

Wise men come to visit Jesus

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[0 : 00] But it is now turned to the portion of scripture that we write together in the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 2, which I will read from the beginning.

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?

But we here saw his dad when he froze and I come to worship him. Seeking the Lord's blessing, we shall focus upon this part of the narrative.

This morning there are two Gospels that give us the account of the birth of Jesus Christ.

There is Matthew and we also have an account of the birth of Christ in the Gospel of Luke. But our focus this morning and seeking the Lord's blessing upon it is going to be on that account that we have here in the Gospel of Matthew.

[1 : 21] Now Matthew was a Jew and he was writing to Jewish people and we must bear that in mind and I hope that as we go on to study this portion of scripture that that it will answer for itself.

That is why in the Gospel of Matthew we have this phrase coming up again and again and even in this chapter itself there are at least four if not more, a reference to the word of God being fulfilled.

He is taking them back to the Old Testament which is the Bible that they had in those days obviously the New Testament hadn't yet been written. They had the Old Testament scriptures, they had their own scriptures and Matthew brings them back to their scriptures and he shows them how the events of these days in the birth of Christ is a fulfilling of their own scriptures given to them by God is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and that was very important for the Jew.

And so we must bear that in mind as we look at this account. In Matthew's account of the birth of Christ he informs us that he was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King.

Now later on in this chapter we find that Matthew notes the words of the chief priests and scribes that in accordance to the words of the prophet in verse 5 in Bethlehem of Judea for in Bethlehem of Judea it is written by the prophet and you are Bethlehem in the land of Judah and by no means least among the rulers of Judah for from usual come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

[3 : 28] Now this prophecy cited as a quotation from Machia chapter 5 if you go to Machia and chapter 5 and there in verse 6.

But you O Bethlehem Ephrata who are too little to be among the clans of Judah from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel whose origin is from a fold from ancient days.

Now you will notice that the quotation here is not a direct quotation as we see that Matthew makes certain changes and he makes these certain changes in order for his readers who were Jews to understand better the significance of what was happening in the birth of Christ.

Like Machia names the place as Bethlehem Ephrata, Matthew changes that to Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

Now this may have been in order to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in Sebelon. However I think that Matthew is naming Bethlehem in the land of Judah in order to emphasize the fact that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah because he mentioned it three times in this chapter verse 1 verse 5 and verse 6.

[5 : 16] Now this would be very important for his Jewish readers because they would know that the promised Messiah that the promised Christ was to be from the tribe of Judah.

In Genesis 49 we read regarding the blessing that was placed upon Judah, the person Judah. The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler of staff from between his feet until the tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of his people.

And that was a promise regarding the coming seat of the woman, regarding the coming king, regarding the coming Christ or Messiah.

You will recall another important verse at this time of the year that is coming forth will be when Isaiah says that a virgin shall conceive from Isaiah chapter 7.

And the importance of that verse again within the background of being given to Ahas. Ahas was worried at this time because the Syria and Israel was against Judah and he was afraid that Judah was going to be destroyed.

[6 : 54] The nation Judah would be destroyed by the Syrians and Israel if they would come against them. So the prophet Isaiah asked Ahas, king of Judah, asked the Lord for a sign and he refused to ask the Lord for a sign.

And so the Isaiah says the Lord himself will give you a sign and in that was a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and so on.

You find the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 7. And the importance of that prophecy is it was actually telling Ahas the king of Judah who was so worried about that his nation Judah was going to be destroyed by the Syrians and Israel that it would not be destroyed.

It cannot be destroyed. Judah must remain. Judah must be a whoever will come against it and however great they are, the armies are, they will not destroy Judah because a virgin must conceive and have a son.

In other words the Messiah must come through Judah. The Christ must come from Judah. And so the nation of Judah cannot be destroyed.

[8 : 09] And so you see the importance of this for this Jewish reader that Matthew quotes this prophecy of Micah and he says Bethlehem, not Bethlehem Ephrata, but Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

The place Bethlehem is itself significant. The name means the house of bread and it was from here that was to be born the one who could claim to be the true bread that came from down from heaven.

I could say I am that living bread. The first mention of Bethlehem is a way back in Genesis 35 in connection with the birth of Benjamin and the death of Richard.

And Bethlehem came to the fore when a family leaves it during a time of famine to sow John and Moab as recorded for us in the book of Ruth. But Bethlehem comes very much to the fore as the birthplace of one of the great kings of Judah, of Israel, David.

And it's also the place where Samir anointed him to become king in Israel. This is David from whose household Jesus was going to come.

[9 : 36] In 1 Samuel chapter 16, we read that the Lord said to Samuel after the Lord had rejected the first king of Israel, namely Saul. I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite for I have provided me a king among the sons.

