

## Bible Study on Matthew 2:1-12

### The Coming King

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2010

**READ** Matthew 2:1-12

Today's passage is about the Magi, the wise men, also known traditionally as the three kings. Someone said to me, "Isn't it a bit early to be thinking about the wise men? It's not Christmas yet!" It may be a bit early, but Advent is here, and the main theme is not so much the three kings as the coming of the King of kings.

**QUESTION:** What do you think of when you think of a kingdom? What do you think this kingdom of God is like?

Matthew's gospel helps us to understand the kingdom of God. Right at the beginning of the gospel, we have an assembly of kings.

**READ** Matthew 2:1-2

1. Herod the king - Herod the Great, was ruler of the region of Judea. We could say a lot about him, but we can't say much good about him. Jewish historian Josephus described like this: "A man he was of great barbarity towards all men equally, and a slave to his passions, and above all consideration of what was right." In other words he was a corrupt ruler.

2. Magi from the east, traditionally kings from Gentile nations.

**READ** Isaiah 60:3 as this verse is often associated with the Magi.

King Solomon was the archetypal "wise-king", so the fact that the Magi wise men may suggest there is something in the tradition they were also kings of some sort. They were men from the east, probably Persian, and may well have been influenced by prophecies in the book of Daniel. Whoever they were, it seems they had come to knowledge of the one true God, and had been given special revelations as to the birth of the coming King. They knew the child Jesus was "king of the Jews" and they came to worship Him.

3. A small child, king of the Jews, King Jesus.

This gathering of kings sets the tone of Matthew's kingdom gospel. Wise, kingly like men seek King Jesus and find him and worship him. This is against a backdrop of a corrupt and tyrannical king Herod. The coming kingdom of God is good news and will eventually overturn corrupt kingdoms of this world.

But Jesus was never crowned as an earthly king. Jesus wasn't like our present Queen, who was crowned in 1953, and has reigned for over 50 years. Jesus never had a coronation and he never wore a crown. He didn't live in a palace and he didn't wear royal robes. He didn't seem like a king at all. On the one occasion when the people wanted to make him king by force, Jesus refused [John 6:15]. There was no external show of the pomp and power of kingship, but the opposite.

**DISCUSS:** In what ways was Jesus a king?

Jesus did something most kings and queens don't do: He preached and taught about his kingdom, which he called the kingdom of God / heaven. In fact He taught about the kingdom more than he taught about anything else, and Matthew's gospel is full of it.

The idea of a kingdom of heaven wasn't new. The phrase "Kingdom of God" isn't in the Old Testament, but the idea of God as a King who has a kingdom is.

READ Psalm 24:10, 103:19

It's helpful to know something about the kingdom in the Old Testament to understand the kingdom of God in the New Testament. The idea of "kingdom" was part of God's whole relationship to God's people. Let's briefly summarise "kingdom theology" in the Bible.

DATES	HISTORICAL EVENTS	IDEAS OF KINGDOM OF God
1290BC	Exodus	<u>Who is king? Pharaoh or Yahweh?</u> The LORD is able to demand from king Pharaoh "let my people go" because He is the true king.
1250-1050BC	Judges	<u>Judges as God's representatives in the kingdom.</u> The idea was that God should rule and judges were to function as God's representatives on earth.
1050-1020BC	Monarchy – Saul, David	<u>Crisis and normalisation – the kingdom on earth.</u> There was a crisis as the people demanded a king, and this was seen as a rejection of the LORD's kingship and rule. Saul became king, but this failed. David was "A man after God's heart" became king. He was understood as God's kingly representative on earth. The nation was the visible manifestation of the LORD's kingdom.
922-597BC	The Prophets	<u>Division and final fall of the kingdom.</u> The prophet Nathan promised that David's kingdom would be established for ever and ever [2Samuel 7:12,13]. This was the great hope for a lasting kingdom, which would be established through the son of David. But David's earthly kingdom didn't last long. His son Solomon was rejected as king since he followed other gods, and after his death the kingdom divided. There was a series of good and bad kings until eventually the whole kingdom collapsed and the people were taken into exile in Babylon.
587-538BC	Babylonian exile	<u>Daniel – renewed interpretations of the kingdom of God as an eternal kingdom.</u> The hope and promise for an earthly kingdom seemed lost. It was during this time that God gave Daniel visions and a renewed interpretation of the kingdom as a heavenly kingdom. It was over and above earthly kingdoms and sometimes against earthly kingdoms. It was a kingdom that could intervene in human affairs. It was a kingdom that would one day overcome all corrupt human kingdoms, like Herod's. The agent of this kingdom is described by Daniel as "one

		like a son of man". He is the royal figure who rules in heaven.
4BC-30AD	Jesus	<u>Jesus begins his ministry by announcing the good news of the kingdom: "The Kingdom of God is at hand."</u> His ministry is filled with teaching on the kingdom. He is the Son of David, who will establish David's kingdom forever and ever. He's also "the son of man" and identifies himself with the royal figure in Daniel who rules in the heavenly kingdom.
30AD - > now	The church age	<u>The church prays, "Thy kingdom come."</u> It is the Father's good pleasure to give his little flock the kingdom. The kingdom, like yeast will grow and spread throughout the whole dough. The church tries to live by kingdom values. The church prays, they kingdom come, since the vision for peace on earth is the rule of God.
?	The second coming	<u>"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ."</u> Rev 11:15

**DISCUSS:** if Jesus is King, what kind of king is Jesus? What picture of God do you have in your mind?

This is an important and practical question. If you've got a bad boss you don't want to work for him. If you don't like someone, you don't want to be in a relationship with them. What does this passage say about King Jesus?

