
O Little Town, O Mighty King

Matthew 2:1-12; Micah 5:2

Introduction The Advent Season and Christmas celebrations are full of warmth, joy, giving and a sense of family and fun. Songs of the season celebrate love and brotherhood and relationships.

The New Testament writers portray the birth of the Lord Jesus with tenderness and with terribleness – excruciating gladness and grief. We must not miss this.

Each writer of a gospel chooses what he portrays to fit his theme and argument. We do not have “biography” (and I personally see little Biblical justification for attempts to construct the life of Jesus from the gospels – why do what the Bible doesn’t do?)

So this leads us as we look at this short piece of Matthew’s narrative to ask two important questions:

- What is Matthew actually showing us and why?
- Why does he take pains to point us to the Old Testament text he does?

The Inquiry of the Wise Men

(v.1-5)

Matthew presents us with magi who come seeking.

Who They Are

These men are from Persia/Babylon, not from China. They were advisors to their rulers and possibly, students of astronomy/astrology. Probably through the captivity of Israel, they had come into contact with the scriptures and the remnant left in Babylon who did not return. They appear to be familiar with Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17 that a star would arise from Jacob and a scepter out of Israel.

Their mission is not a state visit of veneration, but a personal seeking in order to worship. Their whole demeanor throughout this text points to men who are here with some recognition that they are here for something or someone Divine.

What They Seek

They seek the one born to be King. They seek a child who will be the Messiah.

Now, it should make perfect sense to us as it probably did to them that if you are seeking a royal child, you inquire at the palace. Aren’t newborn kings generally born to the present king? It seems to me that they come to ask Herod, probably fully expecting him to proudly take them to his nursery and to show them his infant boy.

They seek this child king, not to honor his father, but to worship the child. The language conveys the sense of homage and worship that includes the bending of the knee and submission.

What They Cause

Herod is apoplectic. He has no new-born son. He is Jewish enough to know that this is more than just a royal expectation – it is full of religious and prophetic overtones. He sends for the students of Scripture to research and figure out where the Messiah was to be born.

Now understand this. Herod well knows in all the actions that follow that he is attempting to assassinate the future Messiah of Israel, its hope and long awaited expectation. He is not merely trying to end the threat to his throne from some obscure branch of his family tree. He is going to take the one pointed to from all the Scripture and put him to the sword. This is rebellion and hubris at a high degree.

The Word from the Scripture

(v.6)

Matthew now takes us to an Old Testament Scripture, not by quoting it exactly, but by summarizing or paraphrasing it. Thus, we are pointed not only to it, but to its surrounding context as being important to Matthew's argument.

The Answer It Provides

As Bible students, the senior priests and scribes, picked up their Old Testaments and went to the verse that told them where the Messiah was to be born. He was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Micah 5:2 clearly points them to that. So there is no mistaking the place of his birth.

The Announcement It Makes

But Micah 5:2 also announces the prominence of his birth. He will be the ruler who will shepherd Israel. No more will false and wicked kings squat like smelly toads on the throne of God's people. No more shall they threaten and destroy and lead God's people to ruin. No, there shall arise the great Shepherd-King over His people.

The Response by the People

(v.7-12)

All through this Matthew presents to us two responses to the coming of the King.

The Rejecting Agenda of Herod

Here the slick wickedness of Herod hides his snarling design. He pretends to be interested so that he too might join in worship. Yet, as the narrative unfolds, we find out his true murderous intent. He has so rejected the God of his fathers that he is prepared and willing to murder the promised one from heaven. In rejecting God he has become the accomplice of Satan and a weapon in the great spiritual war.

The Rejoicing Adoration of the Wise Men

Here the quickening joy of satisfied seekers is put on exhilarating display. They see their heavenly guide and are brought to a humble home. There they bow and worship, opening their treasures.

In these Gentile kings and their gifts, Matthew is pointing us to Isaiah 60:1-7. Listen to what Matthew is drawing from.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, h the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house.

Now we have to remember that Matthew is writing all this to the church. This is not the first book of the New Testament chronologically. He is answering the question, “What happened to the Kingdom?” From the very beginning of the book, he is showing us that where the King is, there the Kingdom is. And that kingdom is neither limited geographically to Israel nor ethnically to the Jews. The texts he draws from and the narrative he connects them to makes his point.

The Royalty of the King

Micah 5:2-5a

So let’s go back now to look more carefully at Micah 5. Turn to the text from which Matthew has quoted, Micah 5:2.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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 of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace. [ESV]

His Humble Coming

(v.2-3)

The humility of his coming is seen in the smallness of his birth. Rather than coming in the palace with pomp and circumstance, with breathless public announcements, he comes born in a place so small it does not even have its own district or district judge. He is born in the “House of Bread” just a few miles south of Jerusalem.

