**The One Born King of the Jews**

Matthew 2:1-23
Key verse 2:1-2

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

In today’s passage, Magi from the East came to worship the baby Jesus. Among the gospel writers, only Matthew tells this story. Matthew’s gospel emphasizes that Jesus is the King sent by God, who is worthy to be worshiped by all people, great and small. This story inspires us that we are made to worship God, and that in worshiping God, we find true joy and meaning of life. Who were these mysterious Magi? And how did they come to worship the baby Jesus? Let’s find out.

**First, The Magi Worship Jesus (1-12)**

Look at verse 1. “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem…” The first event that Matthew documents following the birth of Jesus is the coming of the magi. Who were these people? Usually, we think of the magi as the "three wise men" in the manger scene, but when we look at this passage carefully we see that the actual event happened a little differently from what is popularly believed.

Most likely, the Magi came from ancient Persia or Babylon. The Magi were scholars who believed in scientific reason as well as spiritual revelation. They were advisers to kings and highly respected in society. They were astronomers and astrologers as well as philosophers and theologians. To them, the universe was a mysterious place that was full of questions. They tried to find answers through astrology and magical arts. In fact, the word "magic" comes from "magi," but they were only able to find shadows and hints as to the fundamental questions of life, such as, "Who is God?" and "Why am I here?" and "Where will I go after I die?" Despite the fact that they studied and searched all the time for the truth, they could never be fully satisfied.

These days, there are many people who are like these magi. They search long and hard to find the truth about life, but the more they study the more they get confused until they finally become agnostics, believing that it is impossible to know the answers to these questions. Recently, I met one such young man. He studied science and religion, looking for the truth, but he could not be sure what to believe. Finally, he came to the conclusion that he needed a sign from God, but he couldn't believe that God would give him one.

In fact, a sign is exactly what God gave the magi. Look at verse 2. “…and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’” The Magi were looking for the king of the Jews. Since they were astronomers and astrologers, God used a method that they could understand to announce the birth of Jesus. Somehow, they were able to figure out from this star that a the king of the Jews had been born. They were also able to figure out that this was no ordinary king--for they decided that they must make the long and difficult journey from their country to the land of the Jews so that they could worship this king.

In those days, journeys accross the middle-east were very difficult, involving a lot of time, energy, money and dangers. A few weeks ago, there was an international conference at Purdue University in Indianapolis. To go there, I had to spend a good amount of money for the airplane tickets and conference fees; I also had to endure a "red eye" flight. Sometimes it seemed a little tough, but compared to the journey these magi made it was a walk in the park. The journey they took through the desert set them apart. It showed that they were not just truth-seekers in name. They were serious.

When the magi arrived in Israel, they expected to find the young king in a palace, surrounded by worshipers and servants, so they went to the capital city, Jerusalem, and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" Yet when they arrived, no one knew who they were talking about. "Who? ... Do you mean Herod?"

Look at verse 3. “When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” King Herod ruled Israel from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. Unlike Jesus who was born king of the Jews, Herod was not even born a Jew. He was appointed king by the Romans, and his illegitimate claim to the throne made him extremely paranoid--so much that he even killed his own sons and a wife. Naturally, when he heard that the king of the Jews had been born, he was disturbed. When Herod was disturbed, all Jerusalem was disturbed with him.

Look at verse 4. “When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.” Although the magi were excellent at understanding the stars, there was a limit to what the stars could tell them. The Jews, however, were blessed because God has given them the truth through the Scriptures. So, when Herod asked where the Christ was to be born, the teachers of the law and priests knew the answer.  Look at verses 5-6. “’In Bethlehem in Judea, ’they replied,’ for this is what the prophet has written: “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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.”’” The magi were able to understand from the star that the king of the Jews had been born, but they didn't know what kind of king this would be. Although God reveals himself generally through his creation work, God reveals himself personally through his word. God's word contains the answers to the fundamental questions we have.

