

# Matthew 2 – Protecting the King

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## NIV: Matthew 2

### The Magi Visit the Messiah [1-12]

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup> “‘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 shepherd my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”



<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> 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, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

### The Escape to Egypt [13-18]

<sup>13</sup> 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.”

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

<sup>16</sup> When 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. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> “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 Return to Nazareth [19-23]

<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup> and 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.”

<sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But 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, <sup>23</sup> and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

## Sermon – Matthew 2

### Introduction

When (and I ask you forgive me mentioning an English Monarch in this Presbyterian church), when Princess Elizabeth's uncle Edward viii abdicated Elizabeth's father became King and suddenly Elizabeth was heir to the throne. She had not expected to become Queen but suddenly her life was turned upside down. She was groomed, protected and trained for she, at some point in the future, would become Queen of England.

How are we wired to protect the weak and vulnerable? As parents, Aunts and Uncles or family friends we recognise the weakness those we care for have, we protect and work to provide the best for them. God through his infinite power is protecting the vulnerable baby of Mary, Jesus through his early years.

I like what Henri Nouwen says about fruits weakness and vulnerability.

*There is a great difference between successfulness and fruitfulness.*

*Success comes from strength, control, and respectability. A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame.*

*Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another's wounds. Let's remind one another that what brings us true joy is not successfulness but fruitfulness.*

Let's look at how Jesus in his vulnerability is cared and protected in his early life.

I have broken this talk up as:

- The King is Born [Matthew 2:1–8]

- The Witness of the Wise Men [Matthew 2:9–12]
- The Flight into Egypt [Matthew 2:13–15]
- Herod's Slaughter of the Children [Matthew 2:16–18]
- Jesus at Home in Nazareth [Matthew 2:19–23]

#### The King is Born [Matthew 2:1–8]

Last Sunday & on Christmas Day we looked at Matthew 1. On Christmas Day, Dave shared the Jesus birth from Luke as there is much more detail in Luke's account of Jesus birth. Matthew is very succinct with what he records for us in chapter 2 v 1 "*after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea*" – so, we miss out on the stable, the shepherds etc.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, a small town about five miles south of Jerusalem. About the same distance from here at Tregear to the other side of Rooty Hill.

Bethlehem has such significance to the Jewish people. Bethlehem was where Jacob buried his beloved Rachel and had set up a pillar in memory of her, when she died giving birth to Benjamin. Bethlehem was where that Ruth had lived when she married Boaz. Bethlehem was where Benjamin's descendant, David, was born. For ever afterwards it would be known as 'the city of David'.

But it was not David's line that was on the throne – it was another king, Herod who was in charge of Bethlehem, all of Galilee and Judea. Herod was half Jewish and had been appointed king by the Roman Senate in 40 BC. He gained control of the country by 37 BC. He died in 4 BC. Jesus was clearly born before that date.

In writing this Gospel and being at pains to show Jesus' royal lineage and his coming having been foretold, Matthew is keen to show us the God's plan involved the gentiles.

Here in v 1 we are introduced to the Magi or the wise men I will use these terms interchangeably. For centuries the Magi had been a tribe of priests in Persia, but the name had also come to mean magicians and astrologers. They were known as interpreters of dreams and dreams feature in these opening chapters of Matthew:

- 1:20 Joseph had a dream where an angel of God told him that Mary's pregnancy is of God.
- and as we will see further in vv 12, 13 and 19.

Through God, the Magi had been directed to following a star – many think perhaps the great conjunction, when Saturn and Jupiter meet as we saw last week, which scientists have calculated would have also occurred in approx. 7 BC. These gentile wise men, inspired by God to find and worship *“one who has been born king of the Jews”*.

In verse 3 we read that *“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him”*.

Herod was not just a strong administrator who built up a good reputation with the Romans in collecting taxes but was a particularly evil King. He was a ruthless killer – having people killed who opposed him, empowering those who were loyal to him. I am reminded of despots in the world that display or have displayed such behaviour.

Herod seeks counsel from the Jewish leaders.

Let's think about them for a moment. Where are they in this narrative? We are introduced to the wise men who travel far to worship the King of the Jews. The Jewish leaders are noticeably absent in searching for their foretold King! Herod asked of them *“where will the Christ be born”*.

