

Biblical Truth

As I reflected on our Christmas Eve service and Christmas Day on Christ the Lord, I wondered what truth I could share from Matthew's Gospel account of Jesus' birth. How does Matthew's narrative square with Old Testament prophecy and history? Let's explore what the Lord would reveal to us this morning – first in prayer, then in the reading of His Word and then with examination of God's Word.

Pray

Reading of God's Word: Matthew 2:1-12

Proved Through History and Prophecy

On Christmas Eve we read verses from the Old Testament that spoke of Jesus as the Messiah. Two of the most obvious verses concerning the birth of the Messiah come from the prophets Micah and Isaiah. The prophet Micah's prophecy was written about 700 years prior to Jesus, [“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.](#) (Micah 5:2) This was fulfilled and Matthew verifies it in verse 1 of his account. The prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Micah, also wrote 700 years prior to Jesus' birth, [“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”](#) (Isaiah 7:14) This is confirmed by Matthew in chapter 1, verses 18 to 22 and citing Isaiah in verse 23. Prior to these verses in the Book of Numbers the prophet Balaam gave this prophecy, shortly before Moses dies about 1200 years before Jesus, [“I see him, but](#)

not now; I behold him, but not near: (God gave Balaam a vision of the Messiah that would not be fulfilled for 1200 years, so it was not now or near) **a star shall come out of Jacob**, (the star guided the Magi and both Joseph and Mary are descendants of Jacob as the genealogy of Jesus is recorded in Matthew: Abraham to Joseph and in Luke: Abraham to Mary) **and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.”**
(Numbers 24:17)

The Bible must be 100% true or it is not the Word of God. Here Jesus fulfills 3 prophecies given from 1200 to 700 years before he was born - amazing! For Jesus to fulfill just the most obvious 8 prophecies in the Old Testament, given over a thousand years, is calculated to be 1 in 10 to 21st power (1×10^{21}). There are over 300 prophecies or references in the Old Testament that point to the Messiah. Using only the 48 prophecies that almost all Bible scholars agree Jesus fulfilled - it has been calculated that the chances of one person fulfilling these would be 1 in 10 to 157th power (1×10^{157}). Anything over 10 to the 100th power is considered mathematically impossible. To fulfill all 300 prophecies, which Jesus did, has been calculated to be over one chance in a trillion x 13 trillion ($1 \times \text{Trillion}^{13} \text{Trillion}$) – which is completely beyond human or mathematical possibility. These are just a few of the many reasons we can have full confidence that the Bible is inspired by God and his words given to the authors are 100% true.

The coming Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament is the only one who can be King over all people and save people from their sins. So far, we have learned that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Matthew tells us that Jesus is the King in line with David and born of the virgin. At this point, we have amazing truths that Jesus is the Messiah. Being the Messiah, we can expect Jesus to do Messiah things, but before Jesus does miracles and signs there are proofs to be laid

out before us of his fore-told birth. This morning's proof is centered around the prophecy that the Messiah-King was to be born in Bethlehem.

Verse 1, “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem ...” Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. So how did God make sure Jesus, God's promised Messiah and King, would be born in Bethlehem? God works through the first Roman Emperor, the wicked Caesar Augustus who reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD. He cared nothing about Jesus but only money and power and God uses his ambition and greed to fulfill Scripture. His real name was Octavian but he gave himself the name Caesar to emphasize his relationship with his Uncle Julius Caesar and gave himself the title; Imperator Caesar and the Roman Senate added the name Augustus meaning Venerable and thus began the idea that the Caesars were gods to be worshipped. Augustus was used by Satan, but what was meant for evil, God used for good to bring about his plan for his Son to be born in Bethlehem and be Savior of the world.

God is sovereign over **all**; even those who are pagans. We learn of Augustus census decree from Luke, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.” (Luke 2:1-5) The Roman Empire under Augustus took control of Judea and ordered the governor of Roman Syria, which included the province of Judea, to carry out a tax census. The Jewish people reacted negatively but were

convinced to comply by the High Priest Caiaphas, another ambitious and evil man, who God uses for his plan of redemption for mankind.

In verse 1 we read of “[wise men](#)”, “[Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem ...](#)” These “wise men” or in the Greek “magi” are not given any explanation of who they are by Matthew.

