

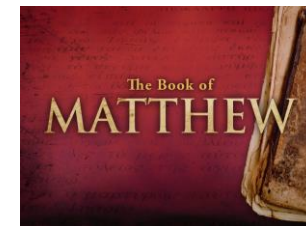
Matthew – The King in Exile
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
February 21, 2021

Diaspora XLIX – The Church Scattered, Forty-ninth
Sunday

Text: Matthew 2:13-23

Purpose: Jesus came into a world where some sought to worship Him, while others sought to kill Him. Often as believers we feel as if we are in exile in this life – alienated from the place of rest – Heaven. One day, God will welcome us to a place He has prepared for those that long for His appearing.

Two weeks ago, I began a new sermon series based upon the Book of Matthew. As I mentioned then, the Book of Matthew was written by a Jew to a Jewish audience. We reviewed the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to David – 14 generations, from David to the exile in Babylon – 14 generations, and from the exile to the birth of Jesus – 14 generations.

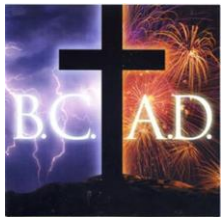


Sometimes as Christians, we forget that Jesus was a real live person, born to a normal, ordinary family. Think back to those times where you have held an infant in your arms. Jesus started out in much the same manner – an ordinary baby.

We are so quick to move from the birth of Jesus to His public ministry, that we forget that it took years of nurture, protection, and care to raise Jesus from infancy to adulthood. Today, I want us to remember that even though Jesus is the Creator of the Universe, the Son of God, the Promised One of Israel; Jesus was still a helpless child in the arms of Mary and Joseph.



It has been said that Jesus' birth is the great divide of history. Our calendars reflect that by saying B.C. and A.D. – before and after the birth of Christ. When the calendar was first set up in the third century, they made their best estimate as to when Christ was born and began marking time from that point forward – AD – anno Domini, which is Latin for “The year of our Lord.”



Years later, it was discovered that maybe Jesus was born about 5 to 7 years earlier than originally thought. Many scholars have been able to pin down the years that Herod the Great ruled that region was 40 B.C. to 4 B.C. In the story of the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great was still alive. That means Jesus must have been born prior to 4 B.C.

The Book of Matthew tries to demonstrate to his Jewish audience, Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. He emphasizes the Kingship aspect of Jesus. Over and over, you will see how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant and is the true King of the Jews.

Later on, in Matthew, you will see how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and is the sacrificial Lamb of God when He voluntarily went to the cross.

A Miraculous Birth - Matthew 2:1-25

Before we move on to our focus passage of scripture this morning, I want us to fix in our minds how miraculous the birth of Jesus truly was.



Many enemies of the Gospel focus in upon this one point in the story of Jesus as an attempt to discredit the deity of Jesus Christ. Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. They had not done anything that would have caused Mary to become pregnant. During this engagement period, an angel of the Lord came to Mary first and told her how she was chosen for the task of bearing God's son. Joseph at first could not believe it, but after being assured in a dream, he accepted Mary as his wife, and took on the role of earthly father for the Child of Promise.

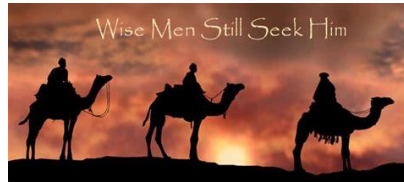
Mary was a virgin and many seek to discredit God's word at this critical point. If Jesus was not virgin born, then He would have inherited a sin nature just like you and I and could not have been our perfect sacrifice on Calvary. Because Jesus' Father was the Holy Spirit, He inherited the nature of His Father – sinless.

The closing verse in chapter one reminds us that Joseph did not know Mary (have marital relations) until after the birth of Jesus.

The Coming of the Wise Men – Matthew 2:1-12

The next story we encounter before our passage of scripture I read this morning, involves the Wise Men. The first week in January we sang about the “Three Kings” of the Orient. If you read the account in Matthew, you will not find three kings listed – you will find three gifts, but not three kings.

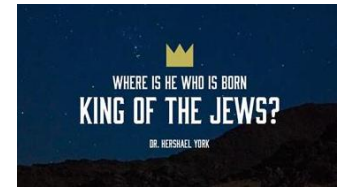
I think a good sermon topic for Epiphany Sunday could be, “Wise Men Still Seek Him.” Maybe I will do that next year.



Let’s think about those Wise Men for a moment. They have also been called Magi. These men were well versed in astrology and understood that one day; a king would be born to the Jews. As they studied the stars, looking for a sign, it came one day. This star was so unusual that it caused them to gather gifts fit for a King and make a journey that could have taken several months or even a year. They left the comfort of their homes, brought something of worth to bring as a gift of worship, and willingly came and humbled themselves before an infant King.

