

Where Is He Who Is Born King of the Jews?; Matthew 2:1-12

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There's a story of an older gentleman who one day picked up the phone and called his adult son and said to his son, you know, son, I've got some really bad news for you. This is probably going to come as a great shock to you, but your mother and I are getting divorced. We just are done with this.

We're tired of it. We're just getting a divorce. This came as a total shock to the son who had no idea, didn't see this coming at all. To which he answered his father, This can't be. You and Mom have always had a wonderful relationship. How is it that you're now getting divorced? We're just done. We're tired of it.

I'm tired of the woman. It's been 40 years. That's long enough. The son replied to say, You can't do that, Dad. Just don't do anything until I get there. I'm going to come. We'll all sit down and we'll talk this thing through. Just don't do anything rash. Alright, well, you better call your sister and let her know about this.

So the dad hung up. The son called his sister and says, You're not going to believe this, but dad says that he and mom are getting a divorce. The same sort of reaction. I can't believe that. They've always had a wonderful marriage. That's what he says. They just are tired of each other. They're getting a divorce.

So the daughter picks up the phone and says, Dad, don't do anything rash. We're coming. The four of us will just sit down as a family and we'll just talk this thing through. It's nothing that we can't talk through. All right, go ahead and come on. So then the father hangs up the phone, turns to the wife, and says, Well, they're coming for Christmas, and we don't have to pay for a thing.

So that's a rather unique way of getting the family to come over for a Christmas visit. But God had a far more unique way of arranging for a Christmas visit, and that's what we'll turn our thoughts to this morning. We're going to turn our thoughts to the visit from what we often refer to as the wise men.

The first 12 verses of Matthew chapter 12. Two. So in Matthew chapter two, what we come up against is this picture of these wise men that show up on our Christmas cards and our nativity sets, which really, I would say is probably the main way that most Americans learn their theology about the nativity of Christ.

We learn our theology mostly through greeting cards and activity sets and Hallmark Christmas movies. Sometimes there can be some helpfulness in some of that, but a lot of times there can be some confusion in a lot of that. And so I hate to be the one to burst a lot of nativity set bubbles this morning, but in order to really grasp the message of the passage before us, we're just going to have to face the reality.

That all of your nativity sets are very much wrong. There's lots of errors in them, and there's lots of errors in all the Christmas images that we often hold so dear. But in order to see the truth and

really the power of the truth of God's message, we need to do a little bit of work this morning and dispel some of those false understandings.

And by doing so, we're going to see A truly powerful message that is far more powerful than any Hallmark movie representation could have been. Now as we land here in Chapter 2 of Matthew's Gospel, what we always need to do, at least take a moment to do, is just to understand how the author got us to this point.

We can open ourself up to lots of problems if we just drop into a passage without understanding what the author has done up until this point. So if we were working our way systematically through Matthew's gospel, one thing that I would say is I would summarize it this way, that Matthew has spent chapter 1 telling us that Jesus is deserving of royal honor.

He has taken us through the genealogy. He's taken us through the virgin birth of the Christ. And he has taken us through the dreams and the message that the angel brought to Joseph. And by doing all of that, he's shown us that Christ is worthy of royal recognition and royal honor. Now, as he turns to chapter 2, we're going to see that that honor is now brought to him.

The royal recognition, which he deserves in chapter 1, So we'll begin not by reading the passage, it's familiar to all of us, but we'll just begin by working our way through the passage, beginning from verse one, from verse one. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, the king, behold, wise men from the east came Jerusalem.

So the first word of our passage, or the second word actually, is after, which gives us a clue that some time has passed since the birth of the Christ child. The nativity sets that you all have at home that show the wise men there on basically the night of the birth of the Christ, or the shepherds are there, and the wise men or the three kings are there, and all that appears to be taking place on the, simultaneously on the night of his birth, none of that happened.

It didn't happen that way. The wise men did not visit. on the day or on the night of His birth. Instead, Matthew immediately clues us in to the fact that some time has passed by saying, after the birth, these things happen. There's going to be a couple of other clues in the passage. I'll point them out as we go.

But Matthew is clearly saying to us that some time has elapsed between the birth of the child and the events that he's now speaking of. So after Jesus was born, In Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King. So here we're introduced to the first character in the story, this character by the name of Herod the King, or we know of him as Herod the Great.

It hasn't been too long in our study of Mark's Gospel that we thought about Herod the Great. and his children and that whole, that whole dysfunctional family. And so I don't want to go through all of the details of Herod the Great, but we do need, at least for our purposes today, to just remind ourself and just revisit really quickly just what a nasty, violent, mean, low down scoundrel was Herod the Great.

So Herod the Great was the ruler of Judea. He was the ruler of Judea because his father, a man by the name of Antipater or Antipater, you never really, sometimes with ancient words, you never really know what syllable to put the emphasis on, but Antipater or Antipater was his father. He

was good friends with the Caesar, and the Caesar that he was good friends with was the Caesar that we know best.

which would be Julius. He was good friends with Julius Caesar and he ended up doing a big favor for Julius Caesar. Caesar, Julius Caesar repaid him by giving him Judea to rule over and then that passed down to his son, Herod the Great. Now, he also gave to Herod the Great the title King of the Jews and Herod the Great loved that title.

That title was precious to him. He thought more of that title than just about anything else. He wanted everyone to call him King of the Jews. That'll be important in our story as we work our way through it. So this man Herod the Great was a violent man. He was hated by everyone and he knew it. He was the one who murdered at least one of his wives and at least two of his children because he thought maybe they were scheming against him or he didn't like the way they looked at him or something of whatever nature.

