

King Jesus Came to Shepherd and Separate

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn to the Bibles now and to Matthew chapter 2. Phil Copeland is speaking these few Sunday mornings and from these wonderful stories in Matthew's Gospel.

And we're going to read this morning a very familiar Christmas reading from Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 12. But Phil is going to help us realize what actually is in the Bible and what is just in some of the Christmas cards and stories that we imbibe at this time of year and in fact isn't in the Bible at all.

So let's pay attention and make sure that we are reading what is here and not just thinking about what we thought might be here. Matthew chapter 2 then at verse 1.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men, Magi, you see the footnote says, wise men came from the east to Jerusalem saying, where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose and we have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

[1 : 2 2] And assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And they told him, in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it's 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 at what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem saying, go and search diligently for the child.

And when you find him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

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

[2 : 3 8] Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts. Gold and frankincense and myrrh. But being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, good morning and please do have your Bibles open to Matthew chapter 2.

And you'll find that on page 807 of our church Bibles. And there's a passage that's all about the fact that Jesus is God's promised shepherd king who separates humanity.

Well, Christmas is coming soon. I wonder how that makes you feel.

For me, I'm full of excitement, but also a little bit of dread. There's lots of things that I love about Christmas. There are also lots of things that I loathe about Christmas. And probably the thing that I love the most about Christmas is the way in which surrounding Christmas, there's so much make-believe and pretense.

[4 : 02] It seems to me that most people in Glasgow today tell us that we need to be jolly and be merry and simply forget about all the hard realities of life.

Put up some decorations, stuff yourself with food and drink. I like that bit. Try to be nice to the members of your family for a bit longer than usual. And tell yourself that all is well.

I think most people today play this massive game of make-believe in Glasgow. But, you know, from my experience, it doesn't take long before the jolly facade fades. A friend of mine told me that a couple of Christmases ago, he'd just finished doing the Christmas dishes, and he walked into his living room to find all of his family sitting in silence with their heads buried in their own iPads, one for every member, flicking through the Boxing Day sales already, looking at what they're going to buy.

More stuff, please. Earlier in the morning, they'd been sickeningly nice to each other, but after they'd unwrapped their presents, it was all over. In fact, he had to switch off the Wi-Fi just to get his kids to talk to each other.

The make-believe merriment didn't last very long. But then, of course, there are those who will find it impossible to pretend that everything is okay.

[5 : 20] Just think of the many poor souls for whom Christmas will be a time of deep sorrow and sadness because tragedy and suffering has hit their lives. So think about all those who've lost loved ones, and they are dreading Christmas because there will be an empty seat at their dinner table as they try and tuck into their turkey.

I imagine that for them, it will be almost impossible to join in with the rest of Glasgow and pretend that all is rosy. Well, friends, when we come to the Bible, we find something refreshingly different.

The Bible doesn't let us play make-believe. It won't allow us to shy away from the realities of life that are hard. It tells us plainly that this world is deeply broken and not what it should be, and that the world is this way because we ourselves and our hearts are broken and not what we should be.

But, you know, the Bible also tells us of the real answer to our problems. And the real answer to our problems is not that we are to try harder and live a better life, nor does it teach that our problems will be sorted by going through some sort of a religious ceremony at Christmas.

No. The answer to our problems is a person. Jesus Christ. And that is what the Gospel of Matthew is all about. Matthew, as I'm sure you'll know, was one of the eyewitnesses to Jesus' time on earth.

[6 : 43] And in this book, Matthew is declaring to us the momentous historical truth that's at the heart of Christmas. The momentous news that the true and living God is not a bystander.

God is not some kind of one who sits idly by and looks down upon this world of evil and says, I'm not getting involved in that. No. The opposite is the case. God loves the world so much that he came down in the person of Christ Jesus himself in order to save people like you and me from our biggest problem.

In other words, Matthew has written this book because he wants you to see how glorious Jesus is so that you will give everything to him and build your life upon his teaching. Well, let me just give you a brief summary of what Matthew has said so far up to this point in his Gospel over chapter 1.

In chapter 1, verses 1 to 17, you can run your eyes over that genealogy there. Matthew is declaring to us that this Jesus is the promised king. And that's why he starts with that genealogy that runs through all the descendants leading up to Jesus in the Old Testament.

He wants us to see that Jesus coming to earth didn't happen in some sort of isolated time vacuum. Rather, Jesus coming to earth is the great continuation and the climax of the Old Testament.

[8 : 02] You see, the Bible is one long, big, glorious Gospel account. And Jesus is the one in whom all of God's promises find their yes and their amen.

