



## Matthew 2:3-6

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

4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among

the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

You might remember from the long list of names in Chapter 1 that Jesus is descended from kings. He’s from the line of David, the rightful king of God’s people, he’s the king of the Jews. But when we looked at this we realised that in a country occupied by Romans, with a Roman king in power, this is extremely dangerous talk. Today things really begin to heat up. Today’s passage has been described as political dynamite.<sup>1</sup> But to feel the tension let me give you a little historical context.

The first half chapter 2 revolves around Bethlehem, where King David was born, a small town about 8 kilometres from Jerusalem in

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1 Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*. (London: Spck Publishing, 2014), 11.

Palestine. Palestine covers the territory of biblical Israel and Judah. It's occupied by the Romans. In 37 BC, the Roman Senate had appointed Herod 'King of the Jews' and provided him the troops he needed to conquer Jerusalem and the rest of Judea. To do so he had defeated the Parthians, a powerful nation from the East. Herod has been described as 'a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis,' 'the evil genius of the Judean nation,' and as someone who was 'prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition.' And he reigned from 37BC to 4BC. But the main point is, Herod was appointed by Rome as 'the king of the Jews' and was known as the 'king of the Jews.'

And knowing that, you can feel the tension, can't you, when the Magi come to Jerusalem from the East, and ask as we saw yesterday

in verse 2:

‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?’ – not the imposter who calls himself ‘the king of the Jews,’ but the one who was born, king of the Jews, the rightful king of the Jews.

But Herod doesn’t kill them then and there. You see they’re political advisors from the East, if they sided with the rightful king, well they might take his throne. No Herod’s too cunning to kill them. But what’s surprising is that the text says that Herod’s disturbed. Maybe he’s worried about this political threat. Or perhaps (he’d been raised a Jew), perhaps he was experiencing a deeper fear at the coming of the Messiah. Or maybe it was the star that everyone was talking about.

But notice also that ‘all of Jerusalem’ is dis-

turbed. The coming of the promised one, God's appointed saviour of the world, the rightful king of the Jews, and all of Jerusalem is disturbed? Shouldn't they be overjoyed? Yet it says they're disturbed. It's likely here that 'all of Jerusalem' is referring to the religious leaders. It's hard to imagine why they were disturbed at the coming of the Messiah but perhaps they feared Herod's rage; or more likely this is a clue to their spiritual health—if Herod's powerbase is under threat, then so is theirs.

Either way, Herod calls the religious leaders in, in verse 4, and asks them where the Messiah, God's rightful king, whom the Scriptures said would reign on David's throne forever, the one who in popular expectations was going to take back control of Judea from the Romans, 'where is he to be born?'

Now you have to understand the cunning nature of what's going on here. What do you think is in Herod's mind? Herod who, as a matter of historical record, grew increasingly paranoid in his later years, and had many of his own family members imprisoned and executed, so he would hold on to power. He was so ruthless, Caesar Augustus reportedly joked that he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son – safer being his pig. What do you think was going on in his mind when he asked where the rightful 'king of the Jews' is to be born?

Feel the dramatic tension. Jesus is barely two years old and already the Roman empire and the leaders in Jerusalem want his blood. The whole world is against him. And this never changes. In Matthew 23 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, over God's holy city, crying:

‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.’

And when he was nailed on the cross, the charge against Jesus was nailed above his head, it read: ‘This is the king of the Jews.’ He was killed by the Jerusalem, its leaders and its people, for being the king of the Jews; he was killed by the Romans for being the king of the Jews. ‘Where is he to be born?’ Herod asks cunningly. And they tell him, they quote to him a prophecy from the Old Testament book of Micah that also echoes 2 Samuel 5:2: He’s to be born in Bethlehem, King David’s home town, the same humble origins, and like King David who was a shepherd, Jesus will shepherd God’s people. And Jesus be-

ing God's shepherd is a beautiful image. Jesus is the good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus takes up the image in John 10 and says that he knows his sheep and his sheep know him and that he came into the world to lay down his life for his sheep.

So today we've seen that Jesus stepped down out of heaven and into human history and already they're paying for his blood. And yet despite the cost he came here to seek you and me, who have strayed from the fold of God. He came here to rescue us at the cost of his own life. Have you entrusted your life to the good shepherd? He's seeking you right now. Have you found comfort and peace and security in his arms? He gave his life so you could. Or are you still wandering alone, lost, and confused in this often violent and unpredictable world? The grass isn't greener else-



where. Come to his pastures and rest. The best of this life is found in relationship with Jesus and with people that know him and love him.

Now's your chance to stop – perhaps the only opportunity you'll get all day – and think deeply about the Jesus, our good shepherd, appointed by God to care for us, to nurture us, to feed us, and to protect us. And when our time on earth is done, to bring us home to our Father in heaven, to join his heavenly fold and live under his love and care and protection for ever. And with this picture in your mind, why not spend some time praying as well.

Thanks for reading, tomorrow the plot only thickens, yet God's sovereignty prevails as I know it will in your life as well today. Until then.