So he killed at least two of his children and at least one of his wives and he didn't really even care. There was a saying that was going around at the time that it was safer to be Herod's pig than to be his child. That's how nasty and how mean and how violent the man was. He was also the one that, as he was approaching death, which, by the way, in our story, He is approaching death.

He's in his seventies and very likely he's on his deathbed in our story. But as he's approaching death, he's the one who had all the leading nobles of Jerusalem incarcerated, locked up with strict instructions that the moment that he died, they would all be executed because he knew that nobody was going to mourn his death.

In fact, they were going to celebrate his death, but he didn't want anyone celebrating his death. And so the way he resolved that was to say, Therefore, we'll just kill thousands of the leading people of Jerusalem in order that there may be mourning on the day that I die. Now, fortunately, that order wasn't carried out after his death, but that was, that was the man, that was what he was all about.

So the, the nastiness of this man, King Herod is right up front and center because he's the first character that we're introduced to. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the king. Behold! Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem. So now we're introduced to the second set of characters in the story, the wise men.

Some of your translations might say *Magi*. So who are these wise men? And how do we get from wise men to *Magi* or *Magi* to wise men? And then where do the three kings come into that? So the word there is *magoi* in the Greek or *Magi*. We would call it *Magi*. And the reason that many of our translations will have wise men It's because that's an attempt on behalf of the editors of our Bible to relate to us who the *Magi* were because it's a bit of a confusing thing to understand who the *Magi* were.

So the word *magi* or *magoi* is an untranslatable word. Which is why some translations will just leave it as *magi*. The reason it's untranslatable is because it's a proper noun and you know, as you know, proper nouns can't be translated. You can't say, you know, somebody can't ask you what's, what's your name translated into Polish.

You. You can't translate a name. It's untranslatable. So *Magi* is the proper name of a tribe. A tribe of people, an ancient tribe of people that lived in the Mesopotamian area. Some people say that they are very, very ancient. Some scholars would trace their history back, all the way back to Abraham and Ur, when he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans.

So that word there might strike some familiarity with you. Ur of the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans from our story of Daniel, you might remember that as we've talked about in our story of Daniel, the Medes and the Persians, as well as the Chaldeans and the Babylonians, and how all of them were tightly knit together with the *Magi*, with that tribe known as the *Magi*.

So that might ring some familiar notes to us, but they're an ancient tribe of people that were known as the *Magoi* or the *Magi*. Now, before we begin talking about the *Magi*, let's first begin by understanding what the *Magi* We're not because there's a lot of things that are in our common vernacular today that had really very little or nothing to do with what the *Magi* actually were.

So the wise men, oftentimes that's an effort to just say, well, these who these people were, they were wise men. But as we'll see as we go through that, that's actually an interpretation to interpret that as being wise men that's interpreting something about them that could be problematic. We'll try to avoid doing that.

But when we think about these *magi*, there's, there's three, there's really. At least three things that come to mind that really needs to be put out of our thoughts. Number one is, first of all, there were not three of them. We often think of the three wise men or the three *magi*, and the reason we think of them as three is because of the number of the gifts, right?

So there's three gifts. So there must have been three gift bearers and we probably come up with that because that's just how we normally do things You know, if you have a an office Christmas party, everybody brings one gift So if there's three gifts, then there must have been three people bringing the gifts But as we go through our story, what we're going to see is we don't know how many there were But we can be virtually assured there weren't just three We'll talk about that as we go along.

Secondly, we know that they weren't kings. Kings has nothing to do with the story. They weren't kings at all. They're never referred to as kings. And I'm not sure where the title king got attached to them, but they weren't kings at all. And then thirdly, as we've already noticed, is they weren't present at the birth.

So there's these *magi* that were present sometime after the birth. We don't know how many there were because it's in the plural. We know that it's more than one. But we don't know how many there were. Some have speculated that they were the descendants of the three sons of Noah, which would have been Ham, Shem, and Japheth.

That came just purely out of thin air. I have no idea where that came from, but that's an ancient tradition that they were the three descendants. Or they were the descendants of the three sons of Noah. Also, it's tradition that they were these leaders, or these kings, or these wise men from three different parts of the world.

Ethiopia, Tarsus, and Arabia is where they're said to be from. Again, just pure speculation, just Plucking something out of the air. No biblical support whatsoever. No extra biblical support

whatsoever. But supposedly they were from Ethiopia, Tarsus, and Arabia. Supposedly they were baptized by the Apostle Thomas.

Again, where in the world that came from, I have no idea. But being from Ethiopia, Tarsus, and Arabia, has anybody, you have nativity sets at home? Does anybody have a painted nativity set? If you have a painted nativity set, then what are the skin tones of the three wise men? Well, there's always one that's brown, there's one that's black, and there's one that's light.

Because supposedly they're from these three parts of the world. Again, just pure speculation. It, in the Middle Ages, it was decided that their names were Melchior, Balthasar, and Caspar. Again, where that came from, somebody just plucked that out of thin air. Well, Actually, not out of thin air, but the explorer Marco Polo, you might remember him from high school history, remember Marco Polo?

He supposedly discovered the town or the city that they originated from, that they originated their journey from, and the city that they returned to at the end of their journey, and where they were buried. That took place in the 12th century, that he supposedly discovered that. Which probably meant that he was just the victim of a huckster.

But nevertheless, he supposedly discovered the town that they came from and returned to, and where they were buried. And you can guess what came next. When he supposedly discovered where they were buried, or the town they were buried in. What happened soon after that was somebody discovered a grave.

