

Recognizing Royalty * Matthew 2:1-12

Thank you, Nick, for reading our text this morning! Ah, can't we just stay in this moment for a little bit? Doesn't it have the rich feel of traditions in here this morning? It just kind of makes you warm and fuzzy inside doesn't it? Go ahead – it's OK to smile! I love Christmas traditions. I mean look, here it is! The manger scene: we have the hay and somewhere back here – we have the little plastic sheep. And I'll bet that as Nick read the text this morning, you could almost see 3 kings – got the whole flowing robes, crowns on their heads, riding three big camels– and showing up at the manger. I don't know if you caught it or not, but the wise men didn't exactly show up at the manger.

I read this week, that if it would have been the Wise Women instead of the Wise "men," the women would have asked directions before they got started. So they would have showed up on time.... they would have helped deliver the baby, they would have cleaned up the manger, got everything in order. They would have made a casserole and they'd have made cute little clothes for baby Jesus. But instead – we got the wise men – showing up like maybe up to a year late, going into town (finally) asking directions, and what do they do? They tip off the evil old Herod!

We **do** like our traditions though. Some of you this week shared your traditions with me – the things that make you "know" it's Christmas time. Singing happy birthday to Jesus – that's always a good one. I heard about people hiding various things in the tree, like doves, a little hat, and a squirrel in the Christmas tree. And I know the Bickells hide a green dinosaur in their Christmas tree – they don't know why – they just do it. I heard about the Ugly Sweater party. One lady has a tradition of giving people an "ugly dolly" – that seems like a nice one. One family has a candlelight dinner around something they call the "ugly Santa" (Please don't tell Chris Carr that I said Santa in church ok?) Back when I was a kid – for some reason – it wasn't officially Christmas until my Dad had everyone stand facing the tree – and he took a picture of the backs of our heads! No clue!

Look, I know that in our minds, tradition places 3 camels, 3 gifts, and 3 kings at the manger, but this morning, God, through the gospel of Matthew is saying (maybe yelling!) Don't miss this: there is 1 King – only 1. He wants us to recognize that **true** royalty – cause as we'll see in the scripture, not everybody gets it. They just miss it! And some people get it, but don't like it cause this King is a threat. And some people – maybe people you'd never expect to get it– recognize the King, and the only response that is appropriate is worship.

Prayer: We don't want to miss it God. We don't want to trade tradition for truth. And it doesn't just happen at Christmas time, but for some reason hearts are maybe a little more tender at this time of year. So it's a wonderful time to not just see Him, your Son, but worship Him...just flat out lowering ourselves before the King. Please help us remember this morning that in the midst of this world we live in, because of Christ, those who would say "He's my King" – that whatever is good and precious in your life, especially people, they need never be lost. They do not vanish forever from us. He came that they might all

be saved and restored to us. And not only that, but Christmas means that whatever is evil, or undesirable in our lives can be changed: from bad habits to hard hearts. Because of Christmas – and eventually Easter – you have overcome the world. So come Holy Spirit. It's in the name of the King – Jesus – we pray, amen.

Let's walk through this text together. The title of this message is "Recognizing Royalty." But before we even do that, I want us to see that the heavens proclaim Him. Look at the first couple of verses again: Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose^[b] and have come to worship him."

All of human history has been building to the coming of the Messiah. The whole world's been waiting – and God moves heaven and earth so that this event is wonderfully known. Up until now, God has been telling His people through the prophets that He's coming...He's coming... He's coming. Century after century have been building to this most incredible time. I mean, do you want to know what God is up to in the world? **This is it...** this is what God is up to – His Son – the King has finally come!

And so many folks want to write off this amazing account and this star as a folk tale, or some oral tradition. Do you find it too amazing or hard to believe that God would or could use a large bright object in the sky to announce the arrival of His Son – the King? I mean, is it really that hard to believe? The culmination of what God is up to in the universe...all of creation proclaiming His glory...everything building to this one time and place where the perfect plan is finally in motion! This is not plan B, it's plan A. And listen, **Jesus has been in on it from the get go!** Look at these 2 verses from Colossians chapter 1, ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by^[a] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. So all of the stars, the heavens, the oceans, the fields have been quietly proclaiming and quietly waiting... Jesus is coming!

I don't find it hard to believe that God would move around some bright object in the sky to announce His arrival. Look, we don't know exactly what it was. They call it a star, but we know that in verse 9 Matthew tells us that whatever it was, it was low enough to come and hover over one single house; they knew exactly which house to go into. Listen man, this is **not** a big deal for God. He's been planning this from before the beginning of time – It isn't **like** God to have some boring, easy to miss, unnoticeable puff of white smoke where no-one's there to see it! It's not in Matthew's account. But there were a bunch of working stiffs, shepherds, who were out in the fields the night He came. Just trying to make a buck, probably sitting around telling crude jokes, yucking it up – and God simply gives a nod – and the sky EXPLODED with a billion angels.

