



Series: Advent: A Thrill of Hope
Date: December 12, 2021
Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor
Text: Matthew 2:1-12
Title: He's My King

Merry Christmas everyone. Good morning to our Mercy Northeast Family! Man, what an absolute thrill it was to be with you last weekend! The Lord moved. Many of you there and here at Providence Road gave your life to the Lord and I want to encourage you to **tell somebody!** That's your big next step. There at Northeast tell Pastor Rashard or Joseph Anderson or somebody right after service today. Here at MPR, talk to Pastor Jake or me.

Reminder: Christmas Eve service times are now up on our website. This is a wonderful unique worship service we do. It's a little shorter than normal. We try to keep it right at 1 hour. And we make it kid friendly. And the reason we have multiple services at both campuses is so that you can invite! I'm going to talk more about this later in the sermon, but I still believe inviting people to church at Christmas is low hanging fruit. And you have no idea how one worship gathering can change somebody's life forever. I heard the story just this week about a member of ours who was speaking at a retreat and a young man there gave his life to the Lord. And later he told his story to our Mercy member saying: I was planning to take my own

life this weekend. But someone invited me to this so I thought I'd give God one chance to show up. And here this weekend He did. I received His salvation. One invite of a friend changed his life and his eternity. We say all the time **we expect God to change a life today.** One thing I'm learning is we can't always see what people are going through. So, all I'm saying is, let's invite and expect God to change a life today. Get a Christmas Square when you leave and invite someone to join you for Christmas eve.

We do need you to RSVP. You can do that on our website at mercycharlotte.com/christmas.

Intro

Matthew 2. Really simple message today. But also, probably the most confrontational of the Christmas messages. That's because this is the passage in the Christmas story about who is in charge. We are going to see our author Matthew tell the story...one you may have heard if you've been around church before at Christmastime. It's the account of the wise men from the east. Every nativity set usually includes them. They are the ones looking all bougie and rolling up on a camel. Anyway, it's their story that Matthew uses to tell us that Jesus is in charge. That Jesus has authority as our King. Not just a king...**our** King.



The reason this one is confrontational is that it claims Christmas is not just the announcement of a savior /deliverer. That part of Christmas is easier to accept. Not too easy, because you still must admit you are a sinner – I can feel gratitude toward you – but at the end of the day I'm still in charge of me. And maybe the most common hole in our Christianity is a Jesus whom we celebrate as savior but functionally ignore as King. By that I mean we nod our heads at the claim but live our lives as if it's a fairy tale. And so, we gotta talk about that.

Particularly here in the 21st century American west...we don't do kings. **We are a country founded in rebellion to a king.** **That's our identity.** Think about the royal family – they are there just for us to be entertained by. Can you imagine if Prince William said in his first public address after taking the throne that he plans to graciously RULE his royal subjects? He will treat them kindly and expects their absolute allegiance to him. Even though we haven't been under British rule for 250 years, I think Americans would lose their minds. How dare he...act like you know...a king. Oprah would be calling him to ask him about how his childhood trauma brought this about.

We have been programmed for generations to be skeptical and guarded AGAINST authority. And on top of that, sometimes we are right. Those in authority abuse their power. Further reinforcing our cultural attitude that nobody is going

to tell me what to do.

Drake – I do what I want I don't really hold back.

Instagram – You do YOU. Silence the critics. You don't have to answer to anybody but YOU. Only YOU are the boss of YOU.

And yet, Christmas announces one who claims to be your king. Not to entertain you, but to rule over you and command your allegiance with rightful authority. He is a good king, in fact a perfect king. But a king, nonetheless. That creates a problem for each of us. And THAT is why I believe it is in here. **Because the Bible has no category for a Jesus who is your savior but not your king who you live your life in full allegiance and surrender to.** Our advent season is called A Thrill of Hope – the reason the weary world can rejoice - is not just that a savior has come, but our king has come.

And in the account of the wise men, we see 3 responses to Jesus the King. And I think they represent 3 options we have too. And the challenge will be not to just see which one you agree with – which one do you nod your head to, but which one do you functionally live by.

- Response 1 - He's nobody
- Response 2 - He's my enemy
- Response 3 - He's my king



I'll walk us through the passage and show you these three reactions and the wonderful hope of Jesus as your king.

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."

Couple of things about the wise men you may not know.