Somebody discovered three skulls that were supposedly the three skulls of the three wise men. Now these were the three skulls of the wise men supposedly because when they were discovered, all three skulls still had the eyeballs intact in the sockets. And the eyeballs were fixated upon the direction of Jerusalem.

You can just see this gets more and more ridiculous as we go. But these skulls were retrieved. They first ended up in the cathedral of Saint Sophia in Constantinople. Then they made their way to Madrid, and now you can go see them if you happen to be in Germany, you can go to Cologne and visit the cathedral in Cologne.

And you can see these three skulls that were supposedly the three skulls of Melchior, Balthasar, and Caspar. All of that is just an exercise in the ridiculousness. Isn't it? All of that is just fabricated out of thin air and as humorous as it might be to just see how fanciful people's imaginations can become, it's important to remind ourselves that that is sin.

That is sin. To add to what God has said. To import into what God has said what is purely the *imagination* of man is nothing short of sin. So all of that, we put all of that aside, and let's now think carefully about what the Bible tells us that these men were who visited the Christ child because the actual people and their actual visit is far more interesting and far more spectacular than any of those made up stories.

So this group of people known as the *Magoi* It's the word that we, we get our word magic from this word, we get our word magistrate from this word. And we get those words from this because first of all, their association with sorcery and the occult, and secondly, their association with government and with governmental influence.

And so we'll talk about both of those things. So they lived in, like I said, Mesopotamia, which would be, if they were alive today, that would be present day Iran. They were a priestly tribe, a tribe of priests, of hereditary priest line, much like the Jewish priest line. And they, not only were they hereditary priests, but they were advisors to the rulers.

of their lands. Now, let's talk a little bit about their religion because their religion is interesting. Their religion would later become known as what's, what's known as Zoroastrianism. Everybody, anybody ever heard of Zoroastrianism? It's a world religion, but it is, you probably never heard of it because it is the smallest world religion that's known.

Other world religions like Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Roman Catholics, Mormonism. They have far more adherents, but Zoroastrianism today is estimated to be around 000 followers of Zoroastrianism. So, what this religion entails, and here's the important part, is it is a monotheistic religion, which makes it unusual in the ancient world, because not many ancient religions were monotheistic.

But the religion of the *Magi* was monotheistic. They believed in one God, and they believed in an evil power that confronted Him in this battle between the good God, the good deity, and the evil of the world. They, had many things about their religion that were similar to Judaism, such as they didn't touch dead bodies and different things like that.

They didn't touch corpses. They worshipped fire, or they at least thought that they worshipped their God. through fire. So there are a lot of commonalities between Judaism, which was much older than the faith of the *Magi*. And the faith of these *Magi* people, these, these Zoroastrianists, or what they would later be known of as that.

But one of the things that's really unique about them is that they were what we could really call today as modern-day scholars. They were lovers of knowledge. They were, in the true sense of the word, they were scientists. Now, when we use that word scientist today, what we want to think of is the modern day Well, I'll just use the word I want to use garbage the modern day garbage today that tells us that true science only deals with Verifiable observable facts and that is nonsense if you were to trace the history of civilized mankind Throughout its history, you would see that the sciences have always been those pursuits of all knowledge.

In fact, the word *scientia*, from the Latin, where we get our word science, that word literally means knowledge. And so, true, classical science in the classical sense of the word has always been the pursuit of all knowledge. And of all the knowledge that's pursued, The greatest knowledge of all is the knowledge about why we're here, and how do we get here, and what does this all mean?

And throughout most of human history, that was the highest science. The pursuit of the question of who are we? How did we arrive here? What is this world about? What's wrong with the world, and what can fix the world? And so up until, literally up until the turn of the 20th century, the highest form of science was theology.

It's only the modern age, and don't get me started on, on the modern, um, the, the modern pridefulness that says, well, all ancient people were dumber than us, and only us modern people are the true smart people. That's nonsense. For centuries and centuries and centuries, mankind

considered the pursuit of knowledge to cover all fields, whether observable or unobservable, and the highest pursuit of knowledge was the pursuit of the highest questions in life.

Why are we here and what does this life mean? And so they were true in the sense of the word, they were true scientists. They were students of agriculture. They were students of math. In fact, they had a code. The name of their book of codes was called, and you're familiar with this, The Law of the Medes and Persians.

Anybody ever heard of that? You've heard of it because it's in your Old Testament. It shows up in Daniel 6, and it shows up again in Esther 1. The Law of the Medes and Persians was the code book that the *Magi* wrote. And this code book contained all of their knowledge about agriculture and math and physics and mostly Celestial bodies, because they were enamored with celestial bodies.

And this Law of the Medes and Persians was the code book that shows up in our Old Testament a couple times. Remember how it was binding upon Darius? Because it was the Law of the Medes and Persians and Darius couldn't break it? And so Daniel had to be thrown into the lion's den because that's what the law of the Medes and Persians said.

And so this law of the Medes and Persians was their binding codebook, and it was the collection of all of their higher learning, because they were truly the scholars of the ancient world. Their understanding of the celestial bodies What surpassed all ancient understanding of celestial bodies and the movements of the stars and of the planets.

Now, if you think that's some, a small feat, just remind yourself that all this took place some, what, twelve or fifteen hundred years before the invention of the telescope. They could map out the movement of the stars and the planets. Thousand or more years before telescopes. So that took quite a bit of, of ingenuity, quite a bit of studying, but they, they were enamored by the celestial bodies.

And so what they really were was like a combination of astronomer and astrologer. You probably know the difference between an astronomer and an astrologer. An astronomer is a scientist who studies celestial bodies and the properties that govern them and their, their movements. An astrologer is one who thinks that the movement of the celestial bodies impacts your life.