You see, time and again throughout history, read through the Bible, God promised to send his people an ultimate king. One who would be born into the royal family line of the Bible, a descendant of Abraham and David.

One who would come and finally destroy Satan and all of his work. One who would come and deal with the evil hearts of human beings and change them and bring them forgiveness. One who would renew this broken world and fill it once and for all with the visible and unopposed reign of God, making it a paradise for all of God's people.

And Matthew opens his Gospel by saying, he's here. Here he is at last. He's come in the person of Jesus. And you know, this theme of Jesus being the promised king, it carries on all the way through Matthew's Gospel, but he makes it really explicit in chapters 1 and 2, where he links an event from Jesus' conception, birth and childhood to some Old Testament prophecy or pattern.

Just run your eyes over these verses and see what's repeated. 1.22 2.5 2.15 2.17 And 2.23 Matthew repeats this line again and again and again, having just described an event involving Jesus, he says, this took place, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had promised through his Old Testament prophet.

[9 : 36] He's the one that the world has been waiting for for centuries. He's come. So take him seriously. Listen to him. Trust him. And Matthew tells us that this promised king, he was unlike any other figure from history.

It's just as we sung in that last hymn. Here is a babe without peer. Because Jesus was both fully God and fully man in the one person. Fully God and fully man in the one person.

That's what the eyewitness testimony declares to us. In chapter 1 verse 17, we are told that Joseph is Jesus' legal father by adoption. But there's no mention of a biological father.

Now what's that all about? Well, there's no mention of a biological father because Jesus didn't have one. the Holy Spirit conceived him in the womb of Mary, his virgin mother.

And that's repeated four times in verse 18 to 25 of chapter 1. Again and again and again. Conceived by the Holy Spirit. Conceived by the Holy Spirit. Conceived by the Holy Spirit. Conceived by the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 39] And that means Jesus is a divine king. He is none other than the eternal son of God of one substance and equal to God the Father. He left the eternal glory of heaven and he humbled himself to become an embryo in the womb of his virgin mother.

Why did he do that? Well, for a purpose. Because Jesus came to be the disclosing king. That is, he came to make known the truth about God the Father so that we don't have to play desperate guessing games about who God is and what he is like.

You and I can know the true God through this Jesus. And more than that, please look at verse 21 of chapter 1 where we're told that King Jesus will save his people from their sins.

So not only was Jesus born to be a disclosing king, he also came to be a delivering king. And read on in Matthew and you'll find that it's exactly what he does. He was born to die on the cross in our place taking the punishment that you and I deserve for the terrible way that we've treated God so that you and I could be forgiven and have peace with God and be reconciled to him forever and ever.

And in this morning, in chapter 2, verses 1 to 12, Matthew is teaching us that Jesus was born to be the shepherd king in fulfillment, again, of what was promised by the Lord through the prophet Micah.

[12 : 11] That's so important, friends. You've got to remember this. Those whom Jesus came to save, he also came to shepherd. You can't have one without the other. Those whom Jesus came to redeem, he also came to rule.

And also in this passage, Matthew then records for us two responses to the shepherd king. We're going to see that this shepherd king actually separates humanity.

For either you respond to Jesus with worship and rejoicing, or you respond to Jesus with wickedness and rejection. Well, the rest of our time, let's unpack that under three points.

First point, Jesus is God's promised shepherd king. Please look at verse 1 of chapter 2. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, 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. So much of the Christmas story has been clouded by sentimentality and myth.

[13 : 22] The pretty scenes that you see on the front of Christmas cards or in nativity plays, I've got to go to my first nativity play at my son's nursery next Monday. I'm dreading it, to be honest with you, but there we go.

But a lot of these scenes that we see are actually profoundly unhelpful, especially when we read them into the Bible text. The three wise men arriving with the shepherds to visit the newborn baby Jesus in the stables didn't happen.

The shepherds visited Jesus much earlier in time than this. You can read about that in Luke's gospel account. But by the time these wise men arrived in Bethlehem, Jesus was no longer a newborn. He could have been anywhere up to the age of two years old, and his family had clearly moved on out of the inn into a house.

We don't actually know how many wise men there were. The only reason that we assume that there was three is because there was three gifts mentioned. But there could have been an army of them for all that we know.

And actually, that's probably more likely given the fact that Herod was so alarmed by their appearance and the rest of Jerusalem was alarmed as well. We're not told anything about their names. Neither are we told that they came on camels.

[14 : 32] Sorry. Friends, these details just aren't important. That's why Matthew hasn't told us about them. What he has told us about is so important.

And that's the fact that these men came from where? The east. In other words, they were Gentiles. In the Greek text, they are named the Magi. Now that name crops up in the book of Daniel to describe educated men in Babylon.

