

The Seekers of the King

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Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Series: King of Kings

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Living Hope Bible Church of Roselle, IL

Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of **Matthew**. We are in a series through the book of Matthew entitled: “King of kings!” Today’s message we are talking about “The Seekers of the King”.

Proposition: I want us to understand today, that God will do whatever it takes to save you.

The other day, my son comes to me in tears – “Dad do I really believe? Am I really a Christian?” I think we all have waves of doubts at times. Matthew 2 is a picture of how God seeks people.

Someone once said, “I didn’t find God! God wasn’t lost. He didn’t need to be found. was the one who was lost. God found me.”

We come to the wise men in Matthew 2. We discover they are seeking Jesus, but what we find is long before they were seeking **Him**, He was seeking **them!**

God’s Promise to the Nations

Matthew opens up with the Gentile wise men seeking Jesus. It begins with the nations bringing gifts to Jesus, and the Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus saying, “Go into all the world and preaching the Gospel to all the nations!” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Old Testament ends with the prophet saying things like, “I will destroy Israel’s enemies,” but then “I will save Israel’s enemies”. I will destroy their political power, but I will lift up a light to the nations. I will have mercy on Edom and Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.

And so it is that Matthew opens up to answer all the prophets visions and dreams of God’s mercy to the nations. God wants to save the unclean nations. He wants to save those who were despised.

Our Struggle with God’s Love

Do you ever struggle with God’s love? Often, even though we have seen God do great things for us, God’s people at times struggle with assurance of their salvation. We struggle with our great sinfulness and whether God loves us. Why would God ever love us!

Asaph and God's Forgotten Grace

It reminds me of Psalm 77. Sometimes we wonder with Asaph...

Psalm 77:7–9 (ESV), “Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? 8 Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”

Have you ever wondered if God's love for you had run out? Matthew remember is a former tax-collector. When God saved him, he took Matthew out of the trash bin of Israel. And here we read that the first people to honor the king, after the lowly shepherds, were not the Jewish leaders, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees... no, it is the Gentiles. They have come from afar to worship the king. Let's read about it...

Matthew 2:1–12 (ESV), “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.’ ”

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.” 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. 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. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. “

This morning as we consider the “Seekers of the King” let's consider all that God does to bring us to Himself.

- God draws **Nations**
- God deters **Naysayers**
- God directs **Nature**
- God desires our **Nearness**

I. God draws **Nations** (2:1-2).

Matthew 2:1–2 (ESV), “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.””

God uses nature to draw the wise men.

Who were the wise men?

These were men outside of Israel. We’ve all asked:

- How many were there?
- Were they really kings?
- Did they really ride camels?
- What were their names?

People have come up with all kinds of crazy stuff. A lot of folklore surrounds them. Some have given them names. They’ve said there were three.

- One named: **Melchior**, a *Persian* scholar
- One named: **Caspar**, an *Ethiopian* scholar
- And another named: **Balthazar**, an *Arabian* scholar.

The Skulls of the Wise Men?

It is said that their three skulls, amazingly enough, have been found. Yes, they were found in the 1100s by Roman Catholic Bishop Rainald of Cologne. The bishop apparently dug those up and knew right off they were the skulls of the wise men! Their eyes were still in the sockets fixed toward Bethlehem. Today, believe it or not, they are on exhibit in a priceless golden casket in a great cathedral in Europe (Cologne, Germany).

The truth is we don’t know their names. We can be positive that whosever skulls are in the Cologne Cathedral, it’s certainly not the wise men.

But what do we know?

There were those who had a quest in the east. They were really the kingmakers of the east. There is so much that has been said surrounding them.

King of the Jews? – A Veiled Insult to Herod

The wise men come to town and ask, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” You have to understand that Herod had been called "king of the Jews" by the Senate in Rome for almost 40 years. But he was not Jewish! He was Idumean – he was a mixed breed from Esau and the pagan nations.

So when these wise men ask, “Where is the king of the Jews”, this is a veiled insult of sorts. Everyone knew Herod was not the true king.

Who were the Wise Men anyway?

- They were an ancient priestly family among the Medo-Persians.
- The phrase “wise men” is literally “**Magi**” of which we get our word magic or magician. It is descended from a **tribe of priests** in the Medes and Persians – modern day Iran.
- We find them first in the book of Daniel. In **Daniel 4:9**, Daniel is called, “Beltshazzar, chief of the magicians”, or better translated, “chief of the Magi”.
- They were the **kingmakers** of the Parthian Empire, which included the old Medo-Persian Empire.
- Now the **Magi** of the Parthian- Persian Empire, also acted in the role of **Senators**. They were the law makers. They were the authors and the architects of the “law of the Medes and the Persians”.

