

“The Story of the King: The King is Here”

Matthew 2:1-12

Long ago in ages past, before human history, God determined to create and redeem for Himself a people who would bear His image and reflect His glory. The God who transcends space and time spoke the universe into existence, flung the stars and galaxies into space, and placed the planets in their orbits. He formed the vast expanse of the sky, drew a line on the shore in which He commanded oceans to come no farther, and made plant and animal life. On the sixth day of creation, God made man in His own image, unique and separate from all the rest of God’s created order. He then formed woman from man’s side and gave them the command to subdue the earth and fill it with image bearers.

The serpent was more cunning than any of the other creatures that the Lord God had made. Inhabited by the spirit evil itself, the serpent had a history with God. Satan who opposes God and seeks to rule over that which God has made for Himself comes to the man and the woman in the garden of God and solicits their disobedience. He casts doubt in their minds about the goodness of God and twists God’s Word to satisfy his own sinister ends. The man and his wife choose the path of disobedience, and they forfeit the ability to walk with God in His garden in the cool of the day.

The Lord God confronts the man, who blames his wife, who blames the serpent.

God curses the serpent and says:

Genesis 3:14-15 - “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

The promise was made the the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head.

The man and his wife were then banished from God's garden paradise, forced to live out their days in exile. Before they went out, God took animal skins with which He clothed them, foreshadowing that man needed blood atonement from a sinless substitute to cover his sin.

Thus begins a theme that is woven throughout the Old Testament. Adam who had been created to worship and walk with God now could only approach God through the blood of another. The innocent took the place of the guilty. As Adam saw the blood of this substitute soaking into the ground, he saw with his own eyes the painful reality of sin's consequences.

Adam taught this lesson to his sons, Cain and Abel, and later Seth. Cain rejected his father's faith and murdered Abel. From Seth, a generation of worshipers are born who approach God as God Himself has specified--through the blood of another. These are those who walk with God, such as Enoch and his great-grandson, Noah.

Genesis 8:20 - "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar."

God brings judgment on the world because of its sin, but Noah finds grace in the eyes of God. He commissions Noah to build an ark, through which he and his family are saved from the flood waters of God's judgment. God establishes His covenant with Noah and commissions he and his sons to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

The story continues through Noah's son Shem, and his descendants, from whom God establishes His covenant with Abraham. To Abraham, God says:

Genesis 12:2-3 - "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God promised Abraham that his descendants would outnumber the stars. God promised that a son would be born to Abraham and Sarah, a special son of promise.

After many long years of waiting, Isaac was born. God asked Abraham to do the unthinkable--he asked him to sacrifice his son on a mountain that God would show him. It was test of Abraham's faith and devotion, and at the last minute God provided an animal to take Isaac's place.

Genesis 22:14 - "And Abraham called the name of the place, The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

God's covenant continued with Isaac and his son, Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and he had twelve sons who became the twelve family heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. The children of Israel were in bondage to the Egyptians for 400 years. Yet there was a baby who was born whom God would appoint as their deliverer. This baby's name was Moses. God uses Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, though not before bringing down judgment on their captors in the form of various plagues, the last of which involved the death of the firstborn. God's people would be spared this plague, though it meant that they had to take a young male lamb and kill it, then take its blood and smear it on the doorposts of their house. Then they were to eat it with unleavened bread. By doing this, the destroyer would pass over them and save them from judgment.

Exodus 12:13 - "Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

Moses leads the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Sinai desert where he is instructed to ascend a mountain. There, God gives to Moses His Law chiseled in stone. He gives to Moses specific instructions as to how He is to be worshiped. A Tabernacle was to be built, and its specifications included a holy place that was separated from the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, where God's glory dwelt.

The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Law of God, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod. Above the ark was a mercy seat where the blood of a substitute was to be sprinkled by Aaron, who was High Priest, as were later his

descendants. This was done once a year on the Day of Atonement, and the message was always the same--God can only be approached by sinful man through the blood of another, and man needs someone to represent him.

After 40 long years in the Sinai wilderness, the people are finally able to enter the land that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants. Joshua leads Israel to conquer and subdue the Canaanites and take possession of the land. After Joshua's generation passes from view, another generation arises who forget God. They compromise with the pagans around them, and God allows them to fall into bondage. However, He raises up deliverers known as the "judges" who rescue His people from their oppression. Because there was no king in Israel in those days, every man did what seemed right in his own eyes.