However, extrabiblical evidence sheds light on the place of origin and positions held by the “[wise men](#)” or magi. The historian Herodotus, the Greek historian who lived a couple hundred years prior to the birth of Jesus, mentions the “magi” as a priestly caste of Media or Persia. The religion in Persia at the time was Zoroastrianism ([Zo·ro·as·tri·an·ism](#)). Herodotus, together with other historians, suggests that magi were partly responsible for ritual and cultic life and were royal advisers to the courts of the East. They believed the affairs of history were reflected in the movements of the stars. These magi may be of the same order as the ones in the Book of Daniel who tried to interpret the dreams of the King of Babylon.

The fact that Herod received these magi and took their quest seriously indicates that these 3 magi were men of status and as such they would have had an entourage. So, the group was much larger than 3. Matthew tells us they traveled to Jerusalem by following a star as mentioned by the prophet Balaam. The magi were led to Jerusalem the capital and center of government and spiritual life of Israel. I wonder if they thought Herod might have a child who was to be this Messiah-King, that is, until they met Herod, who had no sons of the right age.

Reading beginning at verse 1, “[Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men 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 and have come to worship him.”³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.⁵ They 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.’” The Scribes quote the prophecy given by Micah as to the location of the Messiah’s birth and this would have unnerved Herod for, he trusted no one and killed many to maintain his position.

This is the Herod, who Jesus would label “**that fox**” in Luke chapter 13, indicating him to be a man of no stature or honor or morals. Herod gains what he needs from the Magi and sends them on to Bethlehem. We know from Luke’s account that Bethlehem is the city of David and this creates yet another link between King David and Jesus.

Reading from verse 7, “Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.’” Herod is full of deception for he would never worship a Jew.

King Herod had been appointed tetrarch of Judea by the Roman Emperor. He was not Jewish, but of Roman and the Jewish people hated him. Herod continually felt threatened by just about everyone. Once he thought his wife was plotting against him and had her killed. He had one of his sons killed whom he

thought was showing interest in the throne. He was a paranoid power-hungry ruler who had no legitimate claim to the throne of Israel.

As we observe in verse 3 the reason the Magi came to Jerusalem was in search for the King of the Jews. In other words, they did not stop when they found Herod but asked him if he knew of this rightful King - whose star they had followed - who was the King of the Jews and where he was to be found. Who says men don't stop and ask for directions?

Their mission was straight forward; find this new King and worship Him. They state their purpose to Herod who falsely tells them that he too desires to know the location of the new King so he can also worship Him. We know from history Herod was lying. The wise men would not have been very wise if they could not see through Herod's lie when he tells the wise men, ["I too may come and worship him."](#)

The exact location of the baby Jesus is not known to Herod, but he is in general vicinity of Bethlehem so in verse 8 – Herod ["sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'](#) 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 over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ [When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."](#) The Magi begin their 5-mile trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem knowing generally where they were to go. Once they were on their way the star appeared again. I do not understand exactly how this was, but it was, because God ordained it. When they saw the star, they rejoiced. This time the star led them to the exact spot where Jesus was.

Involves All Nations

Continuing in 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.” Something very significant is taking place here. These foreign dignitaries are coming to worship the Messiah. These men of great affluence come and bow down, literally fell down in worship of the King of kings. When they rose, in very humble fashion, they presented gifts to King Jesus. These gifts are traditionally gifts presented to a king. Matthew it seems, by mentioning the gifts and what they were - wants us to make a connection that they are honoring Jesus as King, King of the Jews.

In the Old Testament there was a visiting royal dignitary who came to King Solomon with the same gifts. When the Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon, she came bearing the same gifts. These are gifts given to Kings... *gold and frankincense and myrrh*. We learn this from The Song of Solomon, 1 Kings chapter 10 and from Isaiah, who wrote “... all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense.” (Isaiah 60:6) Later in Matthew’s Gospel Account, Jesus says he is a greater King than Solomon, “The queen of the South (Sheba) will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:42)

It was God who led these foreigners or magi to the Messiah to worship Him and pay homage to Him. Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the Messiah who will save His people and His people are made up of those from all nations of the world, not just the Jews. This forms the link and fulfilled prophecy that God gave Abraham. God said, “I will surely bless you *Abraham*, and I will surely multiply

your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. ...
¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:17-18)

After the magi come and find Jesus, they worship Him and give Him gifts suitable for a King. Their mission appears complete. Through this account God has proven once again that Jesus is the Messiah-King. He had to be born in Bethlehem and the magi find Him and fall down to worship. Just as quickly as the magi entered the pages of the Bible they leave. Reading verse 12, “And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”

God spoke to the magi by way of a dream. He told them to go back a different route, not through Jerusalem and not to Herod. These instructions, this different route, would be the event that would “set-off” Herod and put him on his rampage to kill the innocents. As prophesied by Jeremiah with the words of God, “Thus says the LORD: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:15) This prophecy was fulfilled and we can read about its fulfillment in Matthew chapter 2, verses 16 and 17.

