

Week 2: Matthew 2

Hook



Main Point: We can trust God's presence in our lives.

Does this sound familiar? You are sitting in a meeting or shopping in the grocery store when suddenly you get a notification from your Ring app that there is movement at your front door. You immediately open the app and either check the archived video or go to the live view because, hey, you care about your home, and you want to make sure nothing bad has happened.

The Ring systemⁱ (now an ever-growing universe of security tools for your home or business) is yet another example of how we value security now more than ever. But underneath all the products, cameras and apps, a deep truth about who we are emerges: We take comfort knowing something or someone is watching on our behalf. We value presence.

Q: Do you currently use a home security system or app platform similar to Ring? What led you to invest in these resources?

Q: Do you think people value security more today than in the past? Why?

Q: What kind of comfort do you receive knowing that your home is being secured in some way?

Transition: Today we are going to learn of the awesome promise of God's presence and the hope that comes from knowing He is always with us.

Week 2: Matthew 2

Book

Main Point: We can trust God's presence in our lives.

Matthew 2:1–12 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus is worthy of praise.

Q: Why was Herod so interested in gaining as much information as possible about the birth of Jesus?

Verse 1 introduces us to the villain of today's chapter – Herod. Herod was appointed King of Palestine (an area that contained biblical Israel and Judah) by Rome. Although he was half Jewish and known as “king of the Jews,” Herod was not afraid to heavily tax and even force Jewish people into labor – all of these elements earned him disdain by many Jewish people. As he aged, Herod's paranoia of being overthrown drove him to have multiple sons and wives put to death.ⁱⁱ

Any contender to the throne is viewed as a threat to Herod, and this is the news that the Magi drop at his doorstep. These wise men and priests, most likely from Persia, combine both astronomy and astrology.ⁱⁱⁱ The Magi hold that the debut of a new star in the sky marks the birth of a significant person in the land over which the star is shining.^{iv} And it is likely that these wise men had been exposed to Jewish prophecy concerning the Messiah, including Balaam's “A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17).^v

The Magi correctly assume that this child is the King of the Jews, and thus they travel to the capital of Palestine, Jerusalem.^{vi} The fact that Jesus is “*born*” King of the Jews implies that He has the proper bloodline to be the legitimate king of the Jews – Herod is nothing more than a pretender.

Naturally, this news is most upsetting to Herod and the religious leaders (“all Jerusalem”). The word the ESV translates as “troubled” could be translated as “in turmoil” or “terrified” – the religious leaders are the key Jewish players in the city, and many of them were appointed to their positions by Herod himself.^{vii}

Having to consult with the priests and the scribes proves Herod's less-than-robust knowledge of the Scriptures. The king is presented with the prophecy from Micah 5:2 – Bethlehem was the birthplace of the Messiah. The last phrase from the quote used in Matthew 2:6, “You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over

Israel”, is originally found in 2 Samuel 5:2. It implies the kind of leader that this new king will be – a shepherd. Unlike a power-hungry, paranoid leader such as Herod, a shepherd would be with his flock, caring for them, sacrificing for them. The Messiah would be a king *with* the people.

Herod sends the Magi on to Bethlehem, masking his true intent of murdering the child. The star that had appeared to the Magi while they were in the East now reappears and begins to move, moving supernaturally, in fact. Instead of “traveling” east to west across the skyline, this star leads the Magi five miles south to Bethlehem.^{viii} While there remain different opinions as to what (or who) this star was, one fact remains: It is a miracle.

The reappearance and guidance of the star causes the Magi to rejoice! This certainly seems to be supernatural assurance that their mission is of consequence. Imagine the emotion that must have filled these men as they are swept up into a narrative that would most certainly change the socio/political landscape of a nation, possibly an empire!