*they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:*

*<sup>6</sup> “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 shepherd my people Israel.”*

The Jewish leaders have this knowledge of where the Messiah will be born. Their absence clearly shows they have no relationship or deep understanding of what God is wanting for his people.

But I find I can fall into that trap. I'm not claiming to be all knowing but having grown up in a Christian home, having grown up with biblical truths and bible stories it is easy to be flippant "yes, I know that" but it is another matter to write those truths on my hearts and live them each day.

So, Herod sends them off to find the King but he also wants them to report back. Not so he can "come and worship him also" but Herod recognises a threat to his power so is therefore wanting to kill him.

These opening 8 verses setup for us that this contrast between the worst of men, the powerful abusing their power for their gratification and contrasting that with God entering the world in human form, the most vulnerable as a baby.

This contrasting behaviour - that of Jesus, born of humble means, God becoming man, personifying vulnerability and trust. Teaching us the way to live is to be lowly, to serve not to grab power. To have life, life in abundance with him. Living is not about killing or seeking death as a means to one's own end.

The stage is set showing how God protects Jesus in his formative years. Further, that the decisions Jesus family make for him, directions from God, are not reacting to Herod, but actions that had been foretold 100s of years previously.

[The Witness of the Wise Men \[Matthew 2:9–12\]](#)

The wise men (v9) followed the star to where Jesus was.

And then in v 10 "*When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*" These Gentile Wise Men, sent by God, not their God, yet knew that here was the birth of the King of the Jews, God coming as a man. This was not an intellectual exercise to the fulfillment of ancient writings, this is an emotional response, a spiritual response, a heartfelt response to meeting God come to earth as man.

## Kali - photo

Well, what is wrong with this picture. For people listening to this without the use of visual aids we see a black cat sitting in a Nativity scene.



Well, if your answer is that it's unlikely the wise men were not at the birth of Jesus you would be right. There is nothing to indicate whether a cat was or wasn't at the birth – the scriptures are silent on this fact. Although my black cat is known to occasionally offer a sin offering – poor little pigeons.

But we do know from looking at v 11 *"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him"*. There is no mention of a stable or a barn, no mention of a baby. They were visiting a house and saw a child. It is probable some time has passed since Jesus birth, yet the family was still in Bethlehem.

Then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of v 11 *"Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."* We infer there were 3 wise men due to the 3 gifts, but we do not know if there were only three nor do we know their names. And what about the symbolism of the *"gold, frankincense and myrrh"*? As one writer said:

*Gold is the gift fit for a king—and the king in baby clothes was there.*

*Frankincense was in constant use by the priests in the temple, and the ultimate*

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*priest, the one who was to make final reconciliation between God and humankind, lay before them. Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. The man born to be king was the man born to die.*

*In those three gifts we see who he is, what he came to do, and what it cost him. And, like the wise men, we bow in wonder before a God who could love us that much.*

Then in verse 12 the wise men, the magi are warned through a dream to return to Herod but return to their countries another way.

#### The Flight into Egypt [Matthew 2:13–15]

<sup>13</sup> 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.”

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Joseph, having had a dream in Ch 1 regarding the paternity of Jesus is now warned in a dream by an Angel in v 13 *“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.”*

We have had the birth Of Jesus in Bethlehem, not only foretold but in Bethlehem representing so much of Israel’s history.

Now hearing the words *“take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt”* we have the history we know, and Joseph would be well aware of – how God directed Jacob to save his family, by heading to Egypt to buy grain during great famine. They ended up staying for 400 years and became a nation in bondage. Again, God protects and rescues his people empowering Moses to lead Israel to flee Egypt.

There were many Jewish people living in Egypt as it was nation that they would and could seek refuge in. Joseph would have been able to find community and work.



The Angel was clear in the dream that Herod would seek to take the child's life and that they were to stay in Egypt "until I tell you" – until when? Until God tells them.

God is communicating with Joseph via a dream. This is very much a practical dream, Herod wants to kill your son, head to Egypt. Joseph the protector & carer of Mary & Jesus, their earthly father. Cared for and protected by God, their heavenly Father.

