apathetic.

They were speaking of Jesus. They knew the Old Testament and the scriptures. And the wise men had come asking then. And yet they were indifferent to it all.

It is like their life was unaffected. God again was in their midst. As he was so often in the nation of Israel's history.

And yet they still didn't believe. They didn't connect it. Their eyes remained closed to the truth. They knew the religion. But their faith was cold.

[21 : 57] And it's at this point that Herod starts his scheming. Worried about his place on the throne. He's working on his backup plan.

How he's going to get rid of this child, this king of the Jews. His feelings of being troubled are starting to grow.

And hatred is starting to seep in. And he starts this monstrous plan towards killing off this rival king that he was so worried about.

Verse 7 says that he summoned the wise men secretly. And ascertained from them, what time did you see the star?

Why would he care when the star appeared? If it was just out of curiosity, if he truly wanted to go and worship this king, then why would he ask them secretly?

[23 : 03] He didn't because if the child can't be found by the wise men, Herod has another plan to start working on. Herod's response to Jesus sounds cruel, but Herod's response actually is a lot like a lot of people.

Right? His response ranges from irritation of this thing that might change his world to fear, even to hatred.

I think we can all relate to that to some degree. Irritation about what God might want from us. Irritation that it might change our life.

Fear of being a Christian. Maybe even before being saved, maybe hatred towards the word of God. Hatred towards those Christians. This is not an uncommon reaction to Jesus. But he sends a wise men off to Bethlehem.

[24 : 21] Trying to be sincere, he says, Go. Search for him diligently. Do your best. Find him. And when you've found him, bring me back words so that I can come to him and I can worship him also.

So it's at this point where the wise men pick up their search and continue on.

This time, they're headed towards Bethlehem. Still not full with a lot of information about what to look for, right? No address to go to. I imagine on their way, they're trying to come up with a plan. How do we find this baby Jesus? We're not exactly sure how old he is. We're not sure what he looks like. Pictures we have in some picture, we see in some picture on some Christmas card, Jesus has this glow around his head, right?

So I don't think that that was going to work. I don't think they came into the place where he was and saw a glow and said that's the one. But imagine, just imagine, and they're going to Bethlehem, and they're going from house to house.

[25 : 33] How else would you do it? Excuse me, but have you had a child in the last couple months, a year? We're looking for a child. Oh, you had one?

Great. But we're looking for a special boy. Well, I have a special boy. We're looking for a special boy who's born king of the Jews. Well, I think my baby is very special, and he has potential to be anything that he wants to be.

It sounds comical, but you understand. They kind of had a difficult challenge in front of them, finding this one they were looking for. But then, behold, Matthew says, behold, because it's important, it wants to get attention to it.

Verse 9 says, The star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. And verse 10 summarizes how they felt.

Now, I don't have to worry about this crazy plan and weeks of looking for someone. They rejoice exceedingly with great joy. Why? Because God met them again.

[26 : 42] He got their attention when they were in the east with a star. And as they continued to search for him, he connected with them again with that same star, a supernatural star.

It says his star. Now, again, this is another area where the more you dig into it, you can read a lot of thoughts and theories and possibilities for what that star was.

Some that I read about were the planet Jupiter, a meteor, the North Star, and there's several others, and they're interesting thoughts. But in the end, this star was able to lead them to the house.

I don't know of very many stars that are that specific. They're up there, and they can kind of take you to a general area. But as you get close to a star, you can stand there, you can stand five miles away, it will still look like it's pointing to you.

There's something special about this star. One example that I heard was kind of like the cloud of fire that the Israelites followed through the wilderness.

[27 : 53] Just maybe in a little smaller form. Israelites were possibly millions at that time. They needed a big cloud. Wise men were a little bit smaller, and they were looking for a star.

This somehow, to them, had all the right characteristics of a star, yet had the ability to bring them to the house where Jesus was.

Before they were seeking, now the wise men are at this house. They've been seeking, and now they have found it.

They stand there, the wise men and whoever else is with them, in front of the house where Jesus now lives. Years of studying, of anticipation, of watching the stars.

Why? Because they knew something special was coming. Would it be in their lifetime? And then the star comes, and they start to plan the expense of going, and they go on this trip to find the one, and they're finally here.

[29 : 04] They stand there in front of the house where Jesus is. I was studying this yesterday in Dunkin' Donuts, and God just met me with that thought, and I'm like crying at the table, and then the guys at Dunkin' were like, dude, this guy's got issues.

But just to think about the build up of them coming and standing at the door where this supernatural star was over, the king of the Jews.

Think about that phrase, king of the Jews. It's only mentioned twice in the Bible for two situations. One is here when he's born. The star is pointing to the king of the Jews, and the next time is at his death, at his crucifixion, the sign above his head says king of the Jews.