As the people begin clamoring for a king so they can be like the nations around them, God tells Samuel to anoint Saul as king. Saul was the people's choice, a prideful and rebellious man much like them, and he was a disaster. God sends Samuel to anoint another in his place, a man after his own heart--David, son of Jesse, from the tribe of Judah. It was with David that God established His covenant by promising that he would never fail to have a son seated on the throne. Thus, the message of the Old Testament is that the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head would be the Seed of Abraham and the Seed of David.

After David's death, his son Solomon reigned. After Solomon, Rehoboam became king and the kingdom was divided. The northern kingdom had a succession of kings who were not of the Davidic line. The southern kingdom of Judah remained loyal to David's descendants. For centuries, the situation remained this way.

Both of these nations were carried away into captivity--722 B.C. and 586 B.C.

After a period of 70 years, Judah was allowed to return from their captivity, though they would be under foreign occupation.

This is how the Old Testament concludes.

Apart from the gospel record, the Old Testament makes no sense. It would be good stories, but would provide no salvation. Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would have no anchor. What is concealed in the Old is now revealed in the New.

The **foreshadowing** in the Old Testament is **fulfillment** in the New Testament. The promise in the Old Testament is the performance of the New Testament. Redemption that is anticipated in the Old Testament is redemption that is accomplished in the New.

Thomas Schreiner - *“The OT clearly leaves us with an unfinished story. The serpent was not yet crushed. The promise that Israel would dwell in the land was contradicted by the exile, and even when Israel repossessed the land, they were either under the thumb of foreign powers or barely hanging on to independence. The promises of the new covenant, the new exodus, the new creation, and the new David obviously were not realized. The Lord reigned as sovereign King over the entire earth, but His saving promises for Israel and the world remained unfulfilled. The NT witness claims that the promise of a kingdom, anticipated in the OT, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.”*¹

The final verse of the Old Testament is fitting:

Malachi 4:5-6 - “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

The Old Testament begins and ends with mention of the curse, thereby showing that the conflict of Adam’s sin remained unresolved. However, God promised through the prophets and demonstrated through the priests and illustrated through the kings that the true King was coming to make right the situation.

Between Malachi and Matthew there is a period of 400 silent years, an intermission in this great drama of redemption. Then suddenly, like a flash of lightning darting across the night sky, the King makes His entrance into the world:

¹Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 428.

Matthew 1:1 - “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.”

Matthew wants us to know from the start that King is here! Why here? Why now? Why at this point in history?

Galatians 4:4-5 - “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

“Fullness” - *completion of the period of preparation*

The King came at just the right time:

- **Prophetically**--For centuries, the prophets had been preaching about the King’s coming; detail had been given about how, where, and to whom he would be born
- **Culturally**--Centuries before, Alexander the Great had conquered the world and made Greek the common language
- **Politically**--Rome was the power of the day and its empire dominated the world; Rome established roads that made travel throughout the empire fairly easy as well as creating economic stability; “Pax Romana” peace through strength
- **Spiritually**--After their captivity, the Jews developed synagogues where they taught the Scriptures and met for public worship; the law had fully served its purpose

Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus is intended to show us that Jesus is the King that the world has long been waiting for. His message is that the King is here.

In the first two chapters of Matthew, we find concerning the birth of Christ:

- genealogy that was specific
- wise men who were searching
- opposition that was satanic

- gifts that were symbolic

Matthew wants us to know how all of this points to the fact that the King is here. This is the message of the gospel.

1. TRUTH that affirmed the King's arrival (2:1-2)

“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? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

The IDENTITY of the wise men (v. 1a)

We are not told anything in particular about what nation they were from, or what nationality they were.

The Bible simply refers to as ‘wise men from the east.’

*“**Wise Men**” - literally the Magi; term that was used in reference to oriental philosophers and advisers in the Persian territory*

The Book of Daniel mentions ‘Magi’ and suggests that they were among the highest ranking officials in all of Babylon, and even later in the Medo-Persian empire.

Daniel 2:48 - “The king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon.”