We have an extravagant God and He wants the world to know about His Son in whom all things are held together! Do you have trouble with God moving a star around, or some big glob of light? I mean look at this (picture of solar system.) The Psalmist David looked

up and said: "The heavens declare the glory of God – the skies proclaim the work of his hands" – and actually – the word their for hands is better translated "finger." Jesus did that with His finger. Probably His pinky! The Heavens declare Him wonderfully! The same Psalmist also says, A fool says in his heart...there is no God. The heavens and the stars are amazing, and they declare His majesty, but for me this next one takes the cake! (Baby picture) A fool looks at that and say's there's no God. **We're made in His image.** And the miracle that makes it even possible for the eye to work? Do you have any idea the billions of things that have to go perfectly right to make 1 molecule of collagen? That's the molecule that makes the skin tight on a young person... some of us got less and less of that! The chances of that happening correctly would be if we had a standard sized Vegas slot machine. That slot machine would have to be 90 feet wide – with all of those little wheels – 1,055 of them to be exact – and if I were to pull the handle so that the correct protein sequences would come up in the exact right order, the chances of that happening are essentially nill. ZERO. I could pull that handle forever and essentially never get the right sequence to happen.

I just want you to grasp that all since the beginning of time God's been showing off the power and wonder of His Son through creation – and **now** that Creator God is entering His creation – He will move heaven and earth to make sure people know it. We have an extravagant God – and the heavens proclaim His Son wonderfully! He used a million (more or less) angels to tell the shepherds. He used a bright object in the sky to draw some wisemen who knew enough to decide, "Hey, stars don't normally do that." He even brought you here today so that you might recognize royalty and be awed by it! Many times when people read this passage they get hung up and focus on the star. And I'm here to tell you that the star is *nothing* for God. The focus is on his Son – the King.

Now the rest of this passage is all about people's reaction to all of this. And God is forcing the issue even with you this morning. You personally, individually, will have a reaction to what God is up to in the World. I think the text lays out 3 broad categories.

The first reaction we see is that some will recognize royalty – they'll see it – but it's met with fear. Maybe even some people in this room know this is the King. He's legit! And I am scared to death because He's a threat to my lifestyle. He's a threat to *my way* – my Kingdom. And that's exactly how Herod felt.

So in Matthews narration, Jesus had already been born and these wise men show up. Probably not 3 of them – we assume 3 because of 3 gifts – and more likely traveled in large groups, maybe 50 people, and they show up in Jerusalem, and they are asking everyone – everyone they come up to – and everywhere they go in that town (verse2) "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. Verse 3 (Here's Herod's reaction) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled... and all Jerusalem with him.

Let me tell you just a little bit about Herod. He is one bad hombre! Nobody in this room is as bad as Herod. But that might only be because nobody in this room had the kind of power that Herod had. When you get complete unchecked power in the hands of sinful

man there is no telling what can happen, but it isn't good! From what I studied this week, Herod wanted people to like him. He wanted people to say, "Hey, that's my King." But if they didn't, no problem, he just killed them! He wanted people to think that he was a Jew – or at least that he came from royal Jewish ancestry. This was important to him because **he** was called at the time, "the king of the Jews." Herod is troubled because these guys are asking for the one who has been *born* King of the Jews, not simply decreed by some emperor somewhere. Look, there is tons and tons written about King Herod the Great, but the only reason people in that day would say he was great was because they wanted to keep their head somewhere in the vicinity of their neck. You dig? So when our text says that when Herod was troubled, all Jerusalem was troubled with him, it's because when this guy got upset about something... it caused problems, big time!

Look, Herod has his own gig going. He's got his little kingdom and in his kingdom – he's King! Everybody knows how important **he** is. Everything is set up for Him to enjoy. I think deep down – he knows – he's not really in charge – ultimately! Does this sound familiar? Hey! I want this to be about me! This is my house! This is my little kingdom! I'm in charge! There's a little bit of Herod in me – maybe in all of us.

I'm not the king? There's someone bigger than me? I have to answer to someone? But I have everything set up just the way I like it. I don't want to give that up! If I honor HIM as king, then what happens to me? What will people think of me? FEAR! All fear and no worship! Herod recognized royalty. He didn't miss it. He had been around these Jews long enough to know that a true king, a messiah, was coming. And his fear of giving up his kingdom caused him to reject the true King. Herod didn't miss it. He didn't deny it – look at verse 4 – and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And then look at verse 7, he ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child.