The Magi enter the home of Mary and Joseph and offer Jesus, now likely 1 or 2 years old, both their worship and gifts.^{ix} These offerings are expensive and intended to honor the child as king: gold (a precious metal), frankincense and myrrh (fragrant spices and perfumes).^x These gifts would be put to practical use in the future as they most likely financed the family’s plight to Egypt.^{xi}

God once again employs a dream as a warning, bringing the duplicitous nature of Herod’s intentions to the Magi. And in an effort to avoid Jerusalem all together, the wise men return home a different way.

The child who had been born in obscurity is now recognized by pagan travelers as the rightful ruler of Israel, worthy of their praise and offerings. This reminds the reader that Jesus is, in fact, the legitimate king and One who will be for all people.

These verses demonstrate God’s providence, His hand’s guiding people (even pagans) to accomplish His will. This is a beautiful reminder of God’s ability and commitment to accomplish His purposes in the world and in your life. No man, not even a king backed by the Roman empire, could thwart the plans of God.

Q: Describe the leadership style of a shepherd-king. As a Christ-follower, what kind of leadership qualities should you display?

Q: Consider the gifts of the Magi – what kind of offerings are required of you? Why would God want anything from you if His resources are limitless?

Q: Who are the first people to worship Jesus in Matthew's Gospel? What significance might this hold?

Matthew 2:13–18 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus offers redemption.

Q: What stands out to you regarding the faith of Joseph based on his response to the instruction he receives from the angel of the Lord in his dream?

Once again, an angel appears to Joseph and warns him of the threat posed by Herod. Joseph is instructed to take “the child and his mother” and flee to Egypt. A large Jewish community had claimed Egypt as home for centuries.^{xii}

In light of the clear and present threat posed by Herod, Joseph steals his family in the night to Egypt, and they remain there until the death of Herod. Matthew is quick to point out that this action fulfills another Old Testament prophecy, this time from Hosea 11:1:

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

These verses look back on the events of the Exodus/Passover through a Messianic lens. Just as God called his adopted son, Israel, out of Egypt, He now calls The Son out as well. The people of Israel had been offered redemption through the events of the Exodus (specifically the Passover), God is once again offering salvation, this time through the perfect Lamb of God. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to Israel of redemption that was first seen at the Passover and Exodus.^{xiii}

Matthew returns to the narrative in verse 13 as he lays bare the horrendous and paranoid character of Herod. The king has all the boys in Bethlehem who are 2 years old and younger slaughtered in efforts to illuminate the threat of the “king of the Jews.” Given the size of Bethlehem and the parameters of the order, this could have amounted to around 20 deaths.^{xiv}

The prophecy in verse 18 is found in Jeremiah 31:15 as the prophet recounts the wails of mothers whose sons were carried off to Babylon. The anguish of the mothers of Bethlehem, and the community of Bethlehem, must have been debilitating. Reminiscent of Babylon's attempts generations before to wipe out God's chosen people, Herod is doing his best to put an end to the rightful king of the Jews.^{xv}

But, if you keep reading in Jeremiah, God provides a response to the heartbreak of His people. He promises them that one day, their land will be restored to them (Jeremiah 31:16–17) and God will establish a new covenant with them. The Messiah is coming.

Jesus brings hope and light into the bleakest of situations. Like the blood of the Passover Lamb, the sacrifice of Christ proves a worthy offering to cover the sins of those who seek refuge in Him. Not only that, but in His Second Coming, all promises will be fulfilled as Jesus reigns not only in the hearts of His people, but also literally from His throne in Jerusalem.

The Christian life is not free from sorrow or hardship. But, like the kingdom of God, you are living in an already-not-yet state. Christ is your Lord, and you have been rescued from your sin and welcomed into the body of Christ as a redeemed son. And although you may experience hardship in the now, you have the comfort of waiting for the day when Christ returns or calls you home and fulfills His promise:

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. —Revelation 21:4

Q: How does God respond to tragedy? How should a believer respond?

Q: How does the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and hope of heaven impact the way you endure hardship?

Matthew 2:19–23 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus is familiar with hardship.

Q: What are various ways you have seen people deal with hardship?

Q: What are some ways you typically deal with hardship, struggles or unexpected difficulties in your life?