Israel Buffer Zone Between East and West

At the time of the birth of Christ, Israel was the buffer zone between two empires, the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire. And the Empires of the East, the Parthian, Arabian, and the Indian Empires were without a king at the time.

The Magi would have come to replace Phraates IV, who was aged. Caesar Augustus was also aging. Herod was aging. This looked like a perfect storm.

The Roman – Parthian Wars had been going on for 40 years and would continue for another 200. This was war between East and West. So the Persian-Parthians were without a king. They were looking not just for a human king. They are searching for the final King, to end all kings.

King of the East, King of the World

So the Magi were looking for a **new king**, a new king of the east – of the Eastern Empire (Parthia, Arabia, and India) who could war against Rome. When they arrived in Jerusalem Herod knew what was going on. They were the kingmakers and when they wandered around town saying - Where is this new king of the Jews?... Herod got panicky.

II. God deters **Naysayers** (2:3-6).

Now understand, we don't know how many wise men there were. But they come riding into town looking to crown a king. And the king they were looking for wasn't Herod! These wise men were the kingmakers. Herod is old. Caesar Augustus is old. The East is without a king. They need a king to bring a new war with the west. I believe these wise men knew enough from Daniel, that this king was going to have an everlasting kingdom. This king is the ancient of days. Look at the what Matthew records about the naysayer, king Herod. If there was anyone opposed to this kind of King, it was Herod.

Matthew 2:1–6 (ESV), “... 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**”

Persian Horses and a Cavalry

Suddenly these Persian king makers appeared in Jerusalem. No doubt they are traveling in full force with all their oriental pomp. They used to wear conical hats with points on the top and large fabric flaps clear down to the bottom of their chin. And they rode Persian steeds, not camels. And when they came in they didn't come alone, the estimates of history are they came with perhaps hundreds of Persian cavalry.

Now when this little king Herod looked out his little dinky palace window and saw this mighty army of men from the East with the Magi, the kingmakers, he **flipped!**

The PANIC - Herod Troubled, Agitated!

The word says he was “troubled”. It means to be agitated! Like a washer is agitated back and forth. Herod was shaking! And it says “and all Jerusalem with him”. Now Herod was brutal, as we are going to see in the latter part of Matthew 2. Herod is willing to destroy the innocents, two (2) years old and younger to protect his pitiful little monarchy. Caesar Augustus said he'd rather be one of Herod's swine than one of his sons - because Herod was a cruel, insane, maniac. He was known to kill family members or perceived enemies on a whim.

The PEOPLE - End of the World?

So “all Jerusalem” was troubled “with him”. They were likely troubled at what Herod might do. They also knew the prophecies of a king that would come and conquer the world. They also must have wondered if this was the end of the world, and if they were ready.

Herod Calls the PRIESTS and Scribes—

So Herod assembles the chief priests and scribes. Who were they?

Verse 4, “and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”

Chief Priests

There were about 18000 levitical priests in the day of Jesus. The chief priests were the ruling class among them. Many of them were retired high priests and treasurers in the temple. They were the important people in Israel. They were always from the tribe of Levi.

Scribes

The Scribes could be from any tribe. There were liberal scribes of the Sadducees. The Sadducees denied the supernatural. They denied angels. They denied life after death. The Pharisees, the conservatives had their scribes too. They believed in the supernatural, angels, etc. So the Scribes were the scholars. Out of the Scribes came the Rabbis. That's why Jesus can be called a Rabbi being from the tribe of Judah. You could be from any tribe and be a Rabbi.

Enemies

The chief priests and scribes might be indifferent in this passage, but from here on out they are those who oppose Jesus. He threatens their power.

Herod's Ignorance

Now look at Herod's ignorance.

Verse 4, So Herod is "assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born." He doesn't know!

So, **verse 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 Quote – Answers WHERE

The **Scribes and chief priests** are quoting from Micah 5:2 and 6. He's going to be born in David's city – Bethlehem. It used to be called Ephrathah. Out of Bethlehem is the king coming!

Now that doesn't sound very extraordinary either. The reason is that the only purpose for which the scribes quoted the text was to answer Herod's question: **Where?** And the answer is **Bethlehem**.

But What about WHO?