And so think horoscopes, that kind of thing. That's what astrology is all about. Astrology is nonsense. Astronomy is a true science. But the *Magi* were sort of a combination of both. They studied the movement of the heavenly bodies. And they believed that the movement of the heavenly bodies had something to do with life here on Earth.

It had something to do with history, they could foretell the future, something about the movement of the stars and the planets told them about life here on Earth, or at least so they believed. And so the thing to take away here is, How their scholarly knowledge and their observing of the celestial bodies and how that was a mixture of true science and Pagan theology there's their studying and their learning was interwoven with their pagan theology But see how God uses that to strike an intense Curiosity among them and then God uses that to draw them to himself Isn't that fascinating?

This is one of the most fascinating stories in Scripture of how God uses all kinds of ways and means. To strike a chord, if you will, in people's heart, to draw them unto himself. So he uses their

interest in the stars, their knowledge of the stars, to somehow communicate to them that this event has happened and you need to come and see this.

You see how God does that? What a fascinating thing. That God meets people where they are and he uses all kinds of things and people's lives and people's thinking and people's culture, all kinds of things in our experiences to draw us unto the Lord. So he uses their higher learning to draw them unto the Christ child, as we've said, not too long ago.

Those who approach the Bible with a big brain will find the Bible very welcoming. But those who approach the Bible with a big head will find the Bible very unwelcoming. So these *magi* are apparently approaching God and approaching the Scriptures. We'll see a little bit later with a big brain, a brain that understands something about the movement of the stars and a lot of things about how this world works down here and this sort of thing.

But this was, this was the *Magi*. They were an extremely influential group of people. In fact, their influence, as we said, dates all the way back as early as Abraham. And we still see their influence taking place as late. As Acts chapter 8 and Acts chapter 13, you might remember in Acts chapter 8, somebody by the name of Simon Magus, same word there, Magus, *Magi*.

So somehow that, that man Simon had a connection with the *Magi*, maybe he was one of them. Or we find in Acts chapter 13, a man by the name of Elymas, the Magician, and same word there, *Magi*, Magician. So somehow there's a connection there. So they were highly influential. And so instead of wise men, it would be better to think of them as learned men, scholars of their day.

So these scholars, these wise men come, verse 2 saying, and what they're saying is, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? Now, as they come here asking this question, in our minds we have this picture that comes from the greeting cards, and the picture is, what, three very oddly dressed men riding camels along through the desert.

Making their way through the desert. They seem a little bit out of place in the desert because there's these three sort of lovable, scholarly kind of guys, like you'd *imagine* three professors. That just set out on camels across the desert because they're following the star Dispel that image because that's not at all how they came to Jerusalem.

They would have come first of all not on camels But they would have come on the finest Arabian horses and they wouldn't there wouldn't have just been three of them There would have been a very large entourage There would have been soldiers guarding them, there would have been slaves and servants serving them, there would have been cooks preparing their meals.

It is very likely that there was a thousand or more people in this large entourage of people making their way to Jerusalem. So now, begin putting in your mind the picture of an entourage of a thousand Eastern people with the tall cone conical hats and the bright colors and the jewelry and everything.

Imagine an entourage of a thousand or more Eastern people with their slaves, with their soldiers, with their cooks, with all the baggage that comes along with this big entourage of people showing up on their, their fine Arabian horses in Jerusalem. That's the picture that we have in mind. So they come here and their question is, Where is he?

Now, as I thought about this, I did a little bit of research, but then I sort of, I don't know, I figured that I just was never going to get to the end of this. But I kept thinking, where has there ever been someone else in history who was born King? I could think of no one. In fact, I don't think that's ever happened.

I don't think there's ever been anyone in all of the history of humanity that was born King. Oh, there's been plenty of people that were born to be king, and there's been plenty of people that were born prince. But I know of no one in all of human history that as they passed through the birth canal, they were the ruler.

But their question is not where is he who is going to be king? Not where's the future king? Where is he who has been born king? And notice, king of the Jews, what's the title that Herod loves more than anything else? King of the Jews. Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? Now, one of the things to make note of here is this entourage of *magi*, after being led supernaturally by the star, through a journey of anywhere from 500 to 800 miles, being led in this supernatural way.

Isn't it interesting that right here at the end of their journey, they resort to human reasoning? Right here at the end of all of it, they come up here to Jerusalem, They're looking for a king. What's the natural question to ask? We're looking for a king, so where, where's the king going to be? He's going to be in a palace.

I mean, that's where kings are. So let's go to Jerusalem. That's the capital of this area. And let's go to the palace, because that's where the king's going to be. God has led them supernaturally over hundreds of miles. And here at the very end, they're like, okay, we, we got the rest of this, God. And isn't that so much like humans?

Isn't that so much like mankind, that as soon as we get an inkling that, okay, I see where God's going with this, I see what you're doing, God, I'll take it from here. Well, actually, we find out that's not at all where God was bringing them to, because they come here with this question, where is he who is born King of the Jews?

And the impact of that question, we'll see that that impact plays itself out really in the next story as Thousands of baby Jewish boys have to die as a result of that. But as they come here with this question, remember again, this entourage, all the pomp, all the circumstance, all the — of this group that shows up here from the east wearing strange clothing, speaking strange languages with strange accents.

And they show up and their question is, where is he who is born king of the Jews? Now, in order to really understand the impact of this moment, because this moment here. If, let me put it this way, if it weren't for the birth of Christ itself, this would be the most pivotal event in history during these people's lifetime.