He's not asking if it's true anymore. He's asking where, and who and when – SO HE CAN SQUASH IT. No worship, only fear. Now most of you know how this ends, but Chris Carr will be back next week to tell us about that.

Look, one reaction might be to recognize royalty in King Jesus with fear. The defenses come up – and instead of worship – it's all about self-preservation, keeping ourselves in the #1 spot. Jesus knows. He knows this about us. It kept me from coming to Him for a long time. And it sometimes still kills my worship of him. He knows this, that's why He said in Matthew 10:39, **Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** Letting fear drive all of our energy into self-worship is like drinking sand; it never satisfies. Herod didn't fail to recognize royalty; He feared it – and worship died.

That's one reaction, another reaction are of those who just simply miss it entirely. Let's go back and read verses 4 through 6 again, ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

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.”

Now we know how Herod reacted, fearfully, and in a minute we'll see how the wise men reacted, but what about this religious bunch? I mean they're the bunch that knows the scriptures right? Herod came to **them** saying, "Look, you guys are the experts, this thing is going down, what can you tell me?" And we know that the wise sought them looking for answers. These are the people **in the know**. So look in your Bible, (flipping pages) what did they do? Surely these Bible scholars recognized Him! Let's see, mmm, let me just scan through chapter 2. Nope. Nothing (pause). They didn't do anything. They missed it entirely. Now you'd think that if somebody in this story would have been able to see this coming – it would have been religious people. If someone was going to recognize royalty here, it would be them right? After all, there they are in the church, in the synagogue, week after week. Know all the rules, got this thing memorized: gotta do this, gotta do that; can't do this, can't do that. These are the people who would've said, "We know all about God – we interpret the rules." And they MISSED IT entirely.

Now, I don't want to be too hard on these guys ok, lots of people missed it. And I don't mean to stand up here and pretend that they knew *when* the King was coming. I mean, they've been waiting for hundreds of years. So I'm not like – Pfft, what a bunch of losers! If I were there, I totally would have seen it man. How can these guys be so stupid? I'm just saying that they were so blinded with religious rituals and traditions and rules, and being experts, and having everyone look up to them for the answers... that they missed Him. No matter how you shake this thing out man, they missed Him. They thought that they were royalty, and there was no worship.

Look, do you think that maybe, just maybe that if their hearts were totally into God and these guys – these wise men - showed up and said, "Look...we're not exactly sure what's happening here, but we know that God has put it in our hearts to seek him out. And even though we don't know exactly how it works, but He's been leading us across deserts for like the past year with this star." Do you think that maybe **one** of them might say, "I don't know either, but I'm going with you man! Bring them camels around front. Let's go! I am going to check this out!" And Jesus knew this about them too. That's why He said: **This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.**

Maybe you've been walking through the doors of a church for years and you've gotten bogged down with rituals and rules. And you see these other people, and they're all excited. And they're like, "C'mon man, c'mon, God's doing this amazing thing over here! We're praying, and we're serving, and we're growing. C'mon, it's the most amazing thing ever!" – And your reaction is, "Meh, I know all about that stuff." (Pause) Don't miss it – please! Recognize that he came! Don't be bored! C'mon! Were going somewhere as a church...join us! We're going to follow his light. He's doing amazing things over here and over there! We're taking clean water to Africa, and we're becoming foster parents, and we're ministering to moms who desperately just need a friend. We're proclaiming Jesus in prisons. We're being Christian mentors to young men and women. Don't miss it! WE GET

TO GIVE OUR WHOLE LIVES IN WORSHIP! **LIFE IS WORSHIP!** You're not losing your life; you find it in Him!

Look, I don't know if your tradition brings you here for 2 weeks around Christmas or if your ritual brings you here every stinkin' week. But every time, if instead of your hear it's just your lips that say, "I know all that stuff. I'll get around to that. I got plenty of time... maybe next year." Listen, do you know what Herod thought? He thought He had plenty of time... he was dead within a year. The religious people, they thought they had plenty of time and they missed it. Look man, I went back through the records a little bit this week... 21 people, 21 – and I'm sure I missed some – that somehow or another were connected to this church. Maybe they sat in this room 1 year ago today. Maybe some family member sat here, and they had no idea that would be their last Christmas. No clue. Some finished the race well, and some never even got started. But the point is, it's just a fact that some of us sitting in here today - maybe it's me - won't be sitting here a year from now. We are but a vapor, a mist. Recognize royalty, find true life, and from a grateful worshipful heart, let it cause you to act on it – don't miss it!