So it's possible that they could have come from there. But again, we cannot be certain. The key question is why? Why would such men care about the king of the Jews being born?

Why travel miles and miles to burst into Herod's palace in Jerusalem and ask about his place of birth? Why would they go to so much effort to come and see this king being born?

Well, as I said earlier, the answer is rooted in the Old Testament. See, the Magi came because the promises that had been made about this king of the Jews. It wasn't just the people of Judea, the Jews, who knew the Old Testament and the promises God had made over the centuries.

[15 : 40] Others, too, knew what the Lord God of Israel had promised through his prophets. In the ancient world, it was no secret that his promises all centered in on the coming of a king, a Messiah, a Christ, a shepherd.

And that is why when King Herod, the Romans puppet king of Judea, heard about this other king of the Jews who'd been born. He asked his advisors, his religious staff, where they would be.

And the religious staff didn't have to scratch their heads and guess. Please look at verse 5. They told Herod, well, the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

For so it is written by the prophet, the prophet Micah. 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 Micah, the prophet who wrote those words, wrote them six centuries before the events recorded in Matthew 2. And in that part of the prophecy that is quoted here, Micah is talking about a king who will come and rule over God's people in the same way that a shepherd rules over his flock of sheep.

[16 : 49] Now again, that is another biblical imagery, a biblical image that has been clouded by sentimentality. When we think of shepherds, we tend to think of shepherds as they're depicted in those stained glass window scenes that you sometimes find in old churches, you know, of the beautiful looking soft men with lovely moisturized faces and lovely flowing hair that's because I'm worth it.

You know, head and shoulders adverts with a couple of fluffy cute lambs under their arms like that. But that is so far from reality of what shepherds were like in Bible times.

Shepherds were hard cases. They were hard men who would work tirelessly in dangerous conditions for the good of their flock. They would personally ensure that every single one of their sheep were provided for.

They would lead them to pastures green and beside still waters. And they would also protect the sheep from predators and wild animals, often at great personal cost.

They were even willing to lay down their own lives to ensure that their sheep were secure. And Micah and Matthew are teaching us that this is how King Jesus treats his people.

[17 : 58] This is the type of ruler that you want to be ruled by. This is the king that you really want. He's not a selfish king or a corrupt king. He's trustworthy. He is the total opposite in fact of King Herod who's mentioned here.

Herod was an utterly paranoid and power hungry psychopath. And we know from the history books that he actually murdered many members of his own court and even members of his own family in order to try and protect his own seat of power.

He was the exact opposite of what a godly king should be. Herod was willing to devour all of the sheep in his flock if it meant to fatten himself up and to keep hold of his own status.

He didn't care about his sheep but King Jesus is the total opposite. Here in the birth of Jesus is the arrival of the good shepherd so kind so loving the one who will put the needs of his people of his flock before his own.

And you know if you were to go back to the book of Micah and look at this quote in context and read about the quote which I recommend you should do maybe later this afternoon you will hear Micah say these words this is what he says he that's the one to be born in Bethlehem will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God and his people will live securely listen to this for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth and he will be our peace.

[19 : 32] Do you hear what Micah's saying? This shepherd king's greatness will not be limited to the land of Israel no this king's greatness will spread over the entire world to be a global kingdom in other words God will give this shepherd king all authority to rule over every nation nowhere on earth will be outside his rule and when this shepherd establishes this universal rule on earth it will be such good news for all those who trust in him and live under his rule because they will be freed from oppression from their enemies they will have peace with each other and peace with God that will never end.

Let me just say this is what's going to happen in the future when Jesus comes to earth for the second and final time when God's shepherd arrives he will not come in a humble and lowly state but he will come in power and on that day he will fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God and he will completely subdue everyone and everything that has stood against him for then his coming will be day of ruin and disaster but for all those who trust in him and love him all those who are in his flock they will know the opposite they will live in peace and security forever and they will know his care forever and I think if you're a sane person here this morning then the question you'll be asking yourself right now is how do I get into his flock how can I come under his rule this good shepherd well as I said earlier Matthew describes different responses to the shepherd king one of these responses is a model example of what it looks like to come under his rule and the other response is an example of what it looks like to oppose his rule so let's unpack these two things now here's our second point this morning the right response to king Jesus is worship and rejoicing in him please look at verse 10 when they the wise men saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshipped him then opening their treasures they offered him gifts gold and frankincense and myrrh so these wise men came to God's king and what did they do they bowed down in surrender and in worship and submission and they then bring out what I used to think of was three pretty random gifts but they're not random gifts at all that was the gifts that you would bring to a king they were custom customary gifts for bringing to approach royalty back in those days gold frankincense and myrrh they bring as a tribute just picture the scene these wise men bowing down before this little child and saying oh Jesus you are Lord you are our Lord

