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The Gospel According to Matthew

Know Your Enemy

January 14, 2018

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2

Mat 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

The battle between good and evil, light and darkness.

As I hope most all of us know by now, we live in a fallen, evil world. We are surrounded by wickedness.

But the primary target of evil, of Satan and his minions, is *you. The church.*

The body of Christ. It has always been this way, from the very beginning. Light shines and immediately the darkness tries to overcome and extinguish it:

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

The enemy uses his servants to carry out his warfare against Christ. You hear lots of talk about “spirits” and demons and many books have been written and conferences taught about how we can supposedly do battle with these beings. Yes, evil spirits and demons are real, just as Satan is real. But Satan comes against us *embodied*. That is to say, he uses human beings who are his slaves and servants to carry out his efforts to extinguish the light of Christ.

2Co 11:15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as

servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

A demon doesn't wear a disguise without the disguise! The point I am trying to demonstrate here is that so many times when people are thinking about how some "spirit" working against their church or ministry or marriage, etc., the fact is that it is most probably Linda or Dave or some other person posing in Christian disguise, perhaps a member of one's own local church.

1Ti 1:19b-20 By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, (20) among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

2Ti 4:14-15 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (15) Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

Understand? Satan's minions have names. Spiritual warfare, as Paul describes in Ephesians 6, does not mean that our enemy does not disguise himself as flesh and blood –

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present

darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

It is incredibly difficult to get Christians to understand this. Talk about "evil" in general terms and all seems well. But start putting a name to it, and you will meet all kinds of resistance. But you can see that Paul and Jesus as well (as he confronted the Pharisees), as did all the Lord's servants, *named names*.

What has all of this to do with Matthew chapter 2? Well, here we meet a servant of the devil. His name was Herod. What we see in this chapter was not merely a jealous king's attempts to destroy any possible rival to his throne, but it is the appearance of Satan once again the moment the Light comes into this world.

Mat 2:1-6 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."

Wise Men from the East

The Bible of course is concerned with God's redemption of His people and creation through Christ. Many times our curiosity asks many questions. Who were these "wise men." "Magoi." We are not told very much:

- From "the east"
- Watched the stars
- The actual number is not known ("We three kings"??) but 3 is traditionally assumed because three kinds of gifts are mentioned.

Here is some additional information from the encyclopedia (Wikipedia) -

The term refers to the Persian priestly caste of Zoroastrianism.^[11] As part of their religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science. Their religious practices and use of astrology caused derivatives of the term *Magi* to be applied to the occult in general and led to the English term magic, although Zoroastrianism was in fact strongly opposed to sorcery.

The King James Version translates the term as *wise men*; the same translation is applied to the wise men led by Daniel of earlier Hebrew Scriptures (Daniel 2:48). The same word is given as *sorcerer* and *sorcery* when describing "Elymas the sorcerer" in Acts 13:6–11, and Simon Magus, considered a heretic by the early Church, in Acts 8:9–13. Several translations refer to the men outright as astrologers at Matthew Chapter 2....

Although the Magi are commonly referred to as "kings," there is nothing in the account from the Gospel of Matthew that implies that they were rulers of any kind. The identification of the Magi as kings is linked to Old Testament prophecies that describe the Messiah being worshipped by kings in Isaiah 60:3, Psalms 68:29, and Psalms 72:10, which reads, "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations serve him."^{[12][13][14]} Early readers reinterpreted Matthew in light of these prophecies and elevated the Magi to kings. By AD 500 all commentators adopted the prevalent tradition that the three were kings.^[15]

Later Christian interpretation stressed the Adorations of the Magi and shepherds as the first recognition by the people of the earth of Christ as the Redeemer, but the reformer John Calvin^[16] was vehemently opposed to referring to the Magi as kings. He once wrote: "But the most ridiculous contrivance of the Papists on this subject is, that those men were kings... Beyond all doubt, they have been stupefied by a righteous judgment of

God, that all might laugh at [their] gross ignorance."^{[16][17]}

But here is the main point Matthew is getting at. We have already mentioned that the Gospel of Matthew frequently mentions Gentiles. Matthew is the only one of the 4 Gospels to mention these magi, for example. Matthew is anxious to show us that Christ *is for the nations*. That “His people” whom he has come to save are not just the Jews, but Gentiles as well. The Old Testament repeats the same theme over and over and these examples may well have been in Matthew’s mind as he recorded this account of the magi coming from the east:

Isa 60:1-3 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. (2) For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. (3) **And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.**

Psa 72:9-12 May desert tribes **bow down before him**, and his enemies lick the dust! (10) May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands **render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!** (11) **May all kings fall down before him**, all nations serve him! (12) For he delivers

the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper.

So the important point Matthew would have us all understand in this is that here we have *a scene of the already but not yet. Of the nations coming to worship the King. Of Gentiles among the elect of God, in His Church.*

But how did they know? Yes, they saw His star but why were they looking? How did they know about a star of a king who would be born? Again, we are not given the details, but we can note this:

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Job lived long, long, ages before the birth of Christ. And he lived “in the east.” Men knew about the coming Redeemer. Job lived long before Abraham, before any Jew existed. Yet he served the Lord faithfully and looked for his Redeemer to come.