Our last group from this passage is the wise men.

Now, we don't know much about these guys ok, it's kind of a mystery. We know they weren't Jewish – so they didn't have the full revelation that the Jews had. I read lots of authors who wrote pages of stuff and at the end said, "We aren't sure." Some say they were Medes or Persians – or maybe they had come from Babylon. Wherever they were from this word "Wise men" is usually translated "Magi," and it's where we get our word "Magician" from – these guys were not Kings.

This line of people – or people who were called Magi – they weren't Kings. You wanna know what they were? They were violators of the Old Testament Law; they were experts in magic, and divination, sorcery, and especially astrology. They essentially gave their life to the study of creation, not the Creator. They worshiped the created things: the stars, the sun, and were into things like black magic. The bottom line is, folks, these guys were sinners! Sinners. We should really be careful that we don't have a narrower vision of who can come to Jesus than God does. We can be so prone to write off people like this, but God doesn't. He draws. He woos. That's why Matthew starts this whole story with "Behold!" He's saying check this out, here's something you won't expect. Magi – unclean sinners – that's who came from the east to meet the Son of God!

Look, we really don't know how much they "knew." All we can guess was that somehow they knew this King was to be born – they probably had access to all the writings of the day – including the scriptures. But they were really experts of the stars. And whatever it was they saw in the sky, they looked at each other and said, "That ain't normal. Fire up the camels! We're gonna go see!" That's it. That's it. That's probably all they knew. They knew a King was born – and this star showed up and they were going.

I don't know how much you know – or don't know about this King. But stay right with me until the end – because I believe that God is less interested in you knowing every detail of

when, where, how, what as he is VERY interested in you recognizing **WHO** He is – and reacting the way these strangers did.

First lets look again at verse 9.

Verse 9: 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 on the place where the child was. (And here's part of their reaction, verse 10) When they saw the star, they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. – It's the only place in scripture where you will find a quadruple superlative. This is Matthew saying these guys were "Happy, happy, happy!" They didn't just rejoice – seriously – when's the last time you rejoiced? I'm not even sure what that looks like! They rejoiced exceedingly, over the top, and not just with joy, but exceedingly with great joy! These guys went nuts! Look, the star is back! Can you believe the star is back! **We are going to get to meet him!** But they hadn't come this far for the star. The star was just leading them to what they really came for.

Verse 11. 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.

They recognized royalty. I mean here are these guys, they weren't the religious experts, ok? They didn't know everything there is to know, and standing in front of them and this young woman and a baby. No red carpet, no fine china, no nursemaid. But this baby, they knew this is no average baby. Of this baby it is said: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon ^[a] his shoulder, (This is the King!) and his name shall be called ^[b] Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of Him it is said – His reign – shall have no end – not ever!

They recognized true royalty and they fell on their face and worshiped. When the magi came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" little did they know that they were asking for him by the very title that would be written above his head as he hung on the cross dying for sins not his own, their sins: "the king of the Jews."

Listen, I invite you to close your Bibles. Can I just talk to you for a minute? You might have noticed that I didn't even go to the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts that the wise men offered him as an expression of worship. Maybe tradition would have it that the whole message would focus on the gifts, and what they meant, and how much they cost – and how they are appropriate for royalty, but Jesus doesn't need your gifts. He wants you! This text is not about money – but about worship. He wants you – all of you.

How many marriages crumble into just going through the motions because a husband fails to hear the yearning of his wife, "I don't want your money...I want you." How many parents lose their children because they failed to see the signs that say, "I don't want your presents, Daddy... I want you!"

He wants you to see that He's come for you this Christmas, and all because he loves you. He doesn't want your stuff. It's already His. He's saying, I seek not what is yours, but you! He wants your worship. He wants you to love him with all your heart – and that will show up in how you give. He wants you to adore him because it was His joy to redeem you – Hebrews 12:2, He didn't go to the cross grudgingly, it was His joy to die for you. He had your face, and your issues, and your struggles, and your eternity on his mind as he died on that cross.

Would you recognize Him –royalty– the King of Kings, and spend some time right now worshipping Him. Maybe close your eyes and sweep away everything from your mind except Him. Now in a minute you might hear the shuffling of feet as the choir comes up and after a few minutes it will be **our** joy to literally raise the roof off of this place in worship of the king. But before we do that, spend some time in your spirit bowing before Him. Don't worry about what the person next to you is doing, or what your friend might think, and just worship Him. And if you want to spend some time on your knees – even right in your pew – that doesn't seem like a bad idea either – given what the wise men did. Just adore Him. He wants your whole heart to worship him.

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