- First, a lot of ya'll are used to the idea of 3 wise men. In fact, they wrote a song "We 3 Kings" that you sing in deep voices on Christmas karaoke night. Well, there's no count of 3 here. Don't go home and trash your nativity sets or anything. There were probably 12-15 wise men and then their staff which all total was probably a 60+ person caravan.
- Second, who were they? "Wise men" from the east – they were most likely from Babylon. And they were sorcerers. trained in astronomy and prominent in their country because of their ability to interpret meaning from the stars. Important? Yes. Kings? No. "We several prominent figures..."
- Cool connection to the whole bible – There is a book in the Old Testament called Daniel. It's about a guy named Daniel. Who was Jewish but got carried off into exile to Babylon when Babylon conquered the Jews. Well, God gave Daniel special wisdom and ability and Daniel eventually rose to a place of great power and

stayed there through the reign of at least 3 kings maybe more. Really through their entire exile. He had authority over all the Magi. Here's what's cool. He taught them the Promises God made to the Jews. He Taught them Numbers 24.17 - Numbers 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel." Hundreds of years later, these Magi knew 2 things: The future KING was marked by a star & he would rule Israel.

- And I show you that as one example of the reality that the whole Bible really is telling you one big story and it's about the coming of Christ the King that we celebrate at Christmas.

3 When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Of course, he was disturbed. When you come to a palace and ask where THE king is, it's going to alarm the one currently sitting on the throne. Herod is Herod the Great. But his greatness isn't a "good" great, it's a bad great. He's a tyrant who was put in charge by the Romans to preside over the Jews in this area. It's not really his throne. And because he's trying to hang onto power that isn't rightfully his, he always feels threatened. And he reaches threat level midnight when these guys start asking around town about where the real king is.



4 So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born. 5 "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "Because this is what was written by the prophet:

6 And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah:
Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

Herod isn't a dumb tyrant. Not being Jewish he doesn't know the Jewish prophecies, so he asks the Jewish leaders where this Christ...this anointed one...is supposed to be born. And they pull from the Old Testament prophet Micah to show exactly where he's supposed to come from. Because again it's all telling one story. This is one of hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah in the OT and do you know Jesus fulfilled every one of them? The chances are infinitesimally small that he could do that.

- *Think of it this way. There are over 300 prophecies about the messiah. let's just take the most obvious easy to understand out of those- 17. The odds of one person fulfilling 17 prophecies:
1 in 480,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
with 31 zeroes.*

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."

Herod is scheming. Not super subtle either. He worships only himself. This is him trying to implement Godfather wisdom – Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer. He wants to pay him a visit alright. But not to worship him. It's to kill him.

9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was — the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. Here's what I love about this. These guys were astronomers. And so, God uses the stars to point them to Jesus. We see God meeting them where they are. Using the heavenly bodies to direct these astronomers who are seeking him. This is HOW gracious God is. He uses the things you know, the people you know, the situations you are already in, to draw you to himself. He's working in your life, through your life, to tell you about himself. You just gotta look.

Had a college student a couple of years ago tell me she was talking with a friend who said, "You know, I think I want to know God, but I don't know how." So, the college student said



well come with me to church and we'll see what's there. And at church that week we were beginning a series called "knowing God." The two girls look at each other like...Ummm, I think God might be trying to say something. BTW – continuing that series the first week in January. A great kick off to the year.

I'm just pausing to say – God is not far away & difficult to find. Quite the opposite. He's near & already working. In fact, the more you get to know him the more you realize God using all these things in your life is not so much you on a quest to find him, but him knowing you and bringing you to himself.

This is why we keep talking about inviting to Christmas eve. Because that person you know or that group of friends who are far from God but close to you – may be just one invite away from finding Christ. Christmas Squares!!

11 Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Ok couple of observations here I think Matthew is powerfully articulating here.

- **His kingdom is not of this world.** This scene is so descriptive of the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God. The young child from a poor family receives

the worship of the rich & powerful. God is telling us something about this king right here. He is going to upend all the power structures of this world. Think about how God works for those of you who know your bible...

- At a time when women were valued for their beauty and fertility, God chooses older Sarah, not young Hagar.
 - He chooses Leah, not Rachel
 - He chooses the barren to bring forth life. He chooses Rebekah who can't have children; Hannah, who can't have children; Samson's mother who can't have children; Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, who can't have children. Why? Over and Over and over again God says "I will choose Nazareth, not Jerusalem. I will choose the girl nobody wants. I will choose the boy everybody has forgotten.
- Why? Is it just that God likes underdogs? No. He is telling us something about salvation itself. Every other religion and moral philosophy tell you to summon up all your strength and live as you ought. That's why they appeal to the strong, to the people who can pull it all together.... Only Jesus says "I have come for the weak. I have come for those who admit they are weak. I will save them not by what they do but through what I do."