### 1. King Jesus is the Shepherd King

Jesus is born in Bethlehem, in David's town (Matthew 2:5). The Magi believe him to be the king of the Jews (Matthew 2:2). Herod immediately makes the connections and asks, "OK, where's the [Christ] Messiah to be born?" [Matthew 2v4]. The Pharisees answer, "In Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet has written: 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 be the shepherd of my people Israel" [Matthew 2v5,6].

The very last thing Herod did was to be a shepherd to people. He was and evil ruler. But the coming king would be a true shepherd leader to his people – a shepherd-king. So we see the true nature of Jesus.

**QUESTION:** Do you know Jesus as your shepherd?

The kingdom turns upside down ideas of earthly kingship, leadership and power. The coming King Jesus would be a shepherd-king who cares for and loves the sheep. He's not a cruel dictator, as secularist Christopher Hitchen tried to make out this week, equating the Lord of the universe with the dictatorship in North Korea. No, God is a shepherd king. He is *a King*: He won't tolerate injustice and wickedness for ever. But he is a King who cares for you. King Herod cared only for himself, was totally intolerant to anyone who threatens his little kingdom, and murdered babies! King Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Do you ever doubt he cares for you? Then remember he died for you.

**READ:** 1Peter 5:7

**QUESTION:** Are there any worries you need to give to your Shepherd-King? You can do this in prayer now.

## 2. King Jesus is the King of the nations

In Matthew 2 we see the extent of Christ's kingdom. Matthew's gospel was written mainly for Jews, which is why there's so much about the kingdom of God which they would relate to. But Matthew makes it clear the gospel of the kingdom isn't just for them but for all nations. The wise men were Gentiles. They were men of extraordinary faith who sought out and found the coming King. Their faith is an example to us. We walk by faith, not by sight. We trust even when things we see seem to be saying the opposite. Faith is the evidence of things no seen, and it's God's gift.

**QUESTION:** Is there a living person whose faith you admire? Can you imitate their faith?

Later in Matthew's gospel Jesus show the kingdom is for all nations: "Many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" [Matthew 8:11]. You don't have to be a particular nationality for God to love you, or to love God.

Jesus showed how the kingdom would spread to all nations: "The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations, then the end will come" [Matthew 14:14]. The great feast in the kingdom of heaven will be for people from every nation on the earth.

**QUESTION:** How can we as church demonstrate kingdom values?

## 3. King Jesus is the King of kings - divine

There's something else in the early chapters of Matthew which shows us the true nature of Jesus kingship. The wise men come to *worship him*.

**READ:** Matthew 2:11

The church has always confessed Jesus as Lord, as divine, the eternal Son of God. This can seem like idolatry. How can a man be God? Men can't be God, and it's dangerous if they think they are. But if God can do all things, it must be possible for God to become man. And the Bible says of Jesus he "was declared with power to be the Son of God through his resurrection from the dead [Romans 1:4]. Matthew 2:11 shows us the Divinity of Christ – He not just king of the Jews, he's the King of kings.

**QUESTION:** How can we enter the kingdom of God? (see Matthew 18:3,19:14)

We enter his kingdom with the humility of a child, and allow Christ to be our king, our Lord. But this can be difficult for people. "I don't want anyone ruling over me, thank you very much!" "No-one's going to tell me what to do!" But if we just think about for a moment we'll see we already have others ruling "over us." If you're at school, your teachers tell you what to do. At work you have to obey your boss. We're accountable to others. We all have to obey the law of the land. So the idea of being a totally independent

person making all my own decisions isn't the way life is. Even in our own selves we can be slaves of our passions, as Paul said, "For what I want to do I do not do, and what I hate I do" [Romans 7:15]. So the question isn't about having other "lords" over us or not, but who or what we allow to be our Lord. Making Jesus our king is good news since this is where to find the blessing.

Jonathan Edwards, the 18<sup>th</sup> century theologian and philosopher, as a youth was unable to accept the sovereignty of God. He once wrote, "From my childhood up my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty... It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me." However, in 1721 he came to the conviction, one he called a "delightful conviction." He was meditating on 1 Timothy 1:17, and later remarked, "As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before... I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven; and be as it were swallowed up in him for ever!" From that point on, Edwards delighted in the sovereignty of God. Edwards later recognized this as his conversion to Christ.

**QUESTION:** Can you delight in the Kingship of Jesus (the Sovereignty of God)? If not pray and ask God for a fresh revelation of God's kingship.