Christianity, in other words, is THE only true world religion. Christ is the Savior of the world, not merely a Jewish king. Matthew will continue emphasizing this theme throughout his Gospel. For example:

Mat 8:10-12 When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. (11) I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, (12) while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Look at these magi's question again:

Mat 2:2 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."

They came to what would be thought to be the logical place for a king of the Jews – Jerusalem. And they ask *where is he who has been born king of the Jews?* That is to say, they knew that this King for all nations would be born as a descendant of Abraham, a Jew. Other kings were born of course. But it is THIS king, the king of the Jews that they came to worship. Why? Because they knew he was the Savior of the world. Their savior.

And they came to *worship* him. People honor kings. But they worship God. These magi apparently knew quite a lot about Christ. It is quite possible

that they had read the OT scriptures as well.

In our day, we have all kinds of pressure upon us to regard Christianity as a “good” but simply “another” religion. As some kind of religion for western civilization, but certainly not for all civilizations. The magi knew otherwise. Here they came from the East, from modern day Iraq, from the Persian empire. Tradition holds that one even came from as far as India (though no one knows for certain). All of them came because they knew “salvation is of the Jews.” Of Christ.

The Dragon is Stirred

We should not be surprised then that immediately the enemy went to work to try to kill this newborn king. Listen again:

Mat 2:3-8 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." (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."

Consider from these verses just how many people *knew about this coming King*.

- Herod
- All Jerusalem
- The chief priests and scribes
- And of course, as we have seen, the magi

They *knew*. The Jews even knew quite clearly where the Messiah would be born – Bethlehem. They knew that Micah's prophecy, given some 700 years before, was true. The thing isn't even questioned. Once again Matthew demonstrates to us that Jesus is indeed this Ruler who was prophesied all through the Old Testament. And also it is important that we keep in mind something else – namely, that as we read through the rest of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, the backdrop for it all was a people, a city, a nation *that knew from the day of His birth that He was the Messiah*. They knew!! And yet they killed him.

And they did more. *They actively suppressed the facts and truth that all Jerusalem had been in a stir about.*

Even though, as Paul told Festus:

Act 26:24-26 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." (25) But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. (26) **For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.**

Christ you might say is the sinner's "elephant in the room." He looms large and loud, but men cover their eyes and ears to deny him.

Notice the deceptive nature of evil here in Herod's tactics:

- "Where is he going to be born?"
- He *secretly* calls the magi to him
- With evil motive he tries to determine how old the child would be at this time
- I want to come and worship him

One of the facts that is quite plain in God's Word is that our enemy is a *liar*. In fact, whenever he opens his mouth you can be sure he is lying and deceiving. And so it is with his servants. As hard as it may be to grasp

that another human being could be so deceptive and wicked, we must come to terms with this truth. Over and over again I talk to people who say “I just cannot imagine how someone who appears so nice could be so evil.” You hear it all the time as well. A husband/father murders his wife and children. “He was the prime example of a wonderful, godly person,” the people would say. “Something terrible must have happened to cause him to do this. Some mental illness perhaps.” No, it wasn’t mental illness. This is who he was all along. Evil is just that deceptive. And we see it here in Herod. I want to go worship him. Yeah, right.

But God saw it. He intervened. He told the magi what Herod was up to and told them to leave another way.

Micah’s Prophecy (vss 5-6)

Matthew quotes from the prophet Micah here in vss 5-6. Listen to it in context back in Micah chapter 5:

Micah 5:1-6 Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. (2) 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. (3) Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. (4) And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. (5) And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men; (6) they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

Here is Craig Blomberg’s observations, taken from Commentary on the New Testament Use of the OT (Beale and Carson, eds) –

“Micah prophesied in the 8th century BC, warning both Israel and Judah of impending judgment. As so often happens with the OT prophets, short- and long-range prophecies are starkly juxtaposed [ie, side by side]. Micah chapter 4 alternates between predictions of the more distant return from exile and of more imminent judgment. Micah 5 begins with this latter theme (vs 1) but the rest of the chapter returns to the more distant

future, promising a ruler who will shepherd his flock in the Lord's strength and majesty and bring peace to the land (vss 2-5a)...In this context 5:2 is most naturally taken as messianic. Micah consciously predicted that the tiny city of Bethlehem would produce an Israelite king "whose goings out are from aforetime, from ancient times [or, 'from days of eternity']. Though not as clear as Isaiah 9:6 –

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (7) Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

...this final clause suggests a king who is more than a mere human. Some scholars have seen Micah 5:3 as then consciously alluding to Isaiah 7:14, the woman who gives birth, ending the time of Israel's abandonment, is the virgin who will supernaturally conceive."

rages against Christ and orders all the little boys not only in Bethlehem but in the whole vicinity. We will plan to look into this in more detail next time, but we close with this graphic proof that behind that "nice, Christian, godly persona," often lies evil that we could hardly even imagine.

We must be wise in these things. Make no mistake, wherever and whenever the light of Christ appears as He did so long ago there in Bethlehem, you can be sure that the enemy will be along quite soon.

Herod, as we know, is going to launch out openly who he really is when he