If it wasn't for the actual birth of Christ. This is a monumental event in human history. As these people come, this is a pivotal moment, and let's just understand a couple things in order for us to see why this is such a pivotal moment. So these *Magi*, as I said, they were highly influential people. They were a hereditary priest line, and they existed prior to the Babylonian kingdom, they existed in the Babylonian kingdom, and they now exist in the present kingdom in Mesopotamia, which is the Persian kingdom.

And throughout all of that, they had established themselves as the king makers. They were the ones who had firmly established themselves as we are the ones We are the ones who have the code, the law of the Medes and Persians. It's our code. We wrote it. We keep it. And all who would be king must, first of all, abide by their code, and furthermore, be chosen by them to be king, and then be chosen when not to be king.

So the *Magi* were the ones who put the king on the throne, and they were the ones who took the king off the throne. Are you starting to see the significance? of these men coming, the kingmakers coming to say where is this king? Because we saw his star. So the significance of the kingmakers from the east coming is, it holds tremendous, tremendous significance.

Now let's couple that together with the fact that these *magi* have been influenced by Daniel. So we remember the story of Daniel about six centuries prior to this as Daniel and his friends are taken there to Babylon. At the time, that was the Babylonian kingdom. Daniel was there in Babylon as it transitioned over to the Persian kingdom, but nonetheless, his prophecies, prophecies that he spoke, remember there was the dreams that he interpreted, which the *Magi* were big on dream interpretation.

Remember that from the story of Daniel, how Daniel was put into training to be a *Magi*? And how the dream interpretation was the center of so many of those stories. And so you remember the dream, first of all, the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar? And you remember that dream? How he calls all the *Magi* and says I need to know the interpretation of this dream And he's and the *Magi* say okay great.

Just tell us the dream. We'll be happy to tell you the interpretation it's not going to work that way. You tell me the dream and its interpretation and they say no *Magi* can do that So Daniel was part of that group and he was being trained as part of that group and you remember how he was the one Whom God revealed the dream to him and the interpretation and you remember the dream The dream was all about the world kingdoms, the future of the world kingdoms.

It was in the form of this statue, where there was the clay feet and the bronze legs and the silver trunk and the golden head. And then the stone that was not cut by human hands. Crushed the statue into a million pieces, and then that stone grew to be the worldwide kingdom. And you remember the messianic force of that interpretation, the messianic force of that dream.

So Daniel's prophecies were highly messianic. Daniel's prophecies were prophecies that were teaching of the coming stone that was not cut by human hands, that would crush all earthly kingdoms. And so into the theology of the *Magi*. Which is a pagan theology, but into their theology comes these Interpretations, these truths about the coming Messiah, the coming King, and so that's part of their theology now.

And they come here as these kingmakers, the ones who have enjoyed for hundreds and hundreds of years sole authority in all the land of Mesopotamia over who would rule and who would not rule. Now, let me ask you. Who is more powerful, do you think? The king or the one who decides who's king? Who holds the real power?

The one who decides when the king is done being king, or the king himself? I would suggest they hold the real, true power in all of Mesopotamia. These are a powerful group of people that are now coming. And so now imagine this group, this entourage coming here into Israel. And as they come

here into Jerusalem, we are reminded of just what the circumstance must have looked like, what a big happening this was, this was no secret.

They didn't just sneak into Jerusalem in the middle of the night and sneak out. The whole city knew that they were there, which is why we're told later that the whole city was agitated. Okay, so here comes this big entourage from the east. Now what we need to understand about what was going on in the world at this time is this.

The Roman Empire has control over Israel. We all know that at this point. Israel is under the rule of Rome. But as we think about the Roman Empire, sometimes we can falsely think of the Roman Empire as this monolithic sort of empire that always ruled over the known civilized world. And that's just not what the Roman Empire was.

The Roman Empire eventually grew to that, but this is prior to the time that the Roman Empire had conquered all of the civilized world. This was a time in which the Roman Empire had a rival empire, a rival world power that was right beside them, and the rival empire was Persia. So this was a time in which Rome and Persia were more or less about the same size and about the same power.

Now Persia is on the decline and Rome is on the incline. Rome is going up. Rome is becoming more powerful. Persia is becoming less powerful, but at this time they're both world powers. And in fact, they had warred with each other three times prior to this. Persia and Rome had battled one another in three previous wars and all three of those ended up with neither one really being the victor.

And so they were sort of like a stalemate. Persia and Rome, neither one could really defeat the other at this point. Now, the king of Persia, who was a man by the name of Darius IV, their sources, the sources that I found weren't quite in agreement. Some said that Darius IV was still on the throne. Others said that by this point, Darius IV had been deposed of the throne.

But either way, it's the same point. There's a man by the name of Darius IV. who was the ruler of Persia. But the *Magi* didn't like him. And the reason they didn't like him was because he was the one who had gone to Rome or gone to battle with Rome three times before and hadn't won. And Darius IV had come to the conclusion, let's just leave Rome alone.

Let's just not even, let's, let's coexist with Rome because I don't think we can beat them. Let's just stick to our own thing over here. Well, the *Magi* didn't like that because the *Magi* wanted to defeat Rome. So the *Magi* were upset with Darius IV and they've either already taken him off the throne or they're about to.

Now here they come into town. Now, the other thing to know about this region, Jerusalem here, is if we were to look at a map of the Roman Empire at this time and a map of the Persian Empire at this time, and we were to ask ourself the question, what if these two empires went to battle? Where would they battle?

It would be obvious. Israel. That was the connecting point between the two empires, was Israel. In fact, Jerusalem was the connecting point between the two empires. Now Israel is firmly under Rome's control and Herod has the power that he has because Rome has given it to him. But also keep in mind that the average Israelite citizen was none too happy with Rome.