And Samuel did that which the Lord spoke and came to Bethlehem. And here he anointed David to be king. The next mention of Bethlehem is in the prophecy brought before us here in the Gospel of Matthew in Mahjong.

And now here we have also Bethlehem in itself is a place of great significance.

Now another change we notice that Matthew makes in verse 6 where we read, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, that's in Mahjong's prophecy.

But here Matthew changes that to are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. Now Matthew's prophecy bringing before the Jews that are the Bethlehem was a small insignificant village five or six miles south of Jerusalem that was the birth of this man Christ, of this child, that with the birth of Jesus it would become an important village.

[11 : 09] In God's redemptive plan Bethlehem has gone from being to the least to being the greatest simply by the birth of this child Jesus.

And you O Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

Micah says, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.

And here we find Matthew's version. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

So according to Matthew this ruler was also going to be a shepherd over Israel. Bethlehem as a place of birth brings before us once mine, David's kingship and that had once come out from Bethlehem as well as that David was the shepherd king.

[12 : 21] So this child is also going to be a shepherd king, a shepherd ruler.

Now we are recorded by the chief priests and the scribes here in Matthew's version. It does not conclude that last phrase that we have in Micah's prophecy who's coming forth from old, from ancient days.

That is not quoted here in Matthew but is of course in the prophecy of Micah. And there Micah reminds us that Jesus Christ didn't first come into being in Bethlehem.

He already existed as the second person of the Trinity. The pre-existent eternal Son of God who was there with the Father and with the Holy Spirit before the foundation of the world.

He came from another world where time does not exist. Where everything is eternal. Whose going forth is from old, from ancient times.

[13 : 30] All tells the Galatians but when the fullness of time was come God sent forth a son made of a woman made under the law. And this birth was for a distinct purpose to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.

He was born for the purpose of redemption and deliverance of sinners. In the covenant of redemption the eternal Son sets boundaries upon himself for him as for any other child there was a time to be born and there was a time to die.

Paul writing to the Philippians says and being found in fashion as a man. He humbled himself. He condescended. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross.

Here we have the shepherd king prefigured by King David who was the shepherd king of his career but here is the difference. Here he is the shepherd king to both Jews and Gentiles.

David was the king shepherd for the Jews but Jesus is the king shepherd for Jews and Gentiles. He is the king shepherd for the world.

[14 : 53] It is very interesting for you to study the New Testament in the light of the fulfilment of scriptures from the Old Testament.

We must remember that the Bible from Genesis to Revelation brings before us God's redemptive plan. God's redemptive plan.

And if we bear that in mind then the Bible will make sense to us because what's revealed to us in the Bible is God's redemptive plan.

God's redemptive purpose. That is to save sinners like me and you. And the Bible brings before us how God went about that, the work of redemption.

How God went about to fulfil the promise that he gave to sinners in the Garden of Eden that there would come of the seed of the woman.

[15 : 56] And everything that is involved in the Bible in the Old Testament sometimes you might think the Old Testament is so dry but it is not dry. If you have in view that it's God's redemptive plan, God bringing this plan to fruition how God is fulfilling that plan into the person of Jesus Christ then the Old Testament will no longer be dry.

Perhaps you're hearing and you're thinking well you know that book called Leviticus is so dry with all its sacrifices and laws and so on and washes and so on. But my friend, it is rich.

It is a book that is rich in Christ. If you think of God's redemptive plan and apply it to the book of Leviticus it's a living word, it's a living book.

It's a book that's so full of Jesus Christ. Of course every sacrifice pointed to an aspect of the one main sacrifice which is Jesus Christ.

You know we live in an age when everything has to be visual. We have to see things in order to understand. Even our children are raised now to be visual.

[17 : 15] They want to see things in order to understand. Well you know this one of the great visuals that we have of the sacrifice of Christ is the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

The Bible before us aspects of the sacrifice of Christ. So when you go there have this before your mind that it is speaking of God's redemptive plan.

However we must go on. Matthew tells us the time at which Jesus was born was in the days of Herod the King. Now this Herod is Herod the Great.

He was not a Jew but had been made king of Judah and around 40 AD by the Romans who of push occupied the land. He was a tyrant but he had done great things.

He had done great achievements and so this term great was put after his name Herod the Great. He was a great builder and was responsible for doing work to the temple at Jerusalem and building Samaria.

[18 : 23] There were other important building projects that he had undertaken. So he was given this title Herod the Great and it tells Matthew we call that there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem in his days.

Behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and the word behold in the Bible often used to announce something unexpected and calls for our attention towards it.

Remember how John for instance says to his disciples as Jesus approaches him, behold the Lamb of God. It is something that is calling for our attention.

And here in Matthew it indicates the surprise, appearance in Jerusalem of the wise men from the east. It was unexpected and it was so surprising.

