



Matthew 2:7-12

3 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the

child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

In yesterday's passage we had our first close look at King Herod. At the time of Jesus he'd been in power for almost 40 years. And we reached back into history to get a bit of a feel for who we are dealing with. Herod was appointed by the Romans as the 'king of the Jews' and he has been described by historians as 'a madman who murdered his own family,' 'an evil genius,' and as someone who was 'pre-

pared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition.' A real piece of work. And towards the end he became so paranoid about losing power that he killed his wife and two of his sons. He was so ruthless that Caesar Augustus joked that he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son – because he was Jewish, so his pigs were safer than his sons.

Yesterday we saw that when Herod heard about the birth of Jesus he was disturbed. The magi, who were political advisors to nations East of Judea, had come to find the one who was born king of the Jews. And so you can imagine how a man like Herod would have reacted to this news.

And in today's passage Herod's true colours begin to show. In verse 7, did you notice that he calls the Magi secretly, he wants to know all about this Jesus, but on the quiet, be-

cause he's plotting something. And then he asks them for the exact time the star had appeared, because he's trying to calculate Jesus' age. And then in verse 8 Herod's issuing orders to these foreigners, 'Go and search carefully,' 'As soon as you find him, report to me' and then with as much cunning and guile as he can manage 'so that I too may go and worship him' – said the fox to the hare. He doesn't want to worship Jesus, he wants to kill him. Then he gives the Magi directions to Bethlehem, because that's where the Old Testament Scriptures say that Jesus would be born. And so in verse 9 the Magi take what Herod says on board and follow the Old Testament Scriptures and the star to Bethlehem.

I'd like you to notice three things about the rest of this passage. The first one's this:

Both the Old Testament Scriptures and the star in the heavens lead the Magi to Jesus. And it is the same for us today. People are led to Jesus through his word, the bible, but also through things that happen in their lives, things that God uses to get their attention. And in fact, it's often these big things, these big events that aren't always good things, but it's often these big things that God uses in his mercy to lead us to Jesus. And then once God's got our attention, we find Jesus amongst his people and in his word. This might be happening in your life right now.

The second thing I'd like you to notice in the passage is the way the Magi reacted when they first met Jesus. Do you see in verse 10, they're overjoyed. And then they bow down and worship him. And then give him expensive gifts. They don't even know him, he's just

a toddler, they've never heard a word that Jesus has spoken, and have no idea that he came to die for the sins of the world. And yet they're overjoyed, and bowing down, and worshipping him, and giving him their treasure. So for you and I who do know Jesus, who've read his word, who've experienced his forgiveness in our hearts, you and I who know the price that he had to pay so that we might be forgiven – when we see these Magi worshipping Jesus, do we worship like that? Are we filled with the same joy in his presence? Do we lay all our earthly treasure at his feet? Do we joyfully give him the best of our time, our talents and our treasures?

And you can't help but feel the contrast, can you? Between the Magi and us but also between the Magi and Herod. Here's Herod, the self-appointed king of the Jews, and all of Je-

rusalem with him disturbed at the coming of Jesus, and plotting together to kill him – and then there's these foreigners, who historically aren't members of God's people, they're not Jews, and yet they're the ones worshipping Jesus. And in many ways this is the story of Matthew's gospel and the story of the whole bible. Out of God's disobedient and stubborn people would come a Saviour who would come first to them, but only a handful of them would accept him, and then he would go on to become not just the Saviour of the Jewish nation, but the Saviour of the whole world. Jesus came to save not just Jewish people, but the whole world – which includes you and me. And we can see this playing out here already.

Third and final point. Do you notice there's only two reactions here to Jesus. You either you fall down on your knees and worship him

like the Magi or you hate him and want to kill him like Herod and the Jewish leaders. There's no middle ground; and that's because there's no middle ground with Jesus. You see apathy just isn't an option with Jesus. It's all or nothing. The stakes are too high. Did you know that Jesus speaks more about hell than anyone else in the bible and he also says that believing in him is the only way to avoid it. Now that's either *not true and offensive in the extreme*, or *the most important and precious news that you're ever going to hear*. There's no middle ground, apathy just isn't an option.

Well, there's lots in the passage to think about so please take some time to do so now. And when you have, then why not finish this time with Jesus this morning by praying to him. Is he using some big event in your life to draw you to him? Ask him. Does he fill

you with joy, are you worshipping him with your whole heart, are you joyfully giving him your time, your talents and your treasures as an act of worship. Or has apathy crept into your faith? Why don't you pray to him now?

And thanks for listening to today's reflection. I'd appreciate your prayers, and I want you to know that I'm praying for you.