That's not to say that Persia would have been a better ruler, but they weren't too happy with being Roman citizens, Roman subjects. Now comes this grand entourage of people from the east, and not just people, *magi*, king makers from the east, from the rival empire to the one who rules us. And now they show up, several hundred, maybe a thousand or more of them, show up in Jerusalem, and they're asking, Where's the king?

You think that got people talking? Now the other thing to know about what's going on in the world right now, So what I want you to think about now is that there was this for a century or more, there was this, call it a rumor, or a feeling, or an idea, call it what you like, there was a growing consensus that people were believing that the next world ruler was going to come from Judea.

Now, lest you think I'm making that up, take a look in your notes. In your notes I have a couple of quotations here from Roman historians. Here's what Suetonius wrote. There had spread all over the Orient, or the East, an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea.

to rule the world. Or take a look at the words of Tacitus. Tacitus, if you're not familiar with Tacitus, Tacitus was like the Roman counterpart to Josephus. He was the leading Roman historian. He writes, There was a firm persuasion at this time, at this very time, the East was to become powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire.

So there was just this scuttlebutt, this feeling, this talk that was growing and growing and growing among people. There's these two world empires that have collided in the past and neither one has really come on top of the other. But there's this growing sense that the East is going to Rule, they're going to grow stronger, but they're going to do so under the world leadership of a leader that doesn't come from the east, but comes from Judea.

Now the king makers show up in Judea, the king makers who are either just about to depose the King of Persia, or just recently have deposed the King of Persia, and they're asking the question, where's the king of the Jews? Meanwhile, the King of the Jews. is on his deathbed. Do you see the volatile mixture of what just came into Jerusalem?

Do you see how this is far more fascinating and far more powerful of a story than the greeting card version, where these three little scholars show up in the middle of the night? This was a world event. All of Judea was talking about the Persians who came looking for the new world ruler. And who did the Persians find?

A child. One born under a star, one who was born as king. Far more powerful than the narrative that kings came and bowed down before the Christ is the true narrative that the king makers came and bowed down before the Christ and recognized, you are the king. So, they say to him, we saw his star when it arose.

And we have come to worship him. So let's look at that phrase. We saw his star. Notice there, they don't say we saw the star. These scholars of the sky, they say we saw his star. It was his that we saw. We saw his star when it rose. Some of your translations, I think the King James says from the east or in the east.

That, again, is an interpretation because literally it says, when it rose. Now the reason the King James and others will translate that in the east is because all celestial bodies rise in the east

because of the eastward rotation of the earth. So every celestial body, even the moon, rises in the east. But that's not what the text says.

It says we saw his star when it rose. We don't know that it rose in the east. In fact, I've often thought, what direction does the star lead them? The star leads them westward. Why would the star rise in the east to lead them westward? But we contemplate that. We speculate that. But we saw His star, His star, when it rose.

And we have come, don't miss the purpose here, we have come to worship Him. Not we've come to crown Him. Not we've come to anoint Him. Not that we've come to take Him back to Persia with us. We've come to worship Him. This is the fulfillment. of the prophecies. This is the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah who would say, it is too small of a thing for you to be the light to Jacob only, but I will make you the light for the nations.

This is the fulfillment of the prophecy who would say that the God, the father says to the son, ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance. This is God the father bringing to his son, the King of the Jews, bringing to him, The nations to come and to bow down to him, which is a theme of Matthew.

One of Matthew's themes is this is not only the King of the Jews. This is the one that was prophesied that the nations would come and bow down to him. So they say, we see, we saw his star. So let's talk about the star, because the star, quite frankly, is the most fascinating thing about the whole story.

Because this star really just sparks the, no pun intended, just sparks the *imagination* there, doesn't it? What was the star? And how did the star lead them in such a way? So, just like the wise men and everything else about the story, there has been so much. Unnecessary speculation about what the star could have been.

Some have thought that it was a star that went supernova and there's this period of time in which it was really extraordinarily bright and easy to see. Others have speculated that perhaps it was a comet or perhaps it was a meteor or something of that nature. And then others have speculated that it was the convergence of multiple planets together.

Who remembers, this goes back a number of years, I want to say maybe 10 Ten years, maybe 15 years. Who remembers the Star of Bethlehem? It was, it was a celestial event, maybe 10 years, 12 years ago, in which there was the convergence, was it three planets, that converged together to make a bright light in the night sky, and we were told that that same convergence happened about the time of the birth of Christ, and so that was the Star of Bethlehem.

Well, I don't know exactly what the star was, but I can tell you what the star was not. It was not any of those things, because it is abundantly plain in the text that the behavior of the star is nothing like the behavior of any normal celestial body. Because this star led people from one part of the world to another part of the world, and then the star goes on to lead them to a precise destination.

house. They travel 500 to 800 miles to be brought to the precise location where the boy was. There is no celestial body, comet, meteor, planet, anything else that behaves in such a way as that. Just think if you could, if you could see an image. If you could see an image of the closest star and

the Earth, that image would necessarily have the Earth so small that it literally could not be represented.

Even one pixel would be too small because of the expanse and the size. There's just no way that a celestial body, a normal celestial body will behave in such a way. So these study years, these scholars of the heavenly bodies, they're calling this a star. But as we ask the question, what does this star, what was the star?

We're much better off, I think, instead of asking science or astronomy, what the star could have been. Let's ask the Bible what the star could have been. And let's see if the Bible can tell us. What the star possibly was. Well, as we turn to the Bible and we ask, well, what sort of light in the sky could have been the light that was guiding these *magi*?