I notice that Matthew tells us about what was going on in their hearts whilst all this was taking place look they are full of rejoicing because they've seen God's shepherd king their outward behaviour matched the inner reality of their hearts they obviously believed in God's word that Jesus really is the one appointed to rule over all nations the one who will subdue his enemies and establish his kingdom forever and so they declare loyalty to him what a joyful scene it must have been and friends you know that living under the rule of God through this shepherd king is the only place to find lasting joy for living under God's rule is actually what you and I have been made for that's what we're for you see that's the place of true freedom according to the Bible true human freedom is not having no master true human freedom is having the right master and we are not we are not made to be autonomous creatures we've been made to enjoy God ruling in our hearts just think of what

King David wrote King David at the beginning of Psalm 23 verse 1 he says this the Lord is my shepherd I live under his rule and then he says I shall not want in other words I lack nothing I'm satisfied I'm content because I know that all that I need is in him he's happy he's full of joy the Magi clearly came to know this reality too because when they finally saw this child they were elated here is the king who gives all people from all backgrounds real and lasting joy listen to how one commentator puts it he says this King Jesus has come to bring the experience and the deep joy of living at peace with the God who made us and made us to enjoy knowing him of living peace with ourselves in our minds and in our bodies with no regrets or nagging fears and of living at peace with others with no family rows at Christmas no empty chairs at the dinner table the visit of the wise men declares to us that Jesus is a ruler with an eternal country whose immigration policy is to welcome anyone who will pledge allegiance to him regardless of their background and past and whose policy is to keep out of his kingdom all suffering frustration fear and even death this is the experience of the life that everyone in the world is searching for and striving for in one way or another

Matthew is showing every one of us this morning the way of life worshipping and rejoicing in Jesus that is surrendering our all to him in allegiance to him as God's king all those who do so they will know the real joy that is at the heart of Christmas a joy that will last forever well that is the right response to Jesus now let's have a look at the wrong response to Jesus because as usual when the Bible teaches us the truth it not only teaches us the truth but it also gives us the necessary negative not only does Matthew teach us how to respond to Jesus properly he says here is how not to respond to Jesus and friends not everybody was filled with rejoicing when they heard about the birth of God's shepherd king here is the third and final point this morning don't respond to Jesus with wickedness and rejection and really we see two types of wickedness and rejection here we see the hatred of Herod and we see the indifference of Israel and let me just unpack these two points let's look at the indifference of Israel and what I mean by Israel here is really false unbelieving Israel represented by all the chief priests and the scribes that Herod summoned see outwardly they look like they were God's people but from the apathetic way that they responded to the wise men's arrival and the news of the appearance of the star of the king they showed that in their hearts they were actually far from God surely a true Israelite who loved God and trusted his promises of salvation would have dropped everything and gone with the wise men to Bethlehem to see if the Christ had been born but these religious looking men don't do that what do they do they stay in the palace and choose to live under the reign of the false king this sort of indifference reminds me of a conversation

[27 : 18] I once had with a neighbor he had grown up in a church as a child he knew what the Bible taught about Jesus and all of the wonderful things that Jesus promised to do for his people but that man remained unmoved and indifferent to those promises for years and I remember at one point in our conversation he said to me you know Phil I'm really really happy and pleased that Jesus works for you but for me it's not really my thing and you know when he said that it showed that his heart had the same attitude as indifferent Israel here and friends can I just say that is not a neutral response that is not a neutral response it is wickedness and rejection it's polite wickedness and rejection but it's wickedness and rejection nonetheless and you know from my experience all those who are indifferent to Jesus they don't remain that way their indifference usually over time morphs into a more hostile and aggressive rejection do you know

I just wonder if the chief priests who were in Jerusalem at that time were still in Jerusalem 30 years later when Jesus was fully grown because as Jesus walked around Jerusalem and as those chief priests and the teachers of the law they saw Jesus and got to see his authority they were the very first ones to shout crucify him Matthew warns us with love please avoid Israel's indifference at all costs but you know he also goes on to warn us of a second more aggressive rejection and that's seen in Herod's hatred the reign and rule of Jesus is a great threat to Herod's throne see instead of bowing in submission to Christ and acknowledging him as God's rightful shepherd king Herod desperately tries to destroy Jesus just look down to verse 16 of chapter 2 this is we'll touch more on this next week but let's read it now then Herod when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region all who were two years old or under according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men so Herod hates the thought of giving up his own status and bowing down to Jesus so much that he orders the slaying the mass murder of these poor innocent children historians have looked at family records from that time and they tell us that there were probably around 20 to 30 boys in that age group in that region all destroyed because of this wicked king who refused to bow the knee to God's true king and you know the hatred of Herod is alive and kicking today when I lived down in England

