

## WORSHIP THE KING OF KINGS!

Matt 1:20-23; 2:1-11

The Christmas season is an exciting time of the year and loads of traditions have grown up over the centuries as people have celebrated the birth of Christ. As we read again the accounts in the Bible regarding the events leading up to and immediately following the birth event we are struck by the number of unusual happenings that occurred during that time.

In Luke 1:8-13 we see an account of something unusual that happen to a man named Zacharias:

and it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

Later on in verses 26-31 of this same chapter, we see another unusual happening:

and in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, hail, thou that art highly favored, the lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

Moving to the account Matthew recorded we find this in 1:20-23:

<sup>20</sup> But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. <sup>21</sup> And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. <sup>22</sup> Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, <sup>23</sup> Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Luke gives us another unusual event in 2:8-11:

<sup>8</sup> And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Matthew gives us a couple of events in the account of the Wise Men that are out of the ordinary:

<sup>12</sup> And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. <sup>13</sup> And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. Matthew 2:12-13 (KJV)

The final happening is found in Matthew 2:19-20:

<sup>19</sup> But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

What is the common thread that we see in each of these seven accounts? Divine intervention or direct messages from God from an angel or angels account for at least six of the seven events. There was no mention of an angel in the warning in a dream to the Magi to go home a different way. It strikes me as being a LOT of spiritual activity in a relatively short period of time. Why was all this "angel traffic" needed surrounding the birth of Jesus? My guess is that if this extra communication had not been done, then many of the occurrences would

have been thought to be “just coincidences.”

In addition to these seven specifics that give us strong evidence that “what was going on” was more than “coincidences” we find that many of these events had been predicted. As we examine Old Testament prophecies we see that the birth of Jesus of Nazareth was an event planned by God from (before) the beginning. There are references to the coming of the Messiah in the Books of Moses. Many of the Psalms are Messianic in nature and Isaiah’s prophecies, written some 800 years before the event, contain the most direct and specific predictions regarding the life of Jesus.

Jesus: Sent to Save (1:20-23)

<sup>20</sup> But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup> “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” Matthew 1:20-23 (NASB95)

The “this” that Joseph had been considering was how to handle the situation of a betrothal that had failed. Mary had been absent for more than three months because she went to help her cousin Elizabeth in the later stages of her pregnancy and when she returned to Nazareth she was obviously pregnant. Joseph had choices to make about what he should do. Matthew recorded that Joseph decided to just call off the wedding and not make a big deal out of it. He could have made a big deal out of this and called for Mary to be stoned, or the more usual route would have been to go to court and get a divorce, but he decided to just call off the wedding. He feared that the option to go ahead and marry Mary would open him up to ridicule by others and he might be getting into a relationship that was not built on mutual trust.

Joseph was conducting himself in a very noble and just manner; however, he was about to do something that was not in the plan that God had. So we see God intervening. Joseph had a dream in which the angel of the Lord appeared to him and delivered the same message about the Child that Mary had heard, even to the name to be given to the Child. This was enough to convince him to follow through with the marriage.

I think there is a lesson here for us: We may go about our daily lives doing what is noble and just, and, yet, be in conflict with the will of God. From a human point of view Joseph’s intended actions were all one could be expected to do and yet God had a better way. What God wanted from Joseph was beyond the bounds of humanly motivated love but called for the kind of love that only God can inspire. It would need to be a love that was self-sacrificing. You know, that is exactly what God was doing in Christ Jesus. We see a clue to the extent of this love in the words, “He shall save His people from their sins.” At the time, Joseph did not know how that was to happen, but we can look back and see that salvation was bought by the blood of Jesus as He died for you and me on the cross of Calvary.

Notice how Matthew was careful to reference the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies as he related the story of God’s intervention. This reference can be found in Isaiah 7 where God had challenged King Ahaz to ask for a sign regarding the pending invasion of the enemies of Judah. You may remember that Ahaz refused to ask for a sign but this one was given to him anyway.

There is great significance (beyond the obvious) of the virgin birth. Consider the fact that mankind was enslaved to this world system whose ruler is Satan. When Adam choose to obey Satan rather than God, he lost his dominion over creation in the same way that the possessions of

a slave become the property of the slave-owner. All the children of the slave become the property of the slave-owner and slaves nor their children have any rights – they are property. If Jesus had been born of the seed of Adam, then He too would have been subject to Satan. However, being born of the Holy Spirit, He was of a different origin and, additionally, if He refused to serve Satan (that is, commit sin), then He would not be under the penalty of sin nor the dominion of Satan. Consequently, His virgin birth and sinless life are two very important principles. If Jesus was born of a virgin, then He could **not** be of the seed of Adam.

