

Message Series: The Word

Message Title: The Word: Child, King, Savior

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Scripture Text: Matthew 1:18-2:23

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame; resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(Immanuel means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

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." 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." 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.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*"

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 who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*"A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And

he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 1:18-2:23

What a story: betrayal, deception, supernatural conception, supernatural dreams with words to guide and save the lives of the ones who heard, prophetic scripture from hundreds of years before now being fulfilled before our eyes, abnormal cosmic events (stars appearing, guiding, standing still), kings who are paranoid and power hungry having their plans derailed by commoners, genocide, a holocaust on a grand scale... And the most unbelievable thing of all—**A child who is a king, who is a savior**—born to serve, born to save his people from their sins... God stooping to become a man.

All the traits of a great novel are here - intertwining plots, intriguing characters—if this were fiction, it would be great fiction—but the most astounding thing is...It is all true! And the story is not over yet—but the ending is already known! It is the theme of every beloved song, poem and movie throughout all time and in all cultures on earth - someone great, losing what he could keep in order to gain that which he loves. It is a story of true love.

Matthew's account of the Christmas story is unique in two ways: (It is written to the Jews)

1. The reference to the Old Testament. (1:23; 2:5-6; 17-18, 23) (4x)
2. The intervention of the supernatural (1:18; 20-21; 2:9; 13; 19-20; 22) (dreams, stars stopping in their tracks, supernatural conception - 6x)

Matthew waves red flags to turn God's people's attention to the fact: This child is a King... He is a Savior! It is important that multiple gospels say something about the birth of Jesus, because the way Jesus was born is crucial to our understanding of His uniqueness among all men who have lived on this earth. John gives us an eternal perspective: There was never a time when the Son did not exist, but there was a point in time when he appeared on earth. Matthew presents a very earthly story, but with a supernatural invasion. If Jesus truly is who He said he was (and who we say we believe He is), His virgin birth is an essential truth.

Virgin Birth—Jesus was conceived apart from an earthly father. This is crucial to our salvation - for only a spotless man, untainted by the sin that is inherent in all mankind, could be the sacrifice for our sins. Through the Virgin Birth the Second Adam enters the world guiltless of the sin of the first Adam, making our salvation possible.

Incarnation—The story also reminds us that God is not divorced from the physical world, but rather completely dedicated to it! He doesn't hate it, He loves it!

Who was this King they came to see?

How did the wise men know about the "king of the Jews" who would be born?

THE PLAYERS IN THIS DRAMA:

Mary—*She did not see this coming*

She was young, poor and female = "unsuitable" to be used by God in her culture

Her calling was an incredible honor, but all it brought with it responsibility and pain. She endured the pain of childbirth (it was not a silent night), and the pain of seeing her son die a horrifying and undeserved death for our sins.

- What incredible faith and surrender she had in order to be able to hear and obey such an unbelievable Word. Mary is important, because through her we see that Jesus was born of a woman - this is important because it underscores that Jesus Christ was fully human.

Joseph—*He did not see this coming either*

He was a craftsman; he worked his hands in wood. He lived by his trade. Yet, he was entrusted by God to raise his only Son (imagine!). The passage says he was a "righteous man". His actions toward Mary reveal that he was a kind and sensitive man. Joseph not only had the right to divorce Mary, under Jewish law she could be put to death by stoning. He could have put her away, but he covered her (what every godly man is called to do).

- Joseph walked in radical obedience, and he is important because through his story we see that Jesus was not born of a human father. This is important because it underscores that Jesus Christ was fully God and completely sinless.

Herod—*Did not see this coming either* (He was freaked out by this)

When his kingdom was threatened, he became suddenly interested in the Hebrew scriptures - normally he wanted the chief priests and scribes out of his sight, but now they became very important to him.

He was going to snuff out whatever was in his way. This proves that someone can have an interest in the scripture for purely selfish reasons. (Corruption at our core - this is why we need a Savior!).

“All Jerusalem was troubled”—the **Am Ha-Aretz**—the common folk, literally *“people of the land”*. They were uneducated Jews and didn’t understand the scriptures because they could not read. *They were not looking for this*, because they were concerned with day-to-day, subsistence living; little hope. They constituted about 95% of the population of 1st century Palestine. To these, Jesus held out hope, because he grew up as one of them — they thronged him, they followed him. They heard about these happenings and you can believe that the gossip was buzzing.