But when was this plan thought of? When God heard of Herod's plans? No. In Hosea it is written "*Out of Egypt I called my son*" In Jesus early life he is repeating Moses in leading and bringing his people out of bondage and slavery. But not slavery & bondage to the Egyptians but now freedom from bondage & slavery of sin and death.

#### Herod's Slaughter of the Children [Matthew 2:16–18]

<sup>16</sup> When 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.

This next section is a harrowing piece of Scripture. It reflects Herod's evil intent. In v 16 Herod was tricked by the Magi. His response – to give orders to slaughter all the boys in Bethlehem and the surrounding area aged 2 and under – estimated to be 40 - 60 boys murdered.

The reference to Rachel weeping for her children:

<sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> "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."

Rachel's death in childbirth set her apart as the "sorrowful mother" of the Old Testament. Yet, through her death in childbirth, she gave life to Benjamin. In Jeremiah's day, the Jewish people taken captive filed past Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem on their way to Babylonian captivity.

She entered, in a sense, into the pain and desolation of those departing exiles. And again, life came out of death, the return from exile brought new life to Israel. Bereavement became the pathway to blessing. We see many times in Scripture, and in our lives, disappointments that become the seeds of God's ultimate purpose for our good.

#### Jesus at Home in Nazareth [Matthew 2:19–23]

Joseph has another dream, one he was waiting for, v 19-20 *“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.”*

In v 21 – 22 Joseph did not hesitate, home he returned. But Joseph, afraid of who was on the throne, he is again warned in a dream, so he withdrew to Galilee.

In v 23 we see the family settles in Nazareth.

But what do we make of verse 23? *“and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.”* There is no mention of Nazareth in the Old Testament. A man from Nazareth was despised in Jesus' day: it was an obscure town from which no good was thought to come, situated in 'Galilee of the Gentiles', and there was plenty of indication among the prophets that the Messiah would be despised.

When Amanda finished high School at Blacktown girls, she attended Sydney University. One class she was in she mentioned she went to Blacktown Girls and a fellow student's response “and how did you get here?” Well, something good came from Blacktown! I'm sure many of us have similar stories living out west! As one friend I worked with used to say “Andrew, the Western Suburbs starts at George Street - & I dare not cross it”.

Isaiah prophesied that the servant of the Lord would be despised by men. If we look in John 1: 45-46:

<sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote —Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

<sup>46</sup> “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I offer with three final thoughts:

Firstly, Matthew makes it plain that God works through both surprise and continuity to bring about his purposes. The story of Jesus is a continuation of the story with Abraham, with David and with the whole history of the chosen people. But it also provides unexpected detours. We can be encouraged to expect God to be working in our lives steadily and continuously, making sense of our past history; but also, to be on the lookout for God’s surprises in our lives, ready to grasp them and follow through their implications when they come.

Secondly, Matthew has a clear message for the readers of his day. By then the Gentile mission was in full swing, and the tensions with Judaism had reached boiling-point. The temptation to give up on the Jews would have been very great. But Matthew says, ‘Don’t give up on the Jewish people. God has not given them up. He has a special purpose for them. It stretches back to the dawn of time. It is from Jewish stock that Jesus was born. Do not forget it.’

Thirdly, Matthew has a word of encouragement for us when facing opposition. Opposition is inevitable, but it will never, in the providence of God, be allowed to stop God’s mission. There was every possibility of quenching the Messiah: his mother Mary might have been stoned as an adulteress; Jesus might have been killed by Herod; he might have been lost in Egypt. But no. God’s hand was upon him. Opposition could not extinguish God’s light. What an encouragement that would have been to Matthew’s readers! The church, so frail, so exposed, would not be allowed to sink, however threatening the storms and waves that broke over it.



What challenges are we facing individually, as a community, as part of God's church? God will not give up on us. How are we to become? Well, some wisdom from Henri Nouwen

*Become Like a Child*

*The great temptation is to use our obvious failures and disappointments in our lives to convince ourselves that we are really not worth being loved. Because what do we have to show for ourselves?*

*But for a person of faith the opposite is true. The many failures may open that place in us where we have nothing to brag about but everything to be loved for. It is becoming a child again, a child who is loved simply for being, simply for smiling, simply for reaching out.*

*This is the way to spiritual maturity: to receive love as a pure, free gift.*