We come to find, first of all, that there are numerous places in the Old Testament in which the prophets will speak of lights in the sky in ways that are divine and messianic. Think with me of Numbers chapter 24, verse 17. This is the prophecy of Balaam. By the way, Daniel would have been well familiar with the prophecy of Balaam.

And Daniel could have easily told this prophecy to the *Magi*. But here's the prophecy. I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. Daniel would have known that. Daniel also would have known the prophecies of Isaiah, who lived about a hundred years before Daniel, when Isaiah wrote this, The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them, Has light shown? Or from chapter 60, And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. So often we see these images of bright lights in the sky and they have a divine meaning or a messianic meaning or both. But then we ask ourself, wait a minute, wasn't there another occasion in which a bright light in the sky led God's people?

And we say, well, of course there was. From Exodus chapter 13, we all remember the pillar of cloud in the day. And the pillar of fire at night, and that pillar of fire did what? It did two things. It illumined the way and it led the way. And so here we see another light in the sky leading the way of God's people.

We see that in Exodus chapter 13. But where it really gets particularly interesting for me, anyway, is when I put these things together and I realize that a great light in the sky accompanied The Son of Man's first coming, just like it will accompany the Son of Man's second coming. From Luke chapter 2 and verse 9, we're familiar with the shepherd account, Luke's account.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord did what? Shone. So here's these shepherds, up in the sky there is a host of angelic beings. And there is some sort of bright light. Shining and illumining, that was the first coming of the Son of Man. Now we listen to the words of Jesus from Matthew 24 as He speaks of His second coming.

He says, For as the lightning comes from the east and does what? Shines. Does lightning shine? Well we think of lightning as flashing, don't we? We don't think of lightning as shining. So clearly Jesus is not speaking of a normal bolt of lightning here. He's speaking of something that illumines, something that shines.

As far as the west, so be the coming of the Son of Man. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. That word glory in the scriptures oftentimes is connected together with light.

So we see the first coming of the Son of Man, great light in the sky. The second coming of the Son of Man, great light in the sky. Here we see a great light in the sky leading God's people to the child. We also see a great light in the sky leading God's people as far back as Exodus 13. And so we put these things together and we say, Clearly, this was not a celestial body, such as a star proper, or a planet.

This was some sort of supernatural light in the sky that behaved very differently, that has a very different purpose, and the purpose is to lead them to a specific place. So we continue, can you, we continue on reading here. Verse 3, When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

You see the trouble, you see the agitation is. There is a entourage of kingmakers from the rival empire here speaking about a king. And verse 4, And assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So Herod was not a Jew. He was an Edomite.

And so he's not familiar with the Jewish scriptures. He's got to ask. He says, Where do the scriptures say that the Christ is going to be born? And they tell him right away. They've got the answer right on the tip of their tongue. Verse 5, They told him, Well, Bethlehem of Judea. For so 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. So that right there is what it looks like to know the scriptures and not know the God of the scriptures. Because that right there is what it looks like to say, Oh, you're an entourage of Gentiles from the East who are the kingmakers of the next kingdom over?

And you're here looking for the king of the Jews? Oh, well, he's down there.

He came unto his own, and his own didn't care. Those who were near, those who were 20 miles down the road from him, didn't care. Meanwhile, those who were 800 miles away Those who were far have been brought near. You think in Ephesians 3, He has brought those who were far. You have now been brought near. So they give this prophecy.

This prophecy is pointing them all to Bethlehem. Now here's the really crucial thing to see about that. God has led them 800 miles with a supernatural star. But in order to find the Christ, they still need the Word of God. You see that? God has brought them hundreds of miles with a supernatural light, but in order to find the Christ, they still need the scriptures.

So he has brought them all of this way, but it is the Word of God. It is only the Word of God that is about the living Word of God. That can take them the final leg of their journey. Then verse 7. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent to them.

And that, by the way, that's another clue that some time has passed. The reason for this is that, you know, we want to want to find Jesus Christ, because we know that he's going to designate two years and younger. So perhaps the Jesus, *the child* Jesus is as much as a year and a half or two years old. At this point, maybe six months old, but he's not an infant anymore.

And verse 8, And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child. And when you have found him, bring me word that I, too, may come and worship him, you liar. Now, verse 9, And listening to the king, they went their way. Which is what tells me that the interpretation of wise men, how some of our Bibles, the ESV included, will take the word *magi* and include wise men, that's not a very good interpretation because they're not very wise here, are they?

So, Herod duped them. They were fooled. They were duped. God saves them, but they were duped by Herod. So listening to the king, listening to his words, they went 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. So clearly it's not behaving anything like a normal celestial body.

Verse 10, When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. That phrase there, I love it when the gospel writers just seem to trip over themselves to describe a level of joy and celebration that just doesn't seem to fit into words. They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. They weren't just glad.

They weren't just happy. They weren't just saying, we're glad this, this is a long trip. We're glad the trip is over. Now we can get this over and go back home. They were exceedingly joyful. The contrast here is to contrast their joy and their excitement to Herod's anger. And that's the contrast that we see in all of life.

Because the coming of the Son of Man divides all of humanity. And it divides all of humanity by their reaction to His coming. We either love His appearing, So here's the division. They are exceedingly, exceedingly rejoicing with great joy, verse 11, and going into the house. So again, clearly some time has passed.

So they go into the house. There's no mention of a stable. In fact, there's no mention anywhere. In either of the accounts of a stable, so there's one more part of your nativity set that you're just going to have to overlook because there's no mention anywhere of a stable. The most likely place that Mary and Joseph stayed the night of the birth would have been an attachment to a house that was intended to house the animals.