And then they go in, and they see him. They see Jesus with his mother, the prophesied king. He's right there.

Maybe she's holding him. Maybe he's old enough to be on the floor on his hands and knees. And they drop to the floor and they worship him. It's all they can do.

[30 : 40] Something supernatural led them there. Something of God made that connection with them from this star to the king of kings and brought them here.

And they fell and worshipped him. As they worshipped, they brought out their gifts.

Expensive, significant gifts. Gold and frankincense. Fitting for a king. And myrrh. A unique gift. Most likely signifying his death because it was used as they were embalming people who had died or putting incense on them before they went into the grave.

So signifying the loyalty, the kingship of Jesus at the same time is death. I don't know what happened to the wise men after that.

[31 : 58] It doesn't say. But I can imagine that their lives were affected. Their lives were changed after that. After they left, we know that it was God's plan to protect baby Jesus and so he sends them warning in a dream.

Don't go back to Herod. He's a hater of this Christ child. Go another way. Go another way. We saw how God got the attention of the wise men and as they sought him, he met them and they were changed from seekers to worshipers.

We saw the religious ones with their knowledge and their practices and yet when it actually became real, when Jesus showed up on the scene, they were apathetic, unaffected.

Their life just continued because they didn't need a king. And then we saw Herod who signifies those who stand adamantly against God, against his rule.

Hating the one who gave his life for them, denying the truth and claiming that they don't need a savior. I'm just finding the way that I am.

[33 : 36] So my question is where are you this Christmas season? Do you fall into one of those categories? How has your life been changed by this king of the Jews?

Jesus? I'm just going to see you. I'm just going to see you. There's one last aspect that I want to leave you with this morning. We saw it back at the end of verse 6 where Matthew says that Jesus is the one who will shepherd his people.

being a Christian means that we believe in Jesus and we've accepted him as our Lord and king. But in addition to that I want to encourage you with the truth that he also comes as your shepherd.

A couple weeks ago Sean covered chapter 1 and verse 21 where it says he Jesus will save his people from their sins. It was in our readings this morning from Isaiah where it says all we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned. We have turned every one of us to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him this baby Jesus, this king.

[34 : 53] He has laid on him the iniquity, the sin of us all. In becoming our king, he's also our shepherd. Just like he was the shepherd to the wise man as he brought them to himself.

John 10 verse 11 says I am the good shepherd. This is Jesus speaking. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. If you don't know him today, I urge you to seek him.

He doesn't turn people away. And like the wise men, if you are seeking, he will bring you to himself. If you're pushing against him, the King Herod type, I urge you, I urge you, I pray for you, I plead with you to let go of your pride.

God, and even this Christmas season as we celebrate this birth of Jesus Christ that you let him into your heart this Christmas season.

Because he loves you. Because he wants to lead you in a better way, a way to himself, a way that does not end in death and suffering.

[36 : 20] And if you know him already, then I want to remind you that whatever life brings, you can rest in the arms of your good shepherd.

Psalms 23, David knew his good shepherd. David depended on his good shepherd. He said, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. Sheep are not very smart.

Sometimes they have to be forced to do what is necessary for them, for their well-being, and sometimes God does that. We need to lie down.

We need to be beside still waters. We need to have our soul restored. and strengthened. He does that for us.

[37 : 23] He leads us in paths of righteousness for our good, more importantly for his namesake, because of who he is.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you, my God, my shepherd, are with me. Your rod and your staff can comfort me.

You, my shepherd, my God, prepare a table before me, even when it's in the midst of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup of a flutters.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in my house forever. Does it mean all the days of my life, I will not have problems, I will have no struggles, there will be no death in my life, is not what it means.

But when the trouble comes, when the pain comes, he is our shepherd. He is the one that we look to, to be reminded that he will always be there.

[38 : 36] And in the end, he is the one who died, so that we can be with him. And so I want you to be encouraged.

If you're here next week, we'll get to hear the rest of this story. If you're not, be encouraged. My brother, my sister, or those who are still pushing against Jesus, be encouraged that he loves you. He doesn't want to be coherent to you. He wants to be your Savior. Meet him there this season. Let's pray together.

Lord God, we thank you for this encouraging story about wise men and how you reached out to those who were not of your promised people.

you loved them and you brought them in and you showed them this king of the Jews, this good shepherd.

[39 : 46] Lord, I pray that you would encourage us with this word. I pray that this Christmas season we would take time to rejoice, celebrate, to grab on to that truth of who you are for us and that this Christmas just wouldn't be, when it's over, be empty, but we would be encouraged and know the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

I pray these things in your holy name. Amen.