Joseph once again acts in obedience and does as the angel commands him in verse 19. However, Herod's kingdom is divided into four parts upon his death, and his oldest son, Archelaus, is granted Judea as his territory. This son is notorious for his cruelty, and so Joseph, being warned in a dream, makes his family's home in Galilee, in the city of Nazareth.

Of note here is that there is no specific prophecy in the Scriptures that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. It could be that Matthew is connecting Nazareth with the prophecy

found in Isaiah 11:1: *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.* The Hebrew word for branch is *nezer*, so perhaps Matthew is making a typical Hebrew play on words, connecting Jesus with the line of David.^{xvi}

Another possibility has to do with the meaning of “Nazarene”. The term “Nazarene” was slang for someone who comes from an obscure, insignificant place.^{xvii} The town was home to the Roman garrison, and thus the Jewish residents were viewed with contempt as compromisers.^{xviii} Nathanael once used the word in a derogatory remark in John 1:46 when questioning Jesus’ hometown, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” The prophecies spoke to the lowly nature of Jesus (Isaiah 42:1–4), His obscurity (Isaiah 52–53), and the fact that He would be despised (Isaiah 53). In addition to the beautiful names that He carried (such as Messiah, Immanuel and Jesus), our Savior also took on a title of scorn: Nazarene.

Jesus was no stranger to hardship, prejudice and unearned hatred. And while many of us have perhaps experienced these things, it’s important to note that Jesus chose them. He knowingly and willingly stepped into Bethlehem, into the waiting gaze of a monster like Herod. He became a refugee and chose a hometown that was viewed with suspect and disdain by many.

He truly is with us. You can cling to Jesus when you’re alone, persecuted, misunderstood, hated – He understands you. He chose to understand you. Remember the words of 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 and choose to extend that understanding to others and the hope of Jesus to others:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

Q: In what ways was Jesus a “man of sorrows”? How does this impact the way in which you interact with Him?

Q: How has God used your sufferings to bring comfort to others?

Week 2: Matthew 2

Took

Main Point: We can trust God's presence in our lives.

In Psalm 46:1, the Bible reminds us that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” It is amazing to see God's faithful and present help every step of the way in today's story. In fact, we see that every move God led Joseph to make was a part of a prophetically fulfilled plan that was unfolding in real time. Joseph trusted God, even in the presence of Herod's aggression and anger. More importantly, God *was* everywhere Joseph and his family went.

The events of this story, in many ways, foreshadow a critical aspect of the blessing of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God is showing us through the leading of Joseph and his family that He is and will be present not only in the circumstances of our lives, but ultimately, because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, in our very hearts when we respond by faith and receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord. God was with Joseph and, because of Jesus, God is with us today.

Q: What comfort and strength can we draw from God's presence in our lives today?

Q: How different would your life be if you did not have a relationship with Jesus Christ?

CHALLENGES

THINK about what Jesus sacrificed for you. Can you imagine giving up everything, literally everything, for the ones you love? Jesus' incarnation demonstrates the incredible depth at which He cares for you. Seek to greater understand and operate in the knowledge of this love.

PRAY this prayer from the apostle Paul over yourself, your friends and your family:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height

and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. —Ephesians 3:14–19

ACT: Share the whole story of Jesus with someone this week. Jesus' life was marked by sacrifice. Share the story of Jesus with someone and choose to focus on the incarnation. Describe His sacrifice in coming to earth, the way that He was pursued even as a child. Let people know of the mighty king who chose to open Himself to hardship for you and for me.

Hook, Took & Editing by Jonathan Teague

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[®] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2018/02/27/amazon-is-buying-ring-the-pioneer-of-the-video-doorbell-for-1-billion/#15669760706c>

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[®] Blomberg, p. 62.

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[®] Wilkins, p. 93.

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[®] Blomberg, p. 63.

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[®] Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "[Matthew](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 22.

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[®] Blomberg, p. 61.

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[®] Blomberg, p. 66.

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[®] Wilkins, p. 113.

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[®] Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "[Matthew](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 23.