



Matthew 1:18-2:23
The Son is Given

We've begun our journey through the book of Matthew, and this morning we're looking at a passage of Scripture familiar to most people who have come to church at Christmas – we're here at the beginning where we're told about the birth of Jesus.

There are many directions we could go with this, and a lot of questions you could have about the things we're going to read. If you have those questions, I encourage you to seek out answers. A good place to start is with a Study Bible – that's a Bible with notes at the bottom of each page that will tell you more about what you're reading. If you need help finding a good one, let me know.

Another thing to do though is ask your question – ask your parents, your friends, your small group leader if you're involved in women's ministry or men's ministry or a home group or ABF, or ask one of the pastors – all of our email addresses are listed for you in the bulletin. But ask – ask your questions, find the answers, God wants you to grow in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We don't have the time to chase down every issue on Sunday morning, but I hope you are provoked and stirred to do more study on your own – be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to learn more – and if you don't know who the Bereans were, well, there's a great place to start!

But this morning, as we go through this passage our goal is to see what God was doing through the birth of Jesus and how various people responded. So, let's begin with Matthew 1:18. After giving us the family tree from Abraham to Joseph, Matthew tells us:

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*" which is translated, "God with us."

24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

So, right away we see something significant about the birth of Jesus. We're told that He was supernaturally conceived. In other words, Jesus was born of Mary, but Joseph had nothing to do with it. We speak often of the virgin birth, but the virgin *conception* is a more accurate way of describing things and it is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. Since the earliest days of the church, Christians have affirmed the statement of the Apostle's Creed "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary."

There is no explanation in Scripture of *how* it happened in technical terms. Luke's gospel gives us more details, but not much. He tells of how the angel came to Mary and told her that God had chosen her to bring His Son into the world. She asked how that could be since she was a virgin – and the angel simply told her the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and she would conceive in her womb. That's all the detail we get, but she responded "[Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.](#)" (Luke 1:38)

And friends, sometimes that is how we have to respond as well – God calls us to do something and we don't get all the answers, we don't fully understand how it's all going to work out, but we echo the words of Mary, "[Behold, the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.](#)" Sometimes, like any parent, God the Father tells us as His children, to just trust Him without needing a full explanation and maybe He'll tell us when we're a little older. And like children, we have to accept that, we have to trust and obey.

So, God was doing something exceptional, something extraordinary here, and He was asking Mary and Joseph to go along with it.

The young couple was betrothed – a condition something like our modern engagement period – a time when the commitment has been made and now preparations are undertaken for the actual ceremony and life together afterwards, only the Jewish version was even more legally binding – in order to call off the engagement you needed a bill of divorce.

So in the middle of that imagine your fiancé has been out of town for a while, remember Mary had gone to visit her relatives Zacharias and Elizabeth who were miraculously pregnant in their old age with John the Baptist, and when Mary gets back to town it's obvious that she's pregnant too. If you're Joseph, what are you thinking? It's not good is it?

But I want you to notice there is something to be said for the character of both this young man and young woman. His initial reaction was to divorce her; I don't think anyone is going to blame him for that. But, notice he wanted to do it quietly, without making a big fuss. I think that says a lot about him and also about her. He didn't understand at first, but he also didn't automatically think it was the kind of thing she would do. He didn't see her as the kind of girl that would go sleeping around, this was totally out of character for her. But obviously something had happened. Unable to make sense of it all, and not wanting to expose her any more than necessary, he planned to break things off quietly.

And that says a lot about him – he was a gentle man, a man full of character. We don't know much else about him, but this one reaction tells me he's the kind of man that I hope for for my own daughter. Even when he has been wronged - deeply, tragically, wronged - violated even, his response is controlled. He doesn't lash out in rage or anger. He is a man of action – he's going to put her away, but a man of measured action, a man of self-control, who is going to do it quietly.

Until God sends an angel to speak with him too. The angel tells Joseph what is happening. God is going to use him, the "Son of David" as the angel calls him, this descendent of the famous king, to be the adopted father of Jesus, to give this special child legal standing in the line of King David, this child who will be known as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Of course, the birth of someone with a claim to be king will provoke a variety of responses when people hear the news as we're about to see in Chapter Two.

Matthew 2:1 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, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

Now, we get this all wrong at Christmas. You've probably seen the scenes of a manger with Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus and the animals, and maybe a shepherd boy or two and three wise men standing there oohing and ahing over the child.

