

Pako Morning Service Pako 18/12/2016

Scripture Reading: Psalm 72; Mat 2:1-12; Sermon: "Come and worship"

Congregation, a week out from Christmas, a good question to ask oneself is whether the birth of the Saviour comforts you and drives you to bow down and worship. I ask, for in our text we have a group of people who have a desire to worship and bring gifts (v2), and we see another group who were disturbed at the announcement of Jesus' birth (v3). Now whether Jesus' birth causes you to bow down in worship or disturbs you is dependent on your understanding of who he is. If you understand Jesus to be the promised Messiah and your Saviour and King then you would be happy to worship him, for we realize our forgiveness and reward is great! However, if you don't think you need a Saviour and regard yourself as 'king' of your life then the thought of allowing another king onto the throne of your heart may very well disturb you! Matter of fact, I would go so far and suggest why so many people want to take any reference of Jesus' birth out of Christmas is because, if they acknowledge him as King, then they would also need to consider worship and being accountable to him!

Matthew's prime objective for writing his gospel is to convince his fellow Jews that what the OT has been pointing to is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The King of kings and Lord of lords, the Christ, has been born and he is to be worshipped. Matthew links the Lord's birth with father Abraham who the Jews regarded as their forefather and with king David. In fact, Jesus is born in Bethlehem, Judea, the same city where his ancestor king David was born and reared. King David was seen as Israel's greatest king, and now his great, great, great, great, grand Son, the ultimate King has been born in the same city. Matthew's desire is that his fellow Jews see the importance of this great event and come and worship him. The Magi knew how important this King was for they had come from the East and travelled far to find and worship the new King.

Some say these Magi were a priestly cast of Medes who enjoyed special power to interpret dreams. Daniel refers to "Magoi" in the Babylonian empire [Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7]. It is also interesting that the Magi saw "His star in the east." Now there have been all sorts of theories to explain this star, but what the Magi actually saw remains uncertain. Many have speculated that it may have been a "supernova," [a star exploding,] or Haley's comet [12C], a lining up of planets. Still others suggest it was just supernatural. When I wrote about the Bethlehem star in the bulletin last week, someone sent me a link to a video clip where this lawyer explain how it occurred. Congregation, how it occurred isn't all that important.

Furthermore, we need to keep in mind Matthew's devotion to the OT. Matthew knew that the OT mocks astrologers [Isaiah 47:13-15] and forbids astrology [Jeremiah 10:1-2]. Furthermore, Matthew is using language that alludes to Numbers 24:17; "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." This oracle, spoken by Balaam is widely regarded as Messianic and would have been recognized by his Jewish readers. Whatever it was that they saw, God caused it to be there and used it for his glory.

Again, keeping with Matthew's fulfillment motif, he wishes to convince His Jewish readers that the Messiah has come and that, like these Magi, they should be eager to worship the new King Jesus. If the Magi, with their limited knowledge of the OT knew they had to worship, the Jews had more reason to do so. However, we see the opposite of the Jewish people, especially the leadership. There is actually hostility towards the baby Jesus in Herod's court, even though they had the OT Scriptures to inform them. It just goes to show us that formal knowledge of the Scriptures does not in itself lead to knowing who Jesus is. The Holy Spirit needs to do his work and change our hearts to open to the truth of the Scriptures. And sometimes, that will mean we need to push our pride aside and accept what the Holy Spirit is revealing to us.

Notice also the question the Magi ask is not "Where is the one who is to become king of the Jews?" but "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?" Our Lord's kingship was not conferred on him later on. Jesus didn't become a King, he has always been King and he has come to be the Saviour of the world! Jesus' participation in the Davidic dynasty has already been established by Matthew in his opening chapter with the genealogy. And just as the Magi acknowledge Jesus' kingship, so the Jews needed too and so do we. In fact, it is a little ironic, that the same title given by the Magi to Jesus is the same title that was nailed on the cross by Pilate. We read in v9ff that Magi after receiving instructions, followed the star and it stopped over the place where the child was.

Despite what tradition says, it's uncertain when the Magi visited Jesus in the manger as the shepherds did. Some months may have elapsed since Herod's decree was all boy under two years in the vicinity to be killed. Whatever the case, the Magi came to give their gifts to the new King. Gold is self explanatory. Frankincense is a glittering odorous gum, myrrh exudes from a tree found in Arabia and was a much valued perfume and spice. This verse is most certainly an allusion to Psa 72:10-11. [Psa 68:29; Isa 49:7]. **"The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him."** Again Matthew is alluding to the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures that point so clearly to the Messiah who was now born.