Chief Priests/Scribes

Scribes—*They should have seen this coming* (as Matthew takes pains to point out). They were experts on the scriptures; yet didn’t see this, even as it was happening before their eyes. Being a scribe was a good thing in the beginning. They began with Ezra’s renewal of reading/observing the law (good thing). Their job was copying, interpreting and applying the scriptures/law. Out of a desire to not break the law, they added “traditions of men” as a buffer around the law. Ironically, in their desire to not break the law, they ended up not keeping the law (you tithe... but neglect the weightier matters such as justice, mercy and faithfulness).

The Scribes teach us that we cannot keep ourselves from breaking the law of God by putting ourselves under more and more law; but we have a tendency to do this. Also that we can try to be right with God in our own way and thus we miss the Savior. We even mess it up when we try to be religious - *this is why we need a Savior!*

Magi—The Wise Men WERE looking for this (Where is the King of the Jews?)

They knew the **what** and the **when**, but not the **where** of this king who would be born. The Bible tells us very little about the magi. Their story appears but once, in the Gospel of Matthew (2:1–12).

Almost everyone knows about the Magi, but what they know is mixed up, or downright false information, clouded by myth and tradition. So who were they? **One possible answer:** Because they came from the East, they could have been associated with the magicians mentioned in Daniel 2, which mentions people who are referred to as magicians, astrologers and wise men. These could very well be the same group of people.

Perhaps it is from the Hebrews that they learned the prophecy from, of all prophets, Balaam: *“A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult”* (Numbers 24:17).

In one sense, the prophecy applies to Israel itself, particularly with reference to David’s conquest of the Moabites (2 Samuel 8:2). But the concept of the scepter, a symbol of kingship, refers not only to David, but to David’s greater son, and refers back to Gen. 49 - Jacob’s prophecy over his son Judah: *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people* (Genesis 49:10).

You see, Jesus is the Israel of God - “Out of Egypt I have called my Son...” Israel had failed utterly - now Jesus fulfills what God had planned for Israel). The Magi’s knowledge was incomplete, however: they apparently knew about Balaam’s messianic prophecy, and possibly knew about Daniel, but not the prophecy of Micah: *But you, Bethlehem “Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting”* (Micah 5:2). They knew the what and when, but not the where of the birthplace of the promised King. Whoever they were - they were **God-seekers** (You have God seekers all around you). They were not kings — but they knew that they came looking for a king, to worship Him.

The Main Character: the promised King (the main focus of Matthew's account).

The travel of the Magi, travail of Mary, the faithfulness of Joseph, the wonder of the people, the fear of Herod - all pointed to the King.

Matt 2:6 "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."

Messianic Prophecy

The books of the Old Testament contain lots of passages about the Messiah—all fulfilled in [Jesus Christ](#). In fact, some Bible scholars suggest there are more than 300 prophetic Scriptures that are fulfilled in the life of Jesus. The birth of the Messiah was foretold in many OT passages, four of which Matthew recounts in our passage.

"A **Ruler** who will **shepherd** my people Israel" It is extremely rare to find a ruler in history who rises to the call to serve his people. Power corrupts (or more correctly, power brings out the corruption that is inside of us) Most forms of government would be great except for one small fact: the heart of man is desperately wicked.

Jesus was a different kind of king: he told His followers "The Rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; they exercise authority over" (abuse those under their authority and use their power to get what they want). "**Not so with you!**" Who came to mind when the people of 1st Century Palestine thought of a king or a ruler? What were the reference points to "rulers".

1) **Augustus Caesar (Octavian)**—Nephew/adopted son of Julius Caesar and founder of the Roman Empire - established the Roman peace, or Pax Romana (a time of relative stability in the Roman empire—although there were continuous wars of expansion and even a civil war during this time—yet, God sovereignly set up Rome in order to set up the birth of His Son "in the fullness of time"—a decree that a census be taken, leading to the fulfillment of the prophecy that Jesus be born in Bethlehem; and the spread of the gospel in the first 2 centuries A.D.) Augustus Caesar's reign was plagued by wars, rebellion, marriage alliances, etc. He was hardly a model king.

2) But there is another leader whose influence was closer and more relevant to Jesus and his followers in Palestine. The name that most likely came to their minds was Herod the Great. *The contrast could not be greater between Jesus and Herod the Great.*

Jesus was born and Herod died in approximately the same year. Herod the Great was not the Herod we read about in the New Testament who had dealings with Jesus and the early church (there were a string of Herods). But he would be first to come to mind when those who lived in Palestine at this time thought of a king.