From this humble birth emerges a ruler for the glory of God. He is born for the sake of God. He is born for God. The Incarnation is not first about us or for us. It is, as is all things, for and about God. How can we turn the nativity of Christ into a story almost exclusively about us and for us?

When He is born, this is not His beginning. He is one whose coming and goings have been from before creation. He is the one whose origin is located in Yahweh. He is the One who fills the Old Testament Scriptures and dominates the themes of time and eternity and redemption. But, ancient though He may be, He will be brought forth in a wee little town called Bethlehem – the most significant being in all the cosmos is born in the least significant place in all Israel.

His humble coming will mark the turning point. Until then, the Jews will be in national and spiritual disarray. Their return from captivity will be not a full-hearted return to God. They will be given up until His mother's labor brings Him forth into the world. Then will begin the most significant turning point in redemptive history. Then, the scattered and the remnant and the Gentiles will be gathered – any who are the *brothers* of Christ will begin to be gathered to Him.

His Exalted Coronation

(v.4-5a)

I love the grandness of the cadence of this verse.

It is grand in WHAT HE WILL DO:

- He shall stand... He shall arise. The language here denotes a King's stately standing to gird Himself on behalf of His people. The language is used in both the Old and New Testament to point to His arising from death to life and His standing to be seated. And then He shall arise on the Last Day for the eternal comfort of His people and the everlasting consternation of His foes. What a great and grand thing when our King arises for our great good and His great glory!
- He shall shepherd His flock... He shall provide and protect in faithful loving care. He shall wield his rod and staff and lead His flock to green pastures spread out before the city of God from which will flow still waters. He shall gather and guard and guide His flock till they pass through the valley of the shadow of death and arrive safely at home, fearing no evil.

How grand He is in that He stands and He shepherds.

It is grand in HOW HE DOES IT:

- In the strength of the Lord... While He may be born in the weakness of infancy and the smallness of Bethlehem, He will stand and shepherd in the mighty power of God, in His glorious grace. Thus the hateful Herods had better tremble and the fearful trembling sheep must take heart and hope. In the incarnation, in Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, the mighty power of God has moved to redeem and to rule us.
- In the majesty of the Name of God... What do you think of as majestic? We often need mighty snowcapped mountains and wide, restless seas to think of and be

awed by majesty. Majesty is the sense of awe arising from the apprehension of greatness. So He will stand and He will shepherd in such a way as to inspire awe and adoration. So, do not in this season of the year, focus on the smallness and weakness of the humanity of Christ. And do not, for the sake of your souls, worship Him as an infant. We worship the infant, not because He is among us as human, but because He was and is and ever will be, the mighty, eternal God.

How grand He is in the strength and majesty of God.

It is grand in WHAT IT PRODUCES:

- We shall be secure... God's people, whether now in the passing storms of life or eternally in the eternal pleasures of heaven, will be secure. He is with us. He is for us, in the strength and for the sake of His Name. We will never be afraid, for He is with us – what can man do to us?
- He shall be our peace... God's people, whether now in the rolling battles of sin and suffering or in the day of eternal joy, will have the God of peace as their rest. He brings reconciliation. He presents Himself as our rest. He infuses us with His peace. He guards our hearts and minds with peace.

How grand He is as our security and our peace.

FOR, He shall be great to the ends of the earth.

He shall be our peace for He not only will be great in Israel, but He will be great to the ends of the earth. No wonder Matthew points us to the text. This infant born having lived perfectly, been crucified sacrificially and resurrected powerfully will stand having been granted all authority in heaven and earth to send His apostles and His being gathered flock into all the world to preach the good news of the glory of God to redeem and to rule by this one. And behold, He is with them to the ends of the age.

How grand He is in that He stands and He shepherds.

How grand He is in the strength and majesty of God.

How grand He is as our security and our peace.

To the ends of the earth.

So here is the ultimate question: Will you worship Him or will you reject Him?

Conclusion

You see, Matthew show us how the gospel will go into all the world. There will be people, like the wise men and Herod, who will seek to know who the Lord Jesus Christ truly is. The Scriptures will be brought to answer their inquiries, revealing the promised and prophesied Christ, in whom they must believe and to whom they must bow. And then they will respond. Some will respond in glad and worshipping joy that surrenders themselves and their treasures. Some will reject and turn away and possibly even make war on Him. Our plea to you today is to believe and bow – to trust Him and surrender to Him.

Here is hope and help to us – in the strength and majesty of God, the Lord Jesus Christ has stood and will shepherd us to bring us safely and securely home through trials and troubles until all His flock is gathered in from all over the world. Will we fall down and worship Him now, as we will on the day when He is displayed in all His radiant glory to be admired and adored.

O, come, let us adore Him.