Demands A Response

As we now reflect on this passage, I want us to notice the different responses to the message that the Messiah is born in Bethlehem. From Herod the Roman, the Priests and Scribes who are Jews and the Magi who are foreigners from Persia.

Herod: Why do you think Herod was angry? Because he believed in himself and his power. All the people were to serve him and the only one he served under

was the prince of this world. Jesus the true King threatened Herod's master and Herod and his throne.

Some people today are angry when they hear about the true King Jesus. They discover that they are not really king unto themselves. They do not want to be accountable for their sins - so they are threatened and become angry. You may know of someone who is angered by Jesus. Understand the source of this anger – it is their master Satan.

Jesus will be reckoned with. If the prophecies were untrue then why would Herod even bother, for he is ruler of Judea ... “who cares”, would be the response to this message if it was not true. Herod knew it was true. He was angered and would take further steps to kill Jesus – he would eliminate the threat. He knew the truth and the truth put fear in his mind.

Is Jesus a threat today? Yes, to many. Realize, some may try to act like Jesus is not the Christ but He is not going away. How long do people think they can avoid Him? Maybe until they die. But - but Jesus is the Messiah-King who will have people's worship or else. Jesus is the King of kings and He is not to be demeaned or ignored. Herod learned this the hard way and is still learning it, even today, as he endures the suffering of eternal judgment.

Chief Priests and Scribes: In verse 4, Herod assembles “[all the chief priests and scribes of the people.](#)” Herod called in the experts. The Scribes were the conservatives who sought to maintain traditional Jewish culture. The Chief Priests were Sadducees; they were willing to accommodate Roman and Jewish culture to maintain control. Herod knew if these two groups would agree on the place of the Messiah's birth then it had to be true. They both knew that answer to the Bible Trivia question. Both said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They knew

the prophecy Micah 5:2. They knew that the prophets were moved by God to write the prophecies. They knew what the prophet said and that he spoke God's words. Yet, Matthew indicates that they did nothing after answering Herod's question.

I am afraid there may be some today, who call themselves Christian and they can give a correct answer to a Bible trivia question. There may be some who know the Gospel and can explain the doctrine of election and know many answers to many questions and yet they may be like these experts Herod called in. They knew the answer but did not rejoice or go with the Magi to find Jesus.

Why no response? Maybe they liked their job as Priests and Scribes too much to take a chance on going against Rome and Herod. Maybe they liked to be in Herod's good graces. Maybe they knew the answer but in their hearts they did not believe.

I am afraid there may be some who perhaps have grown up in a Christian home and know the answers but are not moved by the answers. Perhaps for some other reason - they are apathetic toward the truths of God. Just because one can give the right answer does not make one a Christian. Do you know the right answer? That is good. But, do you believe it with all your heart, mind and soul? For then you will give your life to Christ. Your life will show fruit of the Spirit. You will have a deep love the brethren. There is more than these that makes one Christian to their very core. But if the fruit of the Spirit, I have mentioned, is absent – you need to search you heart and ask, “Am I saved?”

Magi: Here is something surprising; the Priests and Scribes knew more Bible than the Magi. The Magi would never win a Bible Trivia Game. They knew one thing; the one truth God had given them - this baby is the true Messiah-King. They knew God had brought them to the infant Messiah-King with His star and they were going to present this King with right worship. Theirs was a worship that

cost them something. Months of travel and when they arrived, they gave King Jesus the very best they had.

Are you worshipping Jesus extravagantly? Or do you worship on a budget? The magi gifts were gifts of extravagant worship because the King of kings is worthy. What gifts do you lay at the feet of the King of the universe? I pray you are giving your best in worship and service to Christ and His church. Give Jesus your best not your leftovers...He is the true Messiah-King worthy of all our love and adoration.

I close by saying with my whole heart and agreeing with Apostle Paul, “I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.” (Philippians 1:20-22) Amen! May it be true of all of our lives!