Now they are sometimes referred to as magicians but from what follows we know that there were people who studied the stars.

[19 : 37] These men are very much to the fore in the book of Daniel their homeland is referred to as the east which means that obviously they were not Jews they were Gentiles.

And if they have set an appearance caused astir in Jerusalem upon their arrival it must have aroused even more when they announced why they had come to Jerusalem.

Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen a star in the east and have come to worship him.

Notice now what they said, he that is born or he who has been born king of the Jews.

Not born to be king. What their message is saying is he is already king. They are talking about this child that is born who he is already a king.

[20 : 48] Not what he shall be but what he actually is. This child that we are looking for is already king.

He is not one who is about to be king or one who will become king he is king. That question shows that they were already certain. A king had been born to the Jews and all they wanted was to know where they could find him.

Where is he that is born king of the Jews? We have seen a star in the east and have come to worship him. Now how did they come to attain any knowledge about the king of the Jews?

Well in those days there were a very special interest in the Jewish religion because the Jews had begun to settle outside their own homeland because after the exile not every Jew returned to their own lands and decided to stay away from Jerusalem.

But there was also the influence of Daniel among the Babylonian astrologers for it seemed that among them there was an expectation of a great king that would arise from among the Jews.

[22 : 03] So there is no difficulty to ascertain how they had come to knowledge about the king of the Jews. What is more difficult is how they could have read the king's birth in the star.

They said they had seen his star in the east. Now the words of the verse are too vague and general to give us a clear idea of what exactly they saw.

But it would be too much to say that even the inanimate creation rejoiced at the birth of the son of God as his star announced his birth.

At his birth we find that a star announced his birth but at his death. You know the brightness of all objects refused to shine.

We have already quoted Genesis 49 where we read about that the scepter would not depart from Judah until a log gave her a ruler from between his feet until Shiloh would come.

[23 : 09] As we have it in the A.V. But interesting you will recall when Bela the king of Moab called for Bela to curse the house of Jacob and the people of Israel.

What made it clear to him that it is not to curse but to bless them. And the last two lines of his final oracle is interesting. If you look at Numbers 24 verse 17 it says there, a scepter speaks of one who rules.

And here we are told that one who rules was to rise from Israel and a star would come because the oracle says a star shall come out of Judah and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.

So you can see the expectation of a king. And all away from their homeland these wise men travelled probably over desert and possibly during the night as they were led by the star because it wasn't easy for them to travel during the day.

Probably most of the travelling was done during the night. And it would seem that they did not go directly to where Jesus was born. He was dead, he had quieted in Jerusalem and Herod heard about them and the request very much to stir to end all Israel.

[24 : 25] When Herod the king had heard the why they had come he was troubled and so was all Jerusalem with him and the war troubled there means a strong emotional agitation.

He was overcome by a mixture of fear and anger. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes together he demanded of them, well Christ should be born and we have already gone over their answer and their prophecy, how they cited the prophecy of Micah in chapter 5.

And after Herod had spoken to the chief priests and scribes he asked the wise men to tell him, now this is important, he asked the wise men to tell him the exact time that the star appeared so that he was able to determine the age of the new born king.

Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And that is important for us to remember as we go on because he wanted to determine the age of the new born king because a period of time had elapsed since the birth of Christ.

When the wise men came to see Jesus he would be around two years of age. For Herod who pretended to have an interest in the new born king when the wise men did not come back to Herod to tell whether he had found the child after he had been warned of God and had been, Herod had all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and under put to death.

[26 : 18] As we said Bethlehem was only about five miles south of Jerusalem and Herod did not wait two years for them to return.

He did not wait even a year for them to return, possibly a couple of weeks and when they did not return he knew he had been tricked by them. And so he put out the command, every male child two years and under must be destroyed.

And he was fine two years and under because he had ascertained from them the time that the star had appeared that announced the birth of the king of the Jews, the birth of this child.

And also we find that when the star, when the star reappeared to the wise men and they followed him they came as it says here they came to a house and going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his mother, the child was no longer in the manger, the child was in a house, his mother was there, there is no mention of Joseph, possibly Joseph was out when the wise men had arrived and there was just Mary and the child, Jesus.

So Jesus is roughly around two years of age, that's different to the shepherds, they came soon after he was born, that's the narrative given to us in the Gospel of Luke but here Jesus was around two years of age.

[27 : 59] And you might wonder why did this star really bring them directly to the house? Well I think there is a lesson here for us because by the star not bringing them directly to the house they came into association with Herod and also with the chief priests and the scribes.

Now these chief priests and scribes they knew their own scripture, they knew where the Messiah was to be born and even in the testimony of the wise men that did not arouse their curiosity to travel these five miles to Bethlehem to find out if there was any truth in the report.