There are at least two problems here – first, we assume there were three men because they bring three gifts, but we have no idea exactly how many there were – more than three is quite likely. And, they probably didn't show up for a couple of months or even years after Jesus was born. So, if you put a manger scene up in your living room this Christmas, you may want to put your three wise men and a few camels somewhere at the bottom of the driveway because in reality, it's going to take them a while to get there.

They were coming from somewhere in the East, probably Persia (Iran), though perhaps Babylonia (Iraq), or Arabia (Saudi Arabia). And they were not unheard of; if you want to be a specialist in Ancient Near Eastern history you can learn all about the magi who lived at this time. They were priestly philosophers, students of science, medicine, philosophy, religion and astrology. They're really interesting and you can read some fascinating things about them if you're interested in exploring the subject.

This morning though, I just want to point out that they came, a long distance, at great expense, to see what God was doing, because they believed He was at work. They saw this star – and again, if you want to dig into the subject you can learn about all the things that were going on during this time in the sky – astronomers can reconstruct the sky during this time frame and you find that there was confluence of Jupiter and Venus and all kinds of other things happening – whether that's what God was using to signal them or not, we really don't know, but if you're into it, there's plenty of stuff you can dive into.

But back to our point: God got their attention, and they followed the star to find out more. They were interested, they were curious, and so they came, planning to worship. They followed the pattern of another great man called out of the East, not knowing where he was going, but faithfully following God. That man was Abraham, and God was leading him to the inauguration of the Promised Land. Now hundreds and hundreds of years later, God was leading the wise men along the same path to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.

The Promised Land was a place given to the Jews, to the descendants of Abraham, but the point was always to draw in the nations, that people from all over would come to worship the God of all nations. And now, we see the beginning of the fulfillment as Magi, Gentiles, people from outside the faith and outside the ethnic boundaries of the Jewish people are coming to worship. God has a heart for all the nations, and we see it in action here as He calls people from the outside to come in and play a prominent role in the birth of God's Son.

As Christians, this is where we connect with the story, because we have come from all over the city this morning, representing who knows how many ethnicities and nationalities, to sit in this room, and worship God on this hill. Because we believe that He is at work, and we want to see what He is doing. We have come to bring an offering to Him – an offering of praise, and also an offering of our treasures – to lay them at His feet as we worship.

But there are people who respond differently when God is at work.

3 When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod is serving as the king in Israel, under the approval of the Roman Empire. He's not a true Jew, he's not of the line of King David, but through a tremendous amount of politicking, maneuvering, and murdering he has secured the endorsement of Rome. It's another thing you can look into if you're interested and you can read up on all the history involved here including the role Herod played in the drama that unfolded between Marc Antony and Cleopatra.

But right now what you need to know is: this is a man who was desperate to hold onto his position of power. So desperate, he actually murdered his own wife, mother-in-law, his beautiful daughter, and his three oldest sons (even though he personally liked them) lest they try to overthrow him or be used in a plot against him. Caesar Augustus said it was safer to be Herod's pig (hus) than his son (huios) – a little play on words.

So, you see the terrible timing of it all – Herod is getting older, he's 69 at this point, and he's increasingly suspicious of people trying to overthrow him. It's not a good time for a rival king to be born, in fact it's an awful time, but God is at work and His work is unstoppable.

So, Herod hears about the new king

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.'*"

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

Now, it's interesting to me that these religious leaders who knew where the Messiah was supposed to be born weren't tripping over themselves to say, "Wait! He's here? Let's go with these guys and see what they find!"

Is there a chance that they were afraid of what Herod the king would think if they went to worship too? Is there a chance that Christians in our own government are afraid to go and worship Jesus because of what their supervisors might think? There certainly is. The interesting thing is, Jesus will be worshipped, He will be praised, the Wise men will do it, but others who could have been there will miss out. Friend, don't let that be you.

9 *When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

Think about this: men full of wisdom brought treasures to Christ, and Paul would later tell us that in Christ (Col 2:3) "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

And notice this: the men *rejoiced with exceedingly great joy*. They were genuinely excited to come and worship Christ, to see what God was doing. The Christian life is not all drudgery and obligation; it is not bland and boring. There is, in Christ, in His church, in worship, joy, *exceedingly great joy*, for those who seek it.

And as the wise men received this joy, they gave. They gave their honor – they fell down and worshipped Jesus and presented Him with gifts. They set the pattern we still follow today – when we gather as a church, we express our adoration for Christ and we give Him gifts, from our wallet, our checkbook, or online giving, we're putting some measure of our own treasure at the feet of our God just like these men did so long ago. Giving is an act of worship, not a religious subscription, or membership fee, or donation, an act of worship.

