

December 8, 2024

Morning Worship Service for the Second Week of Advent

“Waiting for Christ.”

Matthew 2:1-12

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Sermon Matthew 2:1-12

2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

2:2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

2:3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

2:4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

2:5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

2:6 “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for out of you will come a ruler

who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

2:7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

2:8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

2:9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

2:10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

2:11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Today’s words describe the birth of our Savior Jesus and how the people reacted when they learned of His birth. During this Advent season, let us think together about how we, too, will welcome Jesus, the Savior of humankind, based on these Words.

Jesus was born in Jerusalem, in Bethlehem, in the land of the Jews, as the angel of the Lord had announced. When Jesus was born, something very strange happened. The Magi came to Jerusalem from the east, knowing by the stars that the King of the Jews was about to be born.

The word translated “doctors” here is the Magi. The word “Magi” refers to members of the Persian priestly class who were engaged in astronomy and astrology. The eastward direction from which the Magi came could also refer to Persia. Later, however, the term did not necessarily refer only to Persian astrologers; astrologers in Babylonia and elsewhere were also called magos. Therefore, we cannot specify exactly which region of the east this refers to. But

what Matthew's Gospel is probably trying to tell us is that non-Jewish Gentiles came to worship Jesus Christ.

These Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked where they could find the One born King of the Jews. But the visit of these Magi was not a pleasant one in Jerusalem, for verse 3 says, **“When King Herod heard this, he was dismayed. And all the people of Jerusalem were like the king.”** This upset Herod, who was then on the throne of Judea. King Herod was not from Judea, but from Idumayah (Edom). Although he had received a queen from the Jewish royal family of Hasmoneans and ascended the throne, his legitimacy as king was always questioned because of his Idumayan background. Then he heard the words of the Magi from the east, “Where is He who was born King of the Jews?” Herod heard these words. In verse 4, we read that Herod “inquired where Christ would be born”. He listened to the Magi and realized that this news was the birth of Christ. However, as is clear from the words of the angel of the Lord in the later verse, 2:13, Herod wanted to find and kill this Christ who would be a threat to his throne.

As I read through today's words, I feel a great sense of discomfort. It is that the news of the birth of the King of the Jews came not from within the Jews, but from without, with the coming of the Gentiles. The Magi in the East saw the star and sensed that something great was happening, whereas when it came down to it, the land of the Jews showed a complete indifference to the birth of the Savior. The Savior's majesty shone brightly in the East, but no one could see it in the land of the Jews.

The place where the Magi of the East came to the land of Judea and visited was Jerusalem. If a Jewish king was born, it would most likely be in the very city where the royal palace was located. However, if you think about it, the star that told the Magi of the birth of the King

of the Jews and guided them, the star that God showed them, is a little ambiguous in terms of what it indicates. The Magi were not sure where the King of the Jews was born, so they came to Jerusalem to inquire about his birthplace. In contrast, what about in the land of the Jews? The chief priests and scribes, under the command of King Herod, searched for the words of the prophecy. They found the prophecy of the prophet Micah, which clearly identified the place as Bethlehem. But even with this revelation, there was still no joy in Jerusalem. They had the Word given to them by God. And this Word had been announcing the birth of the Savior more clearly than the stars and long before. But while the Jewish people had knowledge of the Word, they did not accept it and look forward to its fulfillment. On the contrary, verses 7 and 8 show that Herod was plotting to get information about the birth of Christ out of the Magi and to use them as spies, getting them to lie and say that they wanted to worship as the Magi do. To Herod, that probably seemed like the wisest way to handle the situation. But in the eyes of God, it was a completely ineffective plan, and as verse 12 says, God rather brought Herod's plan to nothing through a dream.

In contrast, the Magi's journey to Bethlehem was in God's will. God led them to Jesus through the star, and verse 10 says, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced more than ever". The original language says, "They rejoiced more than ever." The original language is a reduplication of the phrase "rejoiced greatly with great joy," indicating that they were filled with the greatest joy that words could ever express. It was such a joy for them to meet Jesus. In fact, their journey from the east to this place must have required extraordinary sacrifice and effort, not just a day or two. With their greatest joy, they prostrated themselves before the King of the Jews, who was an infant, and worshipped him. They opened their treasure chests and offered gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

In Isaiah 60:1-6, we read the following prophecy

60:1 "Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

60:2 See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

60:3 Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

60:4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.

60:5 Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.

60:6 Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.

And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

This could be a prophecy of the end time, when men from all tribes will come to the city of the Lord to worship God with the finest offerings. Compared to the prophecy of Isaiah, the service of the

Magi was a very quiet and simple service. However, the service of the Magi tells the story of the dawning of the fulfillment of this prophecy. When Jesus comes again to this land in the last days, all nations and foreign lands will bow down before Him, worship, and offer their treasures. The visit of the Magi of the East lets us know that those very days have begun.

Today we have seen from the first half of Matthew 2 how the people reacted to Jesus' birth in the Jewish land when they learned of His birth. And here we have seen two major conflicting figures. The Magi of the East who came to worship upon learning of the birth of the King of the Jews. In contrast, Herod and the Jews, who had no knowledge of the birth of the promised King, but were rather upset when they were told of it. I believe that the reactions of these two people to the birth of the Savior are not unrelated to those of us living today. For, even today, Jesus is shown to be the King of all mankind to us in a similar way. Like the star that led the Magi to the King of the Jews, we are shown that we too have a true King. Not through the stars, of course. Rather, we are given the Word of God, which is not vague like a star, but is written in words that we can clearly understand.

And at the same time, this Word reveals to us that at the time of the end, the Lord Jesus will come again as King over the whole world. On the day when Jesus comes again, will we rejoice like the Magi, rejoicing with all our hearts, looking forward to that day and preparing for it? Or will we be like Herod, reeling at the news of the coming of the true King and struggling to defend our kingship?

As I conclude my sermon, let me return once again to the opening verse of today's sermon, chapter 2:1.

2:1 “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked”

When Jesus was born, it was in the days of King Herod. But when Jesus was born, it was also the time when the Magi came to worship Him. We want to learn from this past and prepare for the future to come. When Jesus comes to earth again, will it be in my time as king? Or when Jesus comes to earth again, will I be the one who goes up to the City of the Lord to worship Christ?

To live as a king can be paraphrased as living in a self-centered manner. However, the truth is that it is difficult to change this self-centered way of life, or even to realize that we are living in such a way in the first place. In fact, we cannot leave this self-centeredness on our own. But there is hope. For, as I have said repeatedly, the Word of God still shines like a star and shows us the way. The Word is the lamp to my feet and the light of my path. The Word is alive and powerful and can discern every thought and measure in our hearts. Above all, the Word can give us wisdom and enable us to receive salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is easy for us to become busy with all kinds of things in this month of December, but we should keep our eyes high in our hearts even as we work, because the light of the Word of God is still shining like a star, and this Word is leading us to the Savior, and is going to lead us to salvation. Let's pray.