### Jesus: Born to Rule (2:1-6)

<sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’ ” Matthew 2:1-6 (NASB95)

The word translated “wise men” in the Greek is “magi”. It is the root of our English word magician. These men were astrologers and fortunetellers. What they practiced was strictly forbidden by God and these people would not have been considered, by the Jews, to be religiously worthy to have had any part in the coming of the Messiah. It was almost as if God were trying to send a message to the Jews, that the coming of the Messiah was obvious even to the heathen who had enough curiosity to be concerned about such things. The people of Israel, therefore, had no excuse. The Jews had gotten caught up in religious practice rather than righteous living and daily communion with God. The leaders were not looking for the Messiah to come. In fact, they did not want Him because they did not know Him. There is a danger for us today to be so caught up in the busy-ness of church activities that we completely miss the righteousness, peace, and joy of the Kingdom of God. We can fool ourselves into thinking that it is “participation in programs” that pleases God and miss the fact that He requires that we “do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.”

From where did these Wise Men come? It is speculated that the magi came from the area of Babylon. Considering that the Jews had spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon, it would make sense that the people of that area would have had access to the Hebrew writings. Of course, the Old Testament writings do contain numerous references to the coming of the Messiah. Babylon is thought to be the birthplace of many of the mystical religions. These pagan mystical religious organizations tend to adopt forms of other religions. This is nothing more than a mask that they put on to disguise the fact that they are involved in heathen religious practices. Amazingly, many professing Christians belong to such organizations.

Why do you think they went to Jerusalem? Normally, you would expect a king to be born in the capital city. Jerusalem had been the seat of government since the reign of David. Therefore, it is not surprising to have the Wise Men show up in Jerusalem. However, God does not have the same value system that most people have. He chooses the humble rather than the proud; the simple rather than the complex; and the weak rather than the strong. I would imagine the Wise Men were rather surprised that no one there was aware of what was happening. They probably expected to find people jubilant and rejoicing that the long awaited Messiah had been born. But what did they find? Business as usual. We are told that when Jesus comes back the second time, that it will be same way: business as usual.

When they started asking questions, things quickly changed from the usual to the unusual. Herod saw an immediate threat to his position of power. He was not a very popular

person. He was ruthless and did anything he had to do in order to stay in power. Any perceived threat to his authority was crushed with excessive force. He even had his wife and several of his sons put to death. He was a maniac and when he became disturbed, those around him also became disturbed because he was unpredictable; he was liable to do anything. Herod was not the first nor the last in the history of the world to be corrupted with power. There is a saying that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. We frequently read about public officials that misuse their positions of trust. It is my guess that this practice is more often the case than not. I know there are situations in the business world where people in positions of authority use such positions to try to manipulate and control others or else they use such positions for the sole purpose of getting themselves promoted to their next job. Whether in the public arena or the business world such insecure little people become obsessed with their power and become maniacal, like mad men, in their protection of what they have and their pursuit of more power. In the process they make life miserable for themselves and everyone around them. Whether it is the Hitlers and Stalins of our time or the Caesars and Alexanders of antiquity that cause global chaos or even Herod of Judaea who had the babies of Bethlehem murdered, we can be assured that those who pursue selfish interests cause suffering of the innocent. This is held up in stark contrast to the way that Jesus would show us. The way of self sacrifice. The way of putting others first.

Anybody who was likely to know anything about the coming of the Messiah was summonsed to a meeting. The chief priest and the scribes would be the most likely to know. Herod demanded to know where the Christ was to be born. Interestingly enough, someone knew the prophecy that was given by Micah that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judaea. Even though these religious leaders knew what the Scriptures said, just the knowledge was not enough for them to do something about it. Because what they learned was not mixed with faith it did them no good. The writer of the Book of Hebrews, in reference to the Children of Israel who died in the wilderness, said, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." (Heb. 4:2) There are people who go to church week after week and hear the word preached, perhaps, they even read their Bible regularly; and yet, their lives are not changed simply because the knowledge is not mixed with faith.