- Do you feel unwanted? Do you feel like the outsider here at church? Do you feel alone or on the fringes? Do you feel shame or guilt like you are damaged goods? Do you feel like nobody sees you? Hear the anthem of scripture. GOD SEES YOU; GOD WANTS YOU, AND GOD LOVES YOU! **And all that which you may consider a weakness, is what he will use to allow you to boast even more in his strength.**

At the climax of his life he ascended not a throne but a cross. His *poverty* really was our strength.¹ His kingdom is not of this world. And if you try and make sense of it through the power structures of this world, you will never understand it. Don't go clean yourself up to get right with God...don't try to impress God. Come to him broken and alone just as you are and receive the love of Christ. Our God isn't looking for resumes, he's looking only for repentance. Come to him. His kingdom is not of this world.

He is worthy of our greatest treasure. The wise men give Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Treasure.

- I want us for a minute to consider WHY they gave their treasure to him. I think this is big because listen there

is no question God calls us to give of our treasure, specifically I'm talking about our finances, back to him.

- The wise men gave their treasure to Jesus for one simple reason...they believed he was worthy of their treasure. And my question is: DO YOU BELIEVE HE IS WORTHY OF YOUR TREASURE? Here's why he's worthy: Because he is SOVEREIGN and Because he is GOOD.
- The Wise Men recognize his sovereignty. He's the one who rules over heaven & earth. He owns it all. So, we give him our treasure in HONOR of who he is. His sovereignty makes him worthy. But he's also good.
- The apostle Paul once asked the church in Corinth to give to ministry needs of another local church. And he said listen there is a need, but do not give out of compulsion. In other words, guilt or fear cannot motivate you. Give as you decide in your heart. Because God loves a cheerful giver.
- In other words, the gospel is a message that GOD GAVE. God finally GAVE us a way to be reconciled to him. And Paul says give in response to the gospel! So, what happens that is so beautiful is that when we fix our eyes on Jesus, he will do this wonderful work of loosening our grip on our treasure as we tighten our grip on him. As Christ becomes our treasure, he

¹ Keller, Timothy. *Hidden Christmas*. (NY, NY Penguin 2016) 76-77.



- satisfies our souls need for peace, contentment, and security in a way that earthly treasure never could.
- This even changes the answer to the question “how much should I give?” That question is usually the wrong question. Considering the Great act of generosity of God toward us and considering the Surpassing worth of Christ the question is not how much should I give but how much can I give?
 - Advent Giving – why no goal? I may have made a wrong call on no goal. I don’t know. Cause we got some big needs. Providence Rd needs some real work, union county going to need some seed money to get started, expanding our family ministries, and man 1/3 is going to international missions. And it’s awesome to give to meet needs. But I think there is a heart posture for us to say I want to give LIKE the wise men. Just kneel before Jesus and say here’s my best.
 - Giving is an access point into the joy of Christ. And church the message we are trying to put forward at Mercy is that Christ is worthy of our treasure because he is Sovereign, and He is Good.

12 And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

This story is so powerful because of the contrasting reactions to Jesus from Herod and then from the Wise Men. I think they

are powerful examples of contrasting reactions people have today when they discover Jesus. I told you the question today 3 responses to Jesus in this story that I think are helpful for us. Three responses people have to Jesus at Christmas.

1. He’s Nobody You look back at verse 3 and you see Herod was troubled by the announcement and so was ALL of Jerusalem. Everyone is troubled by the question and yet...no one knows the answer. That’s why herod must assemble the priests. And NO ONE else went to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. And I don’t want to stretch this too far because the point of the text is contrasting herod & the wise men. BUT this is a big reaction in our day. And in Jesus’ day.

The Jews were waiting on a Messiah who would come to deliver them politically and militarily from their oppressors. The idea of worshipping a baby born to a poor family in a stable in Bethlehem... simply didn’t fit their understanding of a King. People rejected his claim to be king throughout his life. They mocked him all the way to his death. Putting a sign in mockery that said “king of the Jews” over his body as it hung on a cross.

And all I’m saying at this point is that before you write him off, remember this nobody from nowhere – has been worshipped as the risen savior king for 2000 years by billions of people.



I get you may not understand HOW he is relevant to your life. How does he help your dysfunctional family, your medical problems, your bills piling up? We'll get there. But his word, his spirit, and his church are all testifying loudly to you...he is somebody. Well, then what responses do we have left?

2nd Response - He's my enemy

Herod understood that he did not have the right to the throne, (not in the Kingly line; and he was not a practicing Jew). Any time someone has usurped authority, the most terrifying thing is for the one who has rightful authority to come back. This is what Herod is experiencing.

