

Tommy Meador / General

Stand alone Christmas / Matthew 2:1–18

Introduction

- Have you ever had a bad Christmas? 1 year ago - in the hospital instead of preaching on Christmas Day! 2nd time that's happened! Happened years before - when Luke was just a baby! This week - flashbacks..
- You're not supposed to have a bad Christmas. Christmas is supposed to be full of joy, peace on earth, goodwill to men.
- The first Christmas wasn't any of those things. It may have been the worst Christmas ever.
- Matthew tells the dark side of the Christmas story (really encouraging for a Christmas Eve sermon) – Babies are murdered and Mary and Joseph flee from Bethlehem and Egypt in fear of their own lives. This child who was born the Savior of the World becomes a refugee.
- It's a dark story, but there is hope hope in the darkness because ultimately LIGHT defeats DARKNESS. Jesus is the gift that brings light into the darkness.
- There really is a war for Christmas - an enemy that does not want you to experience joy this Christmas - an enemy that does not want you to experience the gift of Jesus Christ this Christmas.
- Two simple questions from this story: Is Jesus the gift you don't want? Or, is Jesus the gift you must have?

Is Jesus the gift you don't want?

- Matthew's birth story takes place just after the birth of Jesus with wise men traveling from the East to Jerusalem to see the one who has been born King of the Jews.
- Burst the Christmas Bubble – not at the nativity – sometime after the birth. Not told a number, nor their names.
- Don't know where they are from – Arabia, Persia, Babylon... Likely astrologers studying the skies for supernatural signs. (A big no-no for Jewish people. These are pagans!) A star arose that pointed their way to the region of Bethlehem. (The discovery of a new star signified the birth of royalty in the ancient world.) They go to worship a Jewish king even though they weren't Jews! (If they were from Babylon – had knowledge to OT from the time of exile) Maybe familiar with a prophecy in [Num. 24:17](#) - Balaam prophesied of a coming king worthy of a heavenly announcement! – "...a star will come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." They traveled for months to Jerusalem. The birth of Christ has worldwide implications – He's not just a Jewish King!
- Travel to **Jerusalem** – the capital of Israel – where a king would likely be born.
- Seek out the king of Israel – Herod – maybe a child born in his house that will take his place as the new King of the Jews...
- **Herod – a madman** - Not a full Jew - Jews were suspicious - half Jewish/half Edomite – appointed by the Roman government as a client King – He was a puppet of the Roman government.
- **He was prideful** – rebuilt the temple and various other structures and a huge palace for himself. Through building, wanted to show the Jews how great he was.

- **He was paranoid** - He had his wife, mother, and brother killed because he thought they were conspiring against him.
- **He was hungry for money** – Known to tax people up to 50% of their income – and that didn't include Caesar's share or the tax collector's share!
- So, when he hears about this newborn King – the paranoia creeps in. Was there really a newborn king who would threaten his reign?
- Sends for scribes – do the Jewish Scriptures say anything about the birth of this King? ([Micah 5:2](#))
- Herod to wise men: “When you find the child tell me where He is so I can worship too...” **LIE!**
- For Herod – Jesus was the gift he didn't want.
- Why would Jesus be the gift that you would not want?
- **You like your life the way it is.** You might not say it that way... What might keep you from embracing the gift of Jesus is you think you're too smart for Jesus. To you, it's all a fairy tale, a made up story that has no historical or scientific backing. Or, you consider yourself too open-minded for Jesus. After all, there are so many other religions. Wouldn't it be too narrow minded to believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven? And, Christian faith seems so wrong and outdated to call things like homosexuality, transgenderism, etc. sin -
- The problem isn't that Christianity isn't historical enough or too scientific for you. Nor, is the problem that the Christian faith is too narrow or close-minded. The problem is you like your life the way it is. You like calling the shots of your life. You don't want to get off the throne. You don't want to entertain the reality that there is a God who knows better than you do, and you don't want to acknowledge that His way is best, because if you did, you would have to actually surrender to His will. That's just not your plan for your life.

- **You are unwilling to admit you have a problem.** If you don't want the gift of Jesus, you have a problem that you're not willing to admit: you're prideful. Because of your unwillingness to admit your pride, you are on a road to eternal punishment. Is your pride worth it? Is it worth it to like your life the way it is - to be so concerned about you getting what you want out of life that you miss eternal life? It's likely that you know you have a problem - you don't really like your life the way that it is. You know something is missing. Will you admit your problem this morning?

Is Jesus the gift you must have?