Daniel, because of the godly man that he was, came to be highly respected by the Magi or wise men of Babylon. For all we know, it could very well be that because of his witness, the eastern magi came to learn much about the character and purposes of the God of Israel.

The INTEREST of the wise men (v. 1b-2a)

The interest that these wise men from the east show is seen through the questions that they ask. They are interested in the whereabouts of the One who had been born King of the Jews, for they had seen His star in the east.

This is the very first question asked in the New Testament, and it is a very good question. In fact, it ought to be the first question that every single person should ask:

“Where is the King? How can I find the King?”

Isaiah 55:6 - “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.”

Just what was it that had peaked their interest? It was the appearance of a star.

Numbers 24:17 - “A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.”

This King spoken of in Numbers would be associated with the appearance of a star, and the passage goes on to describe how this King would be one who had dominion and would deliver His people from the grip of the enemy.

Isaiah 60:1-6 - “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.”

Isaiah’s prophecy foretold that Gentiles would one day come to the light of God’s people, and that these Gentiles would bring riches and gifts for the purpose of worship.

God's global agenda is seen in the Magi's arrival. He wants all the earth's inhabitants to give worship to this King.

The INTENTION of the wise men (v. 2b)

These wise men reveal their intention for traveling all the way to Jerusalem--they had come to worship. It is yet fulfillment of more of Isaiah's prophecy.

"For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

They well understand through God's revelation that Christ was no ordinary baby, but was One who was deserving of worship. He was God incarnate, deity wrapped up in humanity.

To worship is declare the "worth" of something.

And apart from faith in and redemption through Jesus Christ, man is in total darkness and worships what He does not know. There is something deep within him that compels him to seek something or someone outside of himself to worship and adore. In his lost condition, his search only leads him farther away from the God who made him. He seeks to fill the void in his heart with anything that he can find, only to come up empty in the process.

Matthew 4:16 - "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

God gave His Son to men so that the sons of men could become the sons of God. Jesus came to give us access.

These wise men show how the worship of Jesus is to be central in my life.

2. TURMOIL that affected the King's arrival (2:3-8)

"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 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. 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 word, that I too may come and worship him.”

Unlike the wise men, not everyone was as enthusiastic about worshiping the Christ Child and giving their allegiance to Him as King.

The CONCERN shown by Herod (v. 3)

“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

Every good story has a protagonist, the hero who is also the main character. And, every story has typically has an antagonist, the one who opposes and is against the main character.

In the Christmas narrative, Herod is the antagonist. There perhaps has never been a more wicked man than Herod. To hear that someone who is born King of the Jews is troublesome to him for he had bought that title from Rome for himself.

Jesus was a threat to Herod because Herod grasped what was at stake in the birth of Jesus. If what the wise men were saying was true, then Israel's true and rightful King had been born and Herod could be dethroned.

The seed of the serpent has always persecuted the Seed of the woman. This is a pattern that we see all throughout Scripture.

Jesus is a real threat to anyone and everyone who wants to reserve the right to run his or her own life. If Jesus is King, it means you are not. If He is to be enthroned, I am to be dethroned. His enthronement demands my submission and obedience.

Just like Herod, many do not welcome the news that the real King has come, because it means that they have to abdicate the throne.

The COUNSELORS sought by Herod (v. 4-6)

“And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born...”

Herod’s men know what the Scriptures said. In fact, they even quote Micah 5:2 which predicted Christ’s birth in Bethlehem.

They know what the Bible says, but they are indifferent. They are apathetic to the truth and remain unmoved by it.

Whereas Herod could well represent those who are in opposition to Jesus, these chief priests represent those who are indifferent to Jesus. In other words, they know what Scripture says about Him, but the weight of it has not gripped their hearts.

Unlike the wise men, their lives are not motivated by the truth of who Jesus is. It had become ‘second-hand’ truth to them.

Sadly, where there is a BOUNTY of truth you will also find a BOREDOM with truth. When the truth of Christ becomes commonplace and familiar, our spiritual fires need to be stoked and revival is necessary.

It is not enough to simply know the truth; a person’s life must be transformed and gripped by the truth.

The CRAFTINESS seen in Herod (v. 7-8)

“...And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I too may come and worship Him.”