And I think he represents us. And I think our GREATEST problem is we try to sit on the throne & control our lives. It's where so much of our anxiety and pain comes from. We try to run our lives BUT we can't control everything! We FAIL. Even if we succeed...we worry. We are trying to sit on a throne that doesn't belong to us. And we are mad at the thought it isn't ours.

Romans 8.7-8 says every human heart is hostile towards God. The human heart wants to be king and someone else, Jesus, is saying that he is instead. Inside every heart is a little king

herod that wants to rule and is hostile towards anything that threatens its sovereignty.

"Where is the true king" is the most disturbing question possible to the human heart.² And we put up all kinds of defenses against it. To keep ourselves on the throne.

- Some of us use religion to bring God into our lives & placate him so that we can still have the throne. We live moral lives in hopes this will satisfy God and maybe even put him in our debt. To ensure he will give us good lives. He gets a corner of OUR kingdom.
- Others run from him entirely and live with no concern for God.
- BOTH are attempts at keeping God off the throne. And listen if he is not your king, who is? You? How's that going? Exhausting, isn't it? Almost like it's too much for you? It is!

Even we Christians struggle with this. We say Jesus is on the throne and then, it's still hard to pray. Why? Because even after our surrender there is this residual hostility toward God. a tugging toward the throne. We must surrender again each day.

3rd response: He's my King

² Keller. Hidden Christmas. 71.



The wise men weren't the most biblically knowledgeable people in this story. That was the religious elite. There weren't the wealthiest or most powerful. That was herod. They knew that there was a divine king worthy of worship, and they were sincere in their quest to find him.

If that's you today, like the wise men recognize the Gift Christ is to you. They didn't worship him as the boy who would become king. They said where is he who has been born King? How did they find Jesus? God used a star. God used angels to bring the shepherds to him.

YOU HAVE SO MUCH MORE Than they did! You have his word! Matthew laments time and again at how the Jews missed the messiah when others like the wise men, who had far less, saw him. Don't miss Christ today. His Holy Spirit is working and maybe today he is knocking. Drawing you to faith. Don't resist him. Instead join the wise men and experience the JOY of finding Jesus. Verse 10 they were filled with great joy at finding the king! Fall down and worship with the wise men in verse 11. This is how you know your searching is genuine. Some people search for God like a thief searches for a policeman. Looking for him so they will know when to run and hide. Cause they don't want to give up something they know doesn't belong to them anyway. Recognize that an honest search for God means that when you find him...you must worship him!

That's why these men of prominence are bowing to a 2yr old. They've found God and so have you. Worship him today. I want to close offering you a comfort and a challenge:

Comfort – let me tell you about my king.

- **My king is the wonderful counselor** – He does not make wisdom hard to find. He offers it to you in his word, confirms it in his church, and illuminates it in your heart through his spirit. And his word revives the soul. It is more precious than gold. He knows anxiety, fear, pride, doubt, lust, & greed. He doesn't just know them; he knows victory over them. And he's not just going to TELL you how YOU get victory; no he's going to get victory over them and offer it to you in him.
- **My king is the mighty God** – he speaks and demons flee. He speaks and the blind see. He speaks and the lame walk. He speaks and the dead come up out of their graves. Why? Because he's been speaking since creation. He speaks and there is light. He speaks and there is land. He speaks and there is life. He speaks and sinners are forgiven. This is my king. The Mighty God. Who heals, who rescues... OH NOBODY has sinned too great to be beyond the power of my king. Whatever your background is, what your past mistakes are, your deep dark secrets. I don't care if you've been on the



paid staff of hell itself. He says the gates of hell will not be able to stand against him as he raids hell to rescue and redeem you.

- **My king is the everlasting father** – Before the beginning of time he knew your name. Knew your story. Loves you. Calls you his own. His fatherly love is everlasting. His fatherly security is everlasting. His fatherly PATIENCE with you – its everlasting. Like a loving father he meets you where you are. Like a father he trains you in what it means to follow him. Like a father he invites you into his work. Like a father he celebrates his children's progress. He doesn't expect perfection. And if you say, "yeah but I didn't have a good father." Well then, its sweeter news for you. Because your earthly father was only here to point you to your heavenly father. Earthly father is finite – but

my king is an infinite father. Infinite in time, power, & love. If you say your father left you, well this one says he will be with you until the end of the age.

- **My king is the prince of peace** – He brings peace between Greek and Jew. He brings peace between the rich and the poor. He brings JUSTICE to the oppressed. He brings peace between enemies. How? He brings them home to himself. Calls us to look at his great love for us. And then to love thy neighbor as thyself. Love as you have been loved. He brings peace to a warring soul. – Phil 4.7. And of HIS kingdom there will be no end.

That's my king.