I worked for a church in a rather large town and I remember one cold December afternoon I was all wrapped up and I was out on the high street handing out invitations to our annual carol service and this woman came walking towards me she was very nice and very proper she was smiley she had lovely teeth and she walked up to me and I gave her a flyer and I just watched her walk past me and she stopped having looked down at the flyer she stopped dead she turned and she stormed back to me and she unloaded a furious rant in my face it turns out she'd been at that carol service the year before and she was deeply offended by what she had heard and I was so shocked by her reaction I can't quite remember word for word what she said but here's a paraphrase she said this I came to that carol service last year to drink mulled wine and feel jolly but instead I had to listen to all sorts of nonsense about Jesus being God

I also heard that I was a sinner who needed to bow to him and I needed him to be lord of my life I will never again come to anything that your church runs and if I hear of anyone coming to such an event I will do all that I can in my power to stop them she was no child killer and in the eyes of the world she looked really respectable but let me just say from the way she responded to the real message of Christmas the news that Jesus is God's shepherd king it revealed that in our heart there was the hatred of Herod pure vitriol at the suggestion that God's king has absolute authority over her life and that she needed to bow to him is that you is that same attitude in your heart is that the way you feel about Jesus and if it is Matthew pleads with you he pleads with you he gives you such a loving warning he says please please please do not live like that because in the end if you set yourself against this king and his kingdom it will not go well for you just like it didn't go well for Herod if you read on in the chapter you will see that

Herod is absolutely swept away in fact if you look at verse 15 his demise is mentioned in half a verse he's swept away like dust in a hurricane Matthew pleads with us all please please dear readers don't live like Herod well this Christmas will you join in with the rest of the people of Glasgow and play make believe desperately trying to act all jolly and merry in order to pretend everything's okay or will you listen to the Bible and believe in the real answer to our problems will you surrender and submit to God's shepherd king for friends all those who do so they really will have a properly merry Christmas for they will know the joy of his loving rule and presence in their hearts they will know the joy of having the sure and certain hope of eternity in his kingdom in the perfected earth that he's going to bring in one day that will go on and on forever and ever do you want a part of that do you want to be there well trust in this king says Matthew and if you are a Christian here this morning if you're already worshipping and rejoicing because you live under the shepherd's rule then I think this passage will help us to understand the way the world might respond to us as we reach out as the king's witnesses today you see friends whatever the good news of the shepherd king is proclaimed we find that actually he separates humanity today right now it shouldn't surprise us if as we send out the gospel some will respond like the wise men praise god they will rejoice and they will become true worshippers with us in his church but it also shouldn't surprise us that others will sadly respond with indifference maybe even hostility because they don't want anything to do with God's king let me just say if you've reached out with others maybe you've handed out an invitation to the carol service to someone and the response has not been positive can I just say do not lose heart because it doesn't necessarily mean that you've done something wrong this shepherd king has always separated humanity and you know one day he will return soon and he will separate humanity forever into those who've loved and worshipped him and rejoiced in him and those who've responded to him in wickedness and rejection and you know as you share the gospel today as you share the news about him today that separation of the last day that verdict has actually made a present reality now so don't lose heart keep witnessing in the knowledge that Jesus is the true shepherd king who separates people but that everyone needs to hear of everyone no matter what background they're from well friends come back next week and we shall look at what

[35 : 50] Matthew teaches us about the flight to Egypt but let's be quiet for a moment bow our heads and then I'll pray for us our heavenly father we praise and thank you for sending your promised shepherd king into this world of darkness and despair we praise you that through him you really will establish your kingdom on earth forever we thank you that all are invited to enter this kingdom no matter what background they're from all are invited to repent and come under his loving rule we praise you that all who turn and do so they will be in your perfected kingdom reigning with Jesus forever forever enjoying you and glorifying you thank you that that is what you promised through Micah all those years before Jesus' birth we ask that you will work in our hearts this day so that we will worship and rejoice in him more and more and we pray that you will help us to keep witnessing for him in this our city even if some respond with indifference and hatred please help us to carry on flying the flag for our shepherd and we dare to ask that many will respond to the news about him in the same way that the Magi did back in Bethlehem on that very first

Christmas may many people in Glasgow come to know the joy the true joy of living under the rule of the good shepherd and so become true worshippers with us forever and ever amen well we're going to sing now in response to the word of God the last hymn on the screens come now