They did nothing for the promised Messiah was born, they didn't even accompany the wise men in their search for the newborn king. There is indifference to the message that was brought to them, they were really pouring content upon that revelation that they had in their own hands about this king that was to be born in Bethlehem.

Isn't it ironic really that a Gospel written by a Jew for Jews and yet the first people we see coming to see Jesus and worshipping in the Gospel are Gentiles?

Bishop Ryle says how often the very persons who live nearest to the means of grace are the ones who neglect the most. There is too much truth in the old proverb, the nearer the church, the Father from God.

[29 : 41] You see we have that revelation from God. We have the Gospel and yet like these chief priests and scribes we may be indifferent to what we have, we may even pour content on what we have.

They had these words of the Prophets in their own hands regarding the birth of Jesus and yet they did not walk these five, six miles to see.

You have the very Gospel of Jesus Christ that offers salvation and redemption to sinners and what are you doing with it? Are you indifferent or pouring content?

Well the wise men arrived at the place where Jesus was as we already know that Jesus is no longer in the place where he was born. He is in a house in Bethlehem and we read that the wise men departed and know the star which is on the eastward before them till he came as to do over the place where the young child was.

And when they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they came into the house they saw the young child with Mary's mother and they fell down and they worshiped.

[30 : 57] And when they had over the treasures they presented and gave gold, frackensons and armour, what a scene this is, those wise men, we cannot be sure of how many there is, the tradition of Saint Rhys simply because of the number of gifts given.

But these wise men, Gentiles who had come from the east, had taken some crime and travelling over the desert were so determined to come and see this new child that had been born into the world as king.

They bowed down on their knees and they worshiped. And who did they worship? A little child of around a year and a half to two years.

And I think there we have the great example of faith for what else could make these men travel such a great distance in spite of all the dangers that they may encounter.

And then we told them back to come and bow down and worship before a little child because they had faith. They believed that this child was the promised Messiah, the promised Christ.

[32 : 11] And the presence of gold, frackensons and armour, well I know that we need to be careful for these gifts may not represent any particular type of symbolism.

Gold and frackensons so much used in Israel's worship and myrrh so much noted with the idea of anointing. It is interesting indeed how myrrh became associated very much with the death of Christ.

The Gospel of Mark we learn that on the cross they offered him wine mingled with myrrh which he refused to drink. So not only was Jesus the king presented with myrrh as king in the cradle but he was offered myrrh as king on the cross.

In John's Gospel we are told that Nicodemus took myrrh along with Allos and both he and Joseph of Methia used it to prepare Jesus for burial. But whether we are attaching too much symbolism to it or not, one thing that we know and that it was customary, particularly in the Indies, to bring gifts when one came to approach a superior.

So that these wise men from the east who had come to this house where Jesus was, Jesus been about a year and a half to two years old, they offered him gifts.

[33 : 28] Why? Because they understood that they were in the presence of one who was far superior to them. A little child far superior to them because by faith they had embraced that this was the Messiah, this was the Christ, this was the king.

Oh well let us take example of those wise men and cast from us all out pride and take the place that they do, fall down and worship the king and offer him our best.

And this lay out gold and fanciful since and meritorious feet. They saw no miracles to convince them, they heard no teaching to persuade them, they saw nothing but a little child, helpless and weak and eating a mother's care.

But when they saw that child they believed that they saw the savior of sinners, the Messiah, the Christ, the promised one, the seed of a woman that was promised and they fell down.

And they worshiped him. Let us be like them, let us not be ashamed to believe, to confess and serve Jesus, though all around us may seem careless and unbelieving.

[34 : 48] Because we have more evidence than those wise men had. We have more evidence, we have much more than they had.

But where is our faith? Where is your faith today in the midst of all the great evidence that you have regarding this little child born into the world?

And that's how minds especially at this time of the year becomes focused upon this little child that was born. Let despair and mind the significance of the child that was born.

He is the King, he was born King, he is the King, he is the savior of the world, he is the savior of sinners like me and you.

Do you believe that? Well these wise men did, they believed it. And you know there will be many from the district of Calaway and these wise men will rise up in judgement against them because they believed on the evidence that they had before them that this Jesus is the savior of sinners.

[36 : 04] Well there will be many from this district of Calaway that will be brought to the judgement seat who did not believe in spite of the great evidence set before them to whom this Jesus will say depart from me.

Will the wise men rise up in judgement against you? Where is your faith? May the Lord bless to us this portion of our meditation this morning which I am now seeing from Psalm 37, at verse 3, set out thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good, and so thou in the land shall dwell and verily have it.

Verse 3 to 6 to the Lord's praise of Psalm 37, set out thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good. And so thou in the land shall dwell and verily have it.

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[38 : 09] And so thou in the land shall dwell and verily have it.

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