### Jesus: Worthy of Worship (2:7-11)

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." <sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:7-11 (NASB95)

There is no evidence that Herod doubted the truth of the Scriptures regarding the prophecy. He believed it. However, we know that his response was that of rebellion. Outwardly, he put on a show for the visitors from the East. He called them in and wanted to know more of the details. "When did the star appear?" He sent them on to Bethlehem with instruction to find the Child and bring word back to him. He lied when he said that he wanted to worship Him. I guess Herod is typical of the tyrant that is in each one of us. Each one of us has a little tyrant, it is named SELF. Self is ruthless so that Self can have Self's way. Usually, Self will stop at nothing to protect Self's reign. Self will even lie and pretend to practice religion to avoid yielding to the rule of the Newborn King. God is not fooled by such actions. Herod had

fooled the Magi, but he had not fooled God. You know it is possible today for us to be good “church goers” and apparently have many people fooled; however, we can be as phony as a three dollar bill. If we have never accepted and yielded to the Lordship of Jesus, then we are still carnal and not spiritual. Self is still on the throne rather than Christ. Paul tells us that flesh and blood shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is necessary to put Self to death so that Christ can reign as Lord in our lives. This has to be a daily experience – actually it is a moment-to-moment experience, a situation-by-situation experience. You see, every situation we run upon in life is like a fork in the road of life. As we come to the fork in the road or the crossroads in our walk we have to choose which way we will go. Will we go the way of Self or the way of Christ. This is a choice that only we can make for ourselves.

Apparently, it is possible to know enough to verbally direct others to Christ and still be lost ourselves. This was Herod’s situation. Based on what he was told by others, he pointed the Magi to the Messiah, and yet he was lost. Jesus spoke of this kind of situation relative to people who might call Him Lord but do not practice the Lordship of Christ. He said, “Not everyone that saith unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but those that do the will of My Father who is in Heaven.”

The visitors from the East had no way of knowing the hidden agenda that Herod had. They received the instructions from Herod and were anxious to be on their way. Matthew does not tell us that the Wise Men went to Bethlehem. He does tell us that when they left Jerusalem, they followed the star. There is a good possibility that the star lead them to Nazareth rather than Bethlehem. According to Luke 2:39, after Mary and Joseph had taken Jesus to Jerusalem for the presentation and to offer sacrifices that when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. That event was approximately eight days after the birth of the Child. Luke does not mention the coming of the Wise Men, the flight into Egypt, the slaughter of the children and the return from Egypt. We can’t tell from the narrative if all this happen before or after they returned to Nazareth.

Regardless of where they were, the Magi found them. The Magi recognized that this Child was special. They called Him the king of the Jews. However, I doubt that they realized He was God incarnate. When Matthew tells us that they worshiped Him, it is likely that they did homage to Him in the same way they would bow down to any other king. They brought expensive gifts because one did not visit someone of superior rank without taking a gift. It was not polite. The gifts were gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There have been attempts to interpret the meaning of the various gifts.

According to tradition, gold symbolizes the kingship of Jesus. By His physical ancestry, Jesus is heir to the throne of Israel through the line of David. By His spiritual heritage He is heir to the throne of the universe. It has been the tradition of kings to accumulate wealth. Gold, for most people, represents the ultimate in wealth. It is ironic that this King did not accumulate earthly wealth. He also cautioned others to avoid falling into the trap of materialism. He taught, “Lay not up for yourselves, treasures on earth; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”

The second gift was frankincense. It is a white aromatic gum resin that exudes from Boswellia trees. It was used in worship and was one of the four ingredients of the holy oil used for anointing priests. It was also burned as incense and frankincense was placed pure on the shewbread in the Temple. It is thought that this gift was included because it symbolized the worship that would be offered to the Lord Jesus.

The third gift was myrrh. Myrrh is a low growing bush- like tree. Both the bark and the wood emit a strong odor. The gum of this tree or bush is also one of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil. It was prized as a perfume and was brought along with aloes for embalming the body of Christ. The myrrh, therefore, is thought to symbolize the atoning death of Jesus, when He gave His life so that we might live.

In looking back on this incident, we wonder: Did these visitors seek the Christ Child because they were wise; or, were they wise because they sought Him? Seeking the Lord is the only route to wisdom. Of course, our greatest and noblest search is for God and His will for our lives. We may seek for God for different motives. Some may seek to escape hell; others may seek God for the sake of family or even hoping for material success. The highest motive is none of these, but is simply that we seek Him because of Who He is. That we may know Him and worship Him. In so doing we will be influenced in our living as we interact with others. Our priorities will change and self-sacrificing love will be the theme of our lives.