Herod the Great was buried on a mountain that he had made for himself and then named after himself (**Herodium**) which is about 3 miles from Jesus' birth cave. It was a lavish ceremony - but no one today really remembers his funeral. Jesus was born in a shelter/cave, in poverty around animals, in a quiet affair (yet it is celebrated worldwide).

Herod ruled Palestine for 34 years. A master politician and kingdom builder, he thought big, and carried it out, no matter what is cost to those around him. He slaughtered all possible male heirs to the throne, and even his wife. It was said, "Better to be Herod's pig than his son" His building projects were mind blowing in scope. Herod built seven palace complexes, cities, amphitheatres, chariot racing stadiums, roads, the rebuilt the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem.

The astounding thing is that *Jesus ignored the whole business*. Jesus walked on roads that Herod had built and saw and walked through the cities and buildings of Herod. But Jesus basically lived as though Herod never existed.

Jesus chose to live in the margins of society, work with unimportant people, give attention to the weak, broken and powerless, choose a few relative losers and pour himself into twelve. He was born for a mission

Jesus and Herod had the same agenda - Jesus was building a kingdom.

(God's rule over the entire world). Jesus was working on the largest scale imaginable—it began in Palestine, but was not confined to Palestine. It is global, transcending time and geography and culture and it never ends.

Herod must have sensed the enormity of the moment, for he tried to snuff Jesus out. There was a holocaust on a massive scale to try to stop this Ruler. There is no religious leader who is maligned like Jesus. There is no religious leader whom the powers of hell tries to silence, to snuff out, like Jesus. Quote any other religious leader today and you will be accepted as open-minded, but quote Jesus and you will be maligned as he was. That anti-Christ spirit still tries to shut Him up. But open your mouth and say that name and you will have all the armies of heaven behind you, for they also have the name of Jesus on their lips perpetually.

This King came for a reason—We can never lose sight of this: It comes in the form of the word of the angel to Joseph: and it is the Gospel according to Matthew in a verse:

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (because we need a Savior) (The Child is a King, is a Savior)

So here's the picture:

God Almighty, eternally existent, sets aside what He could have kept and stoops down to become a human in order to save that which he loves.

Mary's Song (Lucy Shaw)

*Quiet he lies, whose vigor hurled a universe.
He sleeps whose eyelids have not closed before.*

*Older than eternity, now he is new.
Now native to earth as I am,
nailed to my poor planet,
caught that I might be free*

*Blind in my womb to know my darkness ended,
Brought to this birth for me to be new-born,
And for him to see me mended
I must see him torn.*

Child. King. Savior.

The application of the Gospel:

He became a **child** to make me a child; He is a **King** that I might be part of His kingdom; He became a **Savior** because I needed one.

- This happened to make your **salvation** possible
- That you might be **justified**, declared not guilty by God Himself, so that no voice could ever rise in condemnation of you, for Christ is your righteousness
- That you might be ever growing into His likeness, more pleasing to Him at the end of this day than you are at the beginning of it
- That you might one day experience his glory in a new body, free from the power and presence of sin, and from the sickness and despair of this world
- That you might reign forever with him in His kingdom, starting right now, and ending never
- That all of this might be made possible for whosoever will trust in Him, in every nation, in every generation, throughout all time and forever into eternity.

This is what the child did for you.

Response:

The message of Christmas is hope—but it requires a response. Our only fitting response is to bow the knee to Christ as the Magi did—**to submit to his rule in our lives; to lay aside our own agendas and obey and submit to him.** In the next chapter we see John the Baptist announcing the kingdom—he is bringing good news and the first word he says is “Repent”. Why is the message of repentance “good news”. Because John the Baptist (and ultimately Jesus) was not laying another burden on people—he was taking one off. Repentance is not a punishment. Quite the opposite, repentance is the first step to healing. Repentance is freeing.

Repentance brings:

- the remission of sins
- the removal of punishment
- the possibility of righteousness for all who turn to Christ
- on the possibility of being connected to our Maker again and living the fullness of life that He created us to live
- on adoption as children to our heavenly Father
- on the blessings of community

Repentance, putting away our pride and simply admitting that we need salvation and healing brings a release of the terrible burden of guilt and shame that all human beings carry. It is the doorway to freedom.

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