But what if Herod had asked them, "**Who?**" Who is this King? They might have read on in Micah 5:2–4 (ESV), "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...**

Or like John says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

The Shepherd-King

This King would not be like Herod. He would be the One who **reigns** as the King but will rule as a **shepherd**.

Micah Goes on to Say in Verse 4...

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.**"

He's going to be great to the very ends of the earth!

Isaiah 60:3, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."

God is bringing Gentiles to Himself! God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him. And he is doing it by exerting global - probably even universal - influence and power to get it done. Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire so that the census comes at the exact time to get a virgin to Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy with her delivery. Matthew shows God influencing the stars in the sky to get foreign magi to Bethlehem so that they can worship him.

God draws **Nations**

God deters **Naysayers**

III. God directs **Nature** (2:7-9).

Matthew 2:7-9 (ESV), "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.' 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."

God Wields the Universe to Save

Over and over the Bible baffles our curiosity about just how certain things happened. How did this "star" get the magi from the east to Jerusalem? Some say it was the aligning of Saturn and Jupiter. Others say it was the Haley's comet. Still others, believe it was God's glory cloud, His Shekinah glory cloud that guided the wise men. I tend to hold to that. But what is most important, whether it was the star of His Shekinah glory or something else, we know that God wields the universe to bring sinners to Himself.

God Wields Nations to Save

In the Old Testament and New we read that All things are upheld by Word of Christ's Power. He calls the King of Babylon in the Old Testament "my hammer". In Jer 51:20 God says to **Nebuchadnezzar**: "You are my hammer and weapon of war: with you I break nations in pieces; with you I destroy kingdoms."

God draws **Nations**

God deters **Naysayers**

God directs **Nature**

IV. God desires our **Nearness** (2:10-12).

Matthew 2:10-12- (ESV), "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 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. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”

Great Joy!

Verse 10, “When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy”

The original text piles up superlatives to emphasize the extent of exhilaration they felt, thus indicating to us their uniquely strong interest in this great event.

Joseph and his family were no longer in the stable but had found a **house** in which to live until the Lord told them where to go and what to do next.¹

Worship!

Verse 11, “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him”.”

Finally they found who they were searching for! There’s no more to do. Christ is our total satisfaction. So at last **they fell down and worshiped Him**²

The Gifts

The gold, frankincense, and myrrh were gifts that tell us that Jesus was born to die.

Gold: royalty

Gold is a gift fit for a king. Jesus Christ is the King of Kings.

Throughout history **gold** has been considered the most precious of metals and the universal symbol of material value and wealth. It was used extensively in the construction of the Temple (see 1 Kings 6–7, 9; 2 Chron. 2–4). It was also a symbol of nobility and royalty (see Gen. 41:4; 1 Kings 10:1–13; etc.). Matthew continually presents Christ as the King, and here we see the King of the Jews, the King of kings, appropriately being presented with royal gifts of gold.³

Frankincense: deity

Frankincense accompanied the incense that was burned during the Old Testament priestly worship of God in the Tabernacle and Temple. Jesus Christ is our High Priest. A priest talks to God on behalf of man. Jesus is our representative before the Father.

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (35). Chicago: Moody Press.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 36.

Frankincense was a costly, beautiful-smelling incense that was used only for the most special of occasions. It was used in the grain offerings at the Tabernacle and Temple (Lev. 2:2, 15–16), in certain royal processions (Song of Sol. 3:6–7),⁴

Origen, the great church Father, suggested that frankincense was the incense of deity. In the Old Testament it was stored in a special chamber in front of the Temple and was sprinkled on certain offerings as a symbol of the people's desire to please the Lord⁵

Myrrh: humanity / death

Myrrh is used for embalming the dead. Why would the wise men bring myrrh? Because Jesus was born to die. Jesus Christ is our Substitute and only Savior.

Once on the cradle
Once on the cross

Conclusion: I'm praying that you will be gripped with the fact that God is worthy of your worship. I pray you will see the global purpose of God's plan.

The global purpose of God is the glad praise of Christ among the peoples of the world.

- God's plan is **sovereign**
 - He directs **nature**.
 - He draws **nations**.
- First, he sends the **Christ** as the greatest missionary!
- Then, he brings the **nations** to him.
- Then he sends the **church** out to the nations!
 - The beginning of Matthew: the nations come to him
 - The end of Matthew: Go and spread the kingdom!
 - Passionately spend your life as a witness.

God is seeking a people! Will you go and tell all nations this Christmas. That begins with your own family. God literally moved heaven and earth to come here. Don't you think He'll move heaven and earth to soften the hearts of those you love?

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.