- The star leads them to a home where Jesus was with his parents in Bethlehem. There, they find the child, and worship.
- They give gifts – [1 Kings 10:1-10](#) - Jesus, the greater Son of David! – Queen of Sheba brings gifts to King Solomon – camels, gold, spices, etc. when she heard of his wisdom. Now, one wiser than Solomon is here, one greater than King David – he is worthy of gifts – and not just gifts from Jewish people – gifts from everyone on the face of the planet. What Matthew is telling us that Jesus isn't just the King of the Jews. He's the King of the world. Think about it. **The Gospel of Matthew begins with this announcement that Jesus is the King of the world** – Wise men, everyone, come and see.
- That night the lives of the wise men were forever changed. These foreign magi had only thought they had lived the good life. They were wealthy, they were respected in their culture for their knowledge. They seemed to have it all – but the God of all creation – the same God who brought the lowly shepherds to the manger now brings the lofty wise men to the home of baby Jesus. God's saying to the wise men, "In spite of everything you have, you've been searching the skies to find purpose and meaning, here's purpose and meaning – a baby, born for you, who

will die for you and take away your sins. Here's your joy. It's not in your possessions. It's not in the signs in the skies. Your joy is found in a person – the Christ child.”

- Jesus is the gift that you must have because Jesus is the gift that changes everything. Is Jesus the gift you must have?
- **God has been guiding you to the gift of Jesus.** Just as God orchestrated the stars in the sky to bring the wise men to Jesus, He has been orchestrating the events of your life as well. He has orchestrated your life in such a way to put you in just the right family, in just the right city, in just the right circumstances, so He might ultimately point your heart to Him. On this Christmas Eve, you are here because God has been guiding you to this moment – to respond to Him in faith. To believe that Jesus is the Promised King who has come to give you joy. Do not fail to see what God is doing in your life. Do not fail to listen to His voice.
- **God wants you to have the gift of Jesus because He wants better for you.** If you could have a better life, what would it look like? Marrying the person of your dreams? A better paying job? A house full of children? Some of us know that all the things we think will give us a better life often are not as fulfilling and satisfying as we thought it would be. You can have all the best things in life and still be miserable because you know something is missing - Magi had all the best things but followed a star because something was missing.
 - Better is intimacy with Jesus - joy of knowing that God is for me. Are you pursuing?
 - Better is holiness with Jesus - joy in growing to be like Jesus and being distinct from the world. Are you pursuing?
 - Better is bold faith in Jesus - the real adventure in life is not thrill seeking but walking by faith when walking by faith seems ridiculous to every one else. (examples of how we see bold faith at Northwood)

- Better is the family of Jesus - having a family that I'm connected to for the pursuit of Christ is essential. Are you connected?
- Is Jesus the gift you must have?
- After wise men worship, warned in a dream not to return to Herod, but to go another way. Herod doesn't really want to worship. Angel of the Lord appears to Joseph – told to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Herod orders all males under 2 in Bethlehem to be slaughtered. So much for peace on earth and goodwill to men.
- In [Matthew 2:18](#), Matthew quotes [Jer. 31:15](#) – Babylonians took Jewish captives to Ramah. Families sold into slavery. Imagine pain of seeing children sold into slavery and you never saw them again. Mothers weep. Now, in [Matt. 2](#) it's happening all over again!
- Promise: [Jer. 31:16-17](#): *“One day your voice will cease its weeping, and your eyes cease from its tears, Your children shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares the Lord.”* ([Jer. 31:16-17](#)) **The day where voices cease to weep has come – on that first Christmas - Evil doesn't get the last word. Jesus does. It seems like evil always wins, but no more!**
- Jeremiah - people in captivity because of disobedience - a disobedience that started as soon as they were formed as a nation (wilderness wanderings).
- BUT... things are going to be different. Sin, evil, and disobedience will not have the last word because Jesus came out of Egypt. [Matthew 2:15](#) quotes [Hos. 11:1-3](#) – looks back to Egypt and captivity. Notice the similarities between [Matthew 2](#) and the Exodus. Herod like Pharaoh – ordering children to die. God had called His people out of Egypt before, tells them to obey and He will bless. They disobeyed. He calls Christ out of Egypt, and Jesus doesn't fail. He obeys. He is the only One who has earned the blessing of God, but He doesn't get it. Instead of blessing,

Jesus gets cursed. Instead of a gold crown, He gets a crown of thorns. Why? He deserved blessing, but He gives us His blessing and He takes our curse. Believe, and you are blessed.

- In this dark world you can know that Jesus gets the last word. On the cross, when He died in our place, He cried out, “It is finished.” Sin and death were defeated. He rose from the dead proving that His work was sufficient to cover all of ours sin.
- Now, we await His return where He will make all things right. Do you know Him? Don’t let Him be a threat to your life, embrace Him and find joy.