So in this day and time, everybody traveled by animals, and so most houses had something attached to them to accommodate the animals, particularly houses that were located in cities. And so they were looking for a place to rent the, the innkeeper said everything's full and we know there's there wasn't motel sixes or actual inns.

But what happened was people would rent part of people's houses. They would rent a space on the floor to sleep. So the regular part of the house was full. So most likely they were given the part where the animals were which is why the manger was handy to put the Infant in the infant Jesus when he was born No Now maybe the census has all been wrapped up and the big influx of people into Bethlehem from the census all that sort of past Now and now the house that they were

staying in the animal portion of maybe now they've moved into the inner part of it, or maybe they've moved to another house that became available.

But whatever the case may be, it's not a stable, it's not a cave, it's a house. Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother. So two things to make note of there. One is the word translated child is the word *paidion*. And that word is always translated young boy or servant. So it's never the word for infant or newborn.

It's either the word for young boy or most, most commonly servant. So Jesus is at least. A few months old by this point, the other thing to see is they saw the child with Mary, his mother. Now it might not seem like a big thing to take note of here, but it is worth our observing that every time Jesus is mentioned together with his mother, he comes first.

It's never Mary and the child. It's always the child and his mother. Just one little clue there that the gospel writers are saying. Which of the two was the important one? They saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and they worshiped. What's that next word? Him. That right there, it's easy to look over this, but that right there is the clearest refutation of the heretical Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary.

Because if there was ever an instance in all of your scriptures in which God wanted to say to us that Mary holds a special place, this is it. If there was ever an instance in which God wanted to communicate that Mary is deserving of some sort of special attention or something bordering on worship, here are the people from the East and the child is still small.

And there's the caretaker, there's the mother, there's the mother of God. And yet their worship is not directed toward her at all. They fall down and they worship the child. So they worshiped him, then opening their treasures. They offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. So all three of these gifts are prophetic.

We could spend a whole message on the gifts, but we won't do that. We'll just go quickly through the three gifts. The three gifts. Gold. First of all, gold was the gift of kings. That was the property of kings. And these are the king makers coming to the king. So it's appropriate to give him gold, which by the way, many people speculate that Joseph and Mary, who are destitute at this point, you know, they, they couldn't afford the lamb for the sacrifice.

So they gave the dove, Joseph is out of work. They're about to flee to Egypt. So it's often been speculated that that was how, that was what financed their trip, which is quite possible. So they give him gold, they give him frankincense. Now frankincense is a, an aromatic resin. that is harvested from a special tree in Arabia.

So it's not native to Israel at all, but it's native to Arabia. And the way that it's harvested is you would go to the special tree and you'd make a cut and go away for about 30 days. And that cut would then bleed resin, and as the resin bled out, it would crystallize on the outside. It's pretty, pretty fascinating, actually.

It crystallizes on the outside, and then it continues to bleed resin on the inside. And the crystallized outer part keeps the resin on the inside liquid, and then you go and you pull the bulb off, it's in balls, you pull this little ball off, and it's hard crystal, crystal on the outside, but very aromatic resin on the inside.

And so it is very aromatic, but only when it's crushed. And so there's something to do with the prophecy there that the God who would crush his son and by the crushing of his son The aroma of his sacrificial death is made known. So there's the frankincense But then there's the myrrh and the myrrh is the most highly prophetic of all the three gifts So the myrrh it was it was a a spice.

And the way that myrrh was used in Jesus's day was twofold. There was two uses of myrrh. Both of these show up in the same incident in Jesus's life later. The first use of myrrh was as an, a type of anesthesia. It could be taken orally and it would produce some lessening of physical pain. And so you remember as they offered Jesus on the cross, wine mixed with

The second use of myrrh is it's very aromatic, very strong smelling, and so it was used as an embalming agent to disguise the odor of a decaying body. And you might remember, as Jesus was placed into the tomb, he was placed into the tomb with a large amount of myrrh to disguise the smell. So both of those uses of myrrh point to the same event in Jesus's life.

Now, there is a further connection that I find quite interesting, I'll share it with you. I find this quite interesting, and that's what the Hebrew rabbis understood *myrrh* as. The association that the Hebrew rabbis had with *myrrh* was to associate it not just with death, but with sacrificial death. And here's why.

The word *myrrh* In Hebrew is more, M O R, and you might be familiar with a mountain in Israel by the name of Mount Moriah, literally Mountain of Myrrh. What happened on Mount Moriah? Anybody remember? Abraham goes up the mountain to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and God spares him by supplying the ram. And so the rabbis had grown to associate myrrh with Abraham's act of sacrificial, sacrificially offering his son.

And here are now the kingmakers saying, these are our gifts. All of these gifts speak to your kingship. They speak to your sacrificial death that is to come. And then finally, verse 12, And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. So God clearly communicates to the *magi* through means other than the star.

He communicates to them through their dreams. And he communicates to them to leave and depart by another way. So just one last observation. And this is an observation that many have made. It is to say this. What Matthew means is they went home a different direction. But can't we also see something else in there that tells us once the *Magi* have found the Christ, their way is different now.

Can you see that? They find the Christ, but they don't go home the same way they came. And isn't that metaphorically speaking something to us about our encounter with Christ? When we encounter Him, we don't go the same way. We don't go home the same way we came. We don't leave the same way. We're not the same people.

We truly are, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, new creations in Christ. Now, that's not exactly what Matthew was saying, but isn't that a helpful thing to round out this portion of the story to say these *magi* came 800 miles. But their way home, their trip home, can you *imagine* their conversations on the way home?

Can you *imagine* what they spoke of on the way home? This man is the one of whom Daniel spoke, and they were never the same again.