Now contrast this desire to worship and pay homage to Jesus the king by the Magi with Herod who is deeply disturbed along with most of Jerusalem. Herod was paranoid as he became older about his power. And the people of Jerusalem, although looking forward to the King Messiah, would have realized that a new king coming on the scene would only mean more

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persecution and how right they were. Herod inquires from the chief priests and teachers of the law and soon discovers that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (v4-5). Matthew again quotes the OT recorded that in Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2, to show the fulfilment of the prophecies spoken through the prophets even after seven centuries had passed. Matthew adds a little from 2 Sam 5:2, making it plain that the ruler in Micah 5:2 is none other than the one who fulfills the promises to David.

Despite what Herod says to the Magi, about desiring to worship him, we know from verse 16 that he issues a decree to kill all the boys under two years old in Bethlehem and surrounding regions thus fulfilling the words spoken by Jeremiah [Mat 2:18ff]. So, by and large, the Jews reject the new King, even though Matthew plainly says that Jesus is the Messiah, coming from Abraham, born in David's line and certain to be shepherd and ruler of Israel. The Sadducees, Pharisees and chief priests, and Herod had no interest in worshipping the new King. All were worried about their authority and power. If they had the slightest regard for the OT Scripture they would have recognised the Messiah. The OT was pointing to him virtually from day one! And when one reads Isaiah it's full of such passages [Isa 42, 49, 53]. And so, instead of the Jews bowing down to worship, the Gentiles from the East do.

The final verse speaks of a dream where the Lord was making sure that no harm would come to the Saviour and King. His time to be sacrificed was not yet upon him. Congregation it so interesting that Matthew after giving all the proof texts from the OT showing fulfilment of all God's promises that the Jews and even the leaders of the church still failed to take notice. They refused to acknowledge Jesus as King of kings and they refused to worship.

Today, many people hear about Christmas. They hear about the child being born. They sing the carols with gusto. They spend big on gifts for each other. They have dinners and parties, but for so many that is where it stops. For the great majority Jesus' birth is no more than an excuse for a holiday and a family get together. Rather than having a desire to worship the new king, and ensuring he is the centre of all their celebrations, their celebrations centre around themselves.

Now before we become judgmental about people's attitude concerning the Christ, it is one thing to hear about Jesus, it's quite another to know him as Saviour. I dare say many people sing carols about Jesus and they have no idea who they are singing about! In today's world, we shouldn't assume that people understand who Jesus actually is. That would be taking far too much more granted. The majority of people in our communities don't really know Jesus or the meaning of his birth or death for that matter. When I grew up as a little kid, everyone went to Sunday school, even kids from families that never went to church. It's no longer true. Now they go to arranged sporting fixtures, for it is the only day of the week that is left.

So please don't under estimate the great privilege of knowing Jesus as Saviour and King. Don't under estimate the privilege of being able to read the Christmas story to your children and grand children. Many in our communities do not read the Scriptures and therefore they don't know Jesus and perhaps they even get a false picture of who Jesus the King actually is. If Jesus is mentioned in our shopping centres and television advertising, he is often portrayed as meek and mild and a great teacher to help us deal with social injustice. He is portrayed as someone who was a great moral example.

However, the Scriptures also teach that God in his love sent Jesus to be the Saviour of the world. He was sent to die for our sins so that those who believe may sins forgiven and have life eternal. This is the message that Matthew tries to convey to the Jews. I put it to you that many people don't have a grasp of this fundamental truth. Of course, we need to explain who this Jesus is with the greatest of care. We need to tell people how good it is to know him as our Saviour! We need to somehow convey to our families and friends that we have this wonderful relationship with the Creator of the universe because Jesus has won forgiveness and eternal life for us. When people can see that you love life and that you have nothing to fear and that you enjoy this wonderful freedom in Christ then that will be attractive. That's the good news.

The other day I picked up a Christmas tract and it mentioned the birth of Jesus in a few lines and then it went on and on about Jesus returning as Judge. Yes, I know and you know that Jesus will come again as judge, but that is not why he came. He came to pay for our sins and redeem sinners. I think some Christians, the probably mean well, try to scare people into the kingdom. I don't think that works very well.

Christmas is not about judgment but about life! In the OT, God's people were encouraged to live such good lives in obedience to God and his good laws, that the nations around them would be amazed that God was so close to them and blessed them with such great laws. When fully understood, Jesus birth it is reason for worship and living in obedience. Brothers and sisters this is the message that has been entrusted to us. We need to pass it on in our speaking and living. We need to pass it on in our life styles so that the people around us will say, "Wow, how blessed are these people to have a God cares for them in such a marvellous way!

It is my prayer that you came to worship today and that will be your desire this Christmas period, for the Saviour of sinners was born and he is King forever. And as we do so, may those who who not know Jesus be attracted to him by the way we celebrate and worship. Amen.