12 *Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.*

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

One commentator wrote: "Herod was afraid this little child was going to interfere with his life, his place, his power, his influence, and therefore his first instinct was to destroy him. There are still those who would gladly destroy Jesus Christ, because they see in him the one who interferes with their lives." (Barclay, 30)

Those words sting, but they are true. "They see in him the one who interferes with their lives." Friends, Jesus does not interfere with our lives, He wants to redeem, reclaim, and rescue our lives. He's not messing things up, He's making them what they should be.

Of course, that's not how Herod sees it. He has no desire to surrender to God, so for now Joseph, Mary, and their young son must flee.

14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*"

At this time in history there were over a million Jews living in Egypt in the city of Alexandria alone. We don't know this is where they went for sure, but it wasn't that far away from Jerusalem, and it was a big city, still governed by the Romans, but outside of Herod's jurisdiction. And, the young family had the money to make the trip and resettle thanks to the gold and other treasures they had just received. In other words, God met their needs as their faithfully followed him.

But meanwhile, word got out that the Child had escaped:

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

18 "*A voice was heard in Ramah,
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted,
Because they are no more.*"

We look at this and we're horrified, and we should be. But we should be even more horrified to realize this was just one act of cruelty and depravity in Herod's long life. Bethlehem was a small village, estimates are this might have resulted in the death of 20-30 kids; he had been responsible for hundreds more than this already.

And the same kind of suffering continues today, even in our own times. Why? Because of evil in the hearts of human beings. The fact that humans are willing to do something like this to other humans is proof that we need a savior. And yet, when that savior came to earth in the least threatening manner imaginable – in the form of an innocent child, a human being tried to kill Him.

Let us be honest and admit: we live in a world that opposes Jesus, that doesn't want to receive Him, a world that loves itself and which will hurt others who get in the way. But no man, or woman, can hold onto their power or position forever, sooner or later, death comes for us all...and then the judgment. Meanwhile, God continues to unfold His sovereign plan.

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

For you Bible students – earlier we saw the connection between the wise men and Abraham called from the East to come worship God in Israel, now we see the connection between Jesus and Moses, called up out of Egypt. Moses was used to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and back to the Promised Land; Jesus came to lead people out of slavery to sin and into the kingdom of God.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Archelaus was even worse than his father – not long after taking the throne, he killed 3000 Jews in the Temple at Passover. That's 100 times as many boys as his dad killed in Bethlehem. The wise men paid a high price to worship God – they took a lot of time for the trip and gave a tremendous treasure to the infant king. Archelaus and his father Herod paid a tremendous price to worship too – only they worshipped power, position, and authority, and worshipped those idols with violence, blood, and human souls.

Let me summarize everything we've seen this morning by pointing out the one thing everyone had in common: they all needed this child, Jesus.

Mary and Joseph, the young man and woman with good character; the wise men who had education and money; and Herod, the desperate king, they all needed Jesus. None of them was good enough without Him, and none of them had enough without Him. So He came for them all.

Friends, there's a little bit of Mary and Joseph, a little bit of the wise men, and little bit of Herod in each of us in us; a little virtue, a little nobility and generosity, a little selfish depravity. And so, we all need Jesus too.

If you have not received this salvation, or if you're not sure if you have received this salvation, and you would like to, or you would like to be sure – all you have to do is respond to the Christ who has come to you today. Mary was told (Matt 1:21), “[you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.](#)” Agree with God that you are a sinner, that you do need to be saved, and receive the salvation He offers you through His sacrifice on the cross. There are no special words you have to use, nothing special you have to do, He sees directly into the truth of your soul.

But you could pray something along these lines: Heavenly Father, I see my need for salvation. I know that I have sinned, I have rebelled against you, I have been selfish and ugly toward others, I know that all my best attempts to be good and do good have not been enough, and so I ask for your forgiveness. I come, like the wise men, and bow before your Son and I worship. I say, like Mary, “Behold the servant the of the Lord, may it be to me according to Your pleasure.” Receive me God, for I want to be changed, and I want to be yours.

If that expresses the true desire of your heart, then God has heard your prayers, and you are saved. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When you come to the Son of God, you become a child of God. Guaranteed.

So join your new brothers and sisters in Christ as we come before our Father again this morning and pray and then let us rejoice [with exceedingly great joy](#), like the wise men, over what we have found in Christ today.