Herod sends the wise men on to Bethlehem, but if he and his counselors were truly interested in worshiping Christ, they would have accompanied the wise men on the five mile trip there.

Herod had no intention of bowing to the King, but only of preserving his own kingdom.

Mathew 15:8 - “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.”

Actions speak louder than words!

3. TREASURES that announced the King’s arrival (2:9-12)

“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 worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”

The Bible says that these wise men brought gifts with them to present to the King, and each gift represents a truth about His identity:

Gold is a gift fit for a KING (v. 11a)

In his lost condition, a man likes to think that he reserves the right to run his own life. He wants to live and do however he pleases. In his rebellious heart, he thinks of no one but himself and his own sinful inclinations.

The gift of gold reveals that Jesus has come to RULE us.

Frankincense is a gift fit for a PRIEST (v. 11b)

In the Old Testament, frankincense was a fragrance that was used in grain offerings in the temple. Before the offering was given in worship, it was applied to ensure a sweet smelling aroma.

The gift of frankincense reveals that Jesus has come to REPRESENT us.

Hebrews 4:15 - “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

We have a sympathetic Priest in heaven who understands and cares. He knows what it is like to hurt. He knows what it is like to be human.

This brings great confidence into our lives.

Myrrh is a gift fit for a SACRIFICE (v. 11c)

Of all three gifts presented to Jesus, this gift would have been the most perplexing. Myrrh was an antiseptic that was used to embalm the dead. When mixed with wine, it was also an anesthetic. It was a fragrance that would often be applied to a body before burial.

This would have been a strange gift indeed to give a baby! But it is not so strange when you consider the purpose for which the King came.

The fragrance of death surrounded His life. He was born to die for the sins of the world. The shadow of Calvary's cross falls upon the scene of Bethlehem's stable.

The gift of myrrh reveals that Jesus has come to REDEEM us.

v. 12 - "Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."

In other words, they came to Jesus one way, but they left another. Isn't that what He does best? He changes those who bow before Him.

What a stark contrast we find in these verses when we look at the lives of the Magi versus the lives of Herod and his advisors. The difference is seen in the way they each respond to Christ the King.

The question, "Who is King?" demands an answer. The One that the prophets said would come indeed came, and the message of the gospel is now, "The King is here." The question not is not, "Will you bow to Him?" The question is, "WHEN will you bow to Him?" Salvation belongs to those who renounce their own lives and by faith trust in Christ who gives us His life.

(Illustration) In England, the flag flies over Buckingham Palace to indicate that the queen is in her residence. When she is not there, the flag does not fly over the place.

Jesus began His ministry by preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In other words, “Surrender and raise My flag over the castle of your heart!”

Anonymous - *“Joy is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart, for the King is in residence there.”*

The message of the gospel is that the Kingdom has come, the King is seated on the throne, and all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. In light of this, the King’s subjects are to declare the good news of the Kingdom. This is our Great Commission given to us by the King Himself!

Dustin Willis/Aaron Coe - *“Historically, during a time of war, kings would set off to battle for their people against the given enemy. If the king was defeated, his people would either become slaves to the enemy or be killed. Messengers would run back to the city yelling, ‘Run for your lives!’ However, when the king and his soldiers triumphed, he would send back a messenger to let the people know that the enemy had been defeated. The messenger would yell, ‘Good news! Good news!’ This could have literally meant freedom from impending slavery or death. This news from the messenger is the same word we now use as the word ‘gospel,’ which in its simplest form means ‘good news.’”²*

We have been entrusted with the gospel of the King and His kingdom. This means several things must be true of my life:

- As a kingdom citizen, I have REPENTED of sin and trusted Christ with my life
- As a kingdom citizen, I have RENOUNCED cultural dictates and follow Christ in discipleship

² Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 47.

- As a kingdom citizen, I have REJECTED self and embrace the cross of Christ every day of my life
- As a kingdom citizen, I have REORIENTED my life around the mission of Christ in the world

We are the King's ambassadors, and the message of reconciliation, the story of the King, has been given to us to declare.

Why do we not embrace our mission as the King's ambassadors? It is in large part because we have our own mission and our own agenda. If we are ever going to get caught up with the truth of God's kingdom agenda, then we are going to have to first of all get rid of our own.