What kind of king is Jesus? God foretold what kind of king Jesus would be through the prophet, Joel. God said about him: he "will be the shepherd of my people Israel." The nature of Jesus' rule is like the rule of a shepherd over his sheep. There have been many kings throughout history, but for the most part their first concern was for themselves. In this sense, none of them were true kings. A true king exercises his rule for the good of his people. This is what a shepherd king is. A shepherd king is the king whose first concern is to provide for and protect his people. A shepherd king will even lay down his own life for his people. This is what Jesus did for us.  When sheep are under a good shepherd's care, they don't need to be worried about anything--they enjoy security and peace.  Psalm 23 describes life under the good shepherd's care:

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
       he leads me beside quiet waters,

 3 he restores my soul.
       He guides me in paths of righteousness
       for his name's sake.

 4 Even though I walk
       through the valley of the shadow of death,
       I will fear no evil,
       for you are with me;
       your rod and your staff,
       they comfort me.

 5 You prepare a table before me
       in the presence of my enemies.
       You anoint my head with oil;
       my cup overflows.

 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me
       all the days of my life,
       and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
       forever.

After receiving the direction to go to Bethlehem, the magi still had a difficult task ahead of them.  How were they to figure out which boy it was out of all the boys in the city? But they didn't give up. Instead, they went on their way toward Bethlehem. Then, something remarkable happened once again: the star reappeared--and not only did it appear again, but it even led them like a laser-pointer directly to the place where Jesus was. Look at verses 9-10. “After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.” The magi were overjoyed because the star gave them confidence of where they were going and assurance that they would find the king of the Jews.

Here, we see how God led these truth-seekers on their journey. First, God revealed the birth of Jesus in a very general way through a star that appeared in the sky. Then, when they arrived in Jerusalem, God revealed more specific details through the Scriptures. Finally, God led them very personally and specifically to the exact place where they needed to go. In each instance, God's guidance became more personal and specific.

Look at verse 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 and of incense and of myrrh.” Despite Jesus’ appearance as an ordinary child in an ordinary house, the Magi knew that he was God whom they must worship. The Magi were noble and dignified people who lived in the courts of kings, but they humbly bowed before this little boy in ordinary clothes. They finally found the one worthy of their worship. In fact, they became the first worshipers of Jesus. For this, these magi are honored by God. In the kingdom of heaven, we will see them.  From their story, we see how God leads truth-seekers to find their shepherd king, Jesus.

**Part 2. The Escape (13-23)**

While the Magi illustrate beautifully how we can find out true king, Jesus, Herod illustrates that those who reject Jesus' kingship can become instruments of Satan. As we saw, Herod's plan was to use the magi to find Jesus and kill him. But God thwarted Herod's plan by warning the magi in a dream not to go back to him. God knew, however, that this would not stop Herod from trying to kill Jesus, so he sent an angel to warn Jospeh. Look at verse 13: "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'" Then Joseph took Mary and Jesus to live in Egypt, where they stayed until Herod died. It must have been very difficult for Joseph and Mary to leave their home and go to a foreign land, but because they did so, Jesus was not touched by Herod.  Not only so, but these events also fulfilled what God had foretold through the prophet Hose, who wrote: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Look at verses 16-18:

16When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:
 18"A voice is heard in Ramah,
      weeping and great mourning,
   Rachel weeping for her children
      and refusing to be comforted,
   because they are no more."

The slaughter of the male babies in the city of Bethlehem was terrible. This shows the extent that a person may go to to retain their kingship. At the same time, this event is further evidence that Jesus is the promisssed Messiah because it, also, is a fulfillment of Sciptures, this time through the prophet Jeremiah.

Let's read verses 19-23:

19After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

 21So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Two more times, an angel of the Lord provided Joseph with guidance. First, leading him back to the land of Israel, and second leading him and his family to the town of Nazareth. All of this happened in fulfillment of the scriptures.

In conclusion, we learn from this passage that God provided Jesus as our true king--the shepherd king. If anyone truly wants to find this king, God will guide them step-by-step on thier journey so that they can find and worship Jesus as the magi did. Those who follow in the footsteps of the magi will find what their heart desires. However, those who reject Jesus quickly become enemies of God, yet they cannot stop God's work through Jesus.

One word: Worship the king.