

We Three Kings
Sound City Ruins Christmas Carols #4
Matthew 2:1-12
December 18, 2022

PreSermon Comments

- This series has been brewing since 2018 | I preached this passage and topic then

Troubling Arrival | vs. 1-3

Matthew 2 ¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

- More on the Wise Men (magi) in a minute, but first...
- How many? Probably not 3.
 - All Jerusalem was disturbed | Medes were known for war horses
 - Treasures require an entourage
 - Ultimately we don’t know. Likely more than 3

Herod’s Ignorance

⁴ So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: ⁶ And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

- The prophet Micah is quoted here, not obscure but pretty well-known!
- This shows us the ignorance of Herod. He’s a Roman puppet king, not liked by the Judeans

Secret Meeting

⁷ Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

- Herod is a wicked man. Smart, capable leader, great builder of cities.
- Paranoid & jealous - had his own sons killed, his brother in law

Following Yonder Star

⁹ After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy.

- Star theories: comet, supernova, Jupiter/Saturn, angel?
- Ultimately we don’t know, glory of God shining brightly!

Stars and Constellations

- For signs and seasons | Genesis 1:14 *separate day/night, serve as signs and season*
- Not for worship | Deuteronomy 4:19 *don't bow down to them*
- Not for salvation | Isaiah 47:13-14 **sarcastic* let the astrologers save you!*
- Not for personality | Just dumb

Worshiping the King

¹¹ Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

- Not the night of Jesus' birth
 - House vs. stable? Nope
 - After Jesus was born
 - Child, not infant - Greek *padion* not *brephos*
 - Herod's edict to kill all 2 years and under
 - But not too long | [Luke] 30 days of purification (Leviticus 12), then to Nazareth
 - My opinion: a couple of months old at this point

Wise Men in General

- Royal advisors | All nations
- Science and religion | No distinction (astronomy vs. astrology)
- Often ethnic | One specific tribe (Babylons had the Chaldeans, Jews had the Levites)

Magi in Specific

- Iranian Tribe | Median-Persian empire
 - **Histories of Herodotus 1.101 (400's BC)** Deiokes collected the Medes into a nation, and ruled over them alone. Now these are the tribes of which they consist: the Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arizanti, the Budii, and the Magi.
- Religious leaders | In charge of worship (Zoroastrianism, but open-minded in absorption)
- Political power | Not kings, but kingmakers

*Several figures in the OT who dealt with Magi: Joseph, Moses, and Daniel

Daniel, the Jewish Magus

- Exiled to Babylon | Daniel 1:1-3
- Trained as a Magus | Daniel 1:3-7
 - Rises to the top | Daniel 1:17-20 (Nebuchadnezzar found them 10x better!)
 - Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream | Daniel 2:1-45 (smashed statue)
- Becomes the chief of the Magi | Daniel 2:47-48
 - ⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." ⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler

over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

- Survives regime change | Daniel 5:30-6:12
 - Babylon, Median-Persian empire
 - Darius the Mede | 120 regional governors ruled by 3 Magi, one is Daniel.
 - Lion's den – Darius commands all to listen to Daniel and his God

Daniel's Prosperity

Daniel 6 ²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to those of every people, nation, and language who live on the whole earth: "May your prosperity abound. ²⁶ I issue a decree that in all my royal dominion, people must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, and he endures forever; his kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. ²⁷ He rescues and delivers; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth, for he has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions." ²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

- As far as we can tell, Daniel never went back to Judah | 90 yrs old at time of return
- Persian religion was syncretistic. How much did he tell them?
 - Abraham > David > Messianic prophecy

A Kingly Star

Numbers 24 ¹⁷ ...A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel.

Following the Magi

1. Jesus is the king that every heart desires
 - a. Widespread desire and anticipation for a king
 - i. **Tacitus, Histories 5.13** In most [Roman people], there was a firm persuasion, that in the ancient records of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judea, were to acquire a universal empire. (70AD)
 - b. Today, widespread desire for a political leader | JESUS IS DIFFERENT
 - i. Humble king: lower than a manger is a grave
 - ii. Servant king: you can't serve Jesus unless you first let him serve you
2. Jesus' kingdom is for all people | Unlikely for Magi to worship
 - a. Good news has always been for the whole world
 - b. The nations will flock to his light | Isaiah 60:6 *bringing gold and frankincense*
 - c. Matthew's gospel will end with "go to the nations and make disciples of all"
3. King Jesus requires all we have and all we are
 - a. Men who made King Herod uncomfortable are bowing before this baby
 - b. Giving gifts: everything they had they turned over to Jesus
 - i. Gold: for a king. Frankincense: for worship. Myrrh: embalming spice.

*Once you get past the first few words, We Three Kings is actually quite profound. What a sad thing that nobody sings these verses

We Unspecified Number of Magi

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain, gold I bring to crown him again
King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign

Frankincense to offer have I; incense owns the Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, voices raising, worshiping God on high

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone cold tomb

Glorious now behold him arise, king and God and sacrifice
Alleluia, alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies

Scripture Reading

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