If you were to receive a sign from God, like the wise men, to go and do a similar thing, would you? Would you leave your home, family, and friends, and travel to a far away place at great cost, to honor the King of the Jews? Few today are even willing to get out of their homes, travel a few miles by car, sit in a warm sanctuary, to be able to sing praises to God and hear God’s word preached. No – I doubt many would do as the wise men did. Remember: Wise Men still seek Him! Foolish Men ignore Him.

When the Wise Men arrived in Jerusalem, they inquired, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” If these men traveled all this way, surely others would have known about this great King that was born. Their appearance caused quite an uproar in Jerusalem.

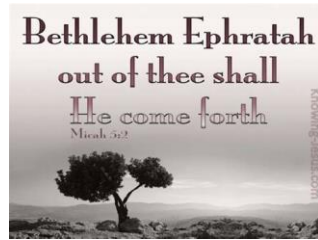


The ruling King of that region was Herod the Great. He bought and bribed his way into this position and had been appointed “King of the Jews.” Over the 36 years Herod ruled that region, he had built great buildings. He had built the Herodium, which towered over the landscape, located about 8 miles south west of Jerusalem. He had built a fortress in the desert at Masada. He had built the huge place in Jerusalem beside the Temple Mount. He had also built a summer palace at Caesarea. He had taxed the people heavily, enslaved as many as 60 thousand, and murdered his enemies, including his mother, his sons, and his advisors. Someone once quipped, “It was better to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.” He was an evil and jealous man.

Now these strange foreigners come into town seeking a newborn “King of the Jews.” He inquired as to when they saw the sign – the star. He wanted to know so he could eliminate any threat to his throne. I understand in the latter days of Herod’s life, he was bloated, discolored, disfigured, and in agony for a long time until his death. He was buried by one of his sons at the Herodium with much pomp and ceremony. I am sure when he died, many were saying, “Ding, Dong, the wicked King is dead.”

The Wise Men found out from the scribes in Jerusalem that yes, a King was to be born in Bethlehem. They quoted Micah 5:2, “*But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are*

not the least among the rulers of Judea; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.” I find it sad that the scribes and priest had head knowledge of the coming king, but not enough interest to travel five miles to see if what these wise men said was true. How many today have head knowledge of the things of God, but not enough heart to sincerely seek the things of God?



The wise men came and found the child living in a house at this time and presented their gifts as an act of worship. Apparently, the infant child was too small to travel back to their home town and so Mary and Joseph stayed some time. Some people surmise they could have stayed there a year or more in Bethlehem. So, all of those Christmas cards showing wise men giving gifts there in a cave or barn, with the child lying in a manger may not be accurate.

The wise men bowed their knee to the King of Kings. They presented their gifts and were satisfied. King Herod told the wise men that he wanted to also go and worship this newborn king. He wanted them to report back with news of the infant King. But the wise men were divinely warned not to return by way of Jerusalem, instead they went home another way. That night, Joseph was warned in a dream to take the young child and flee to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. Joseph and Mary obeyed and quickly fled.

Once Herod learned that the Wise Men had gone another way, he dispatched assassins to kill every infant child in the region under the age of two in hopes of eliminating any future threat to his kingdom.

This infanticide was foretold in Jeremiah 31:15, “*A voice was heard in Ramah (1 mile south of Jerusalem) lamenting, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.*”



The King in Exile – Matthew 2:13-23

Can you imagine being Mary and Joseph? They left their home town, traveled to Bethlehem to register for the census. They were visited by shepherds and now Wise Men from the east bearing gifts of gold – a gift for a king, frankincense – used by a priest in the temple for worship – and myrrh – used as an embalming spice. All very costly, but greatly needed by Mary and Joseph if they were to travel to Egypt.

The Parallels between Jesus’ Earthly Life and Israel’s Story

When you stop and read the story of Jesus’ flight to Egypt, for me, it brings up images of the nation of Israel’s prior encounters with Egypt. There are some very strong parallels between Jesus’ earthy life and the story of Israel.



Matthew 1:1 to 2: 15 Genesis	Jesus' beginning in Bethlehem and ending in exile in Egypt Israel's beginning with Abraham and ending in exile in Egypt	God called Israel to be a holy nation and they failed time and time again. Jesus came to fulfill God's plan of salvation and succeeded.
Matthew 2:16-18 Exodus 1:22	King Herod ordered infant children murdered Pharaoh, King of Egypt, ordered infant male children killed	God called Israel to be a servant to all nations, but they failed. Jesus came and became a servant to Man and won the victory for all.
Matthew 2:18-23 Joshua	Jesus Return to Israel – City of Nazareth Israel Reclaims Promised Land	Israel was God's favorite son, but failed to live up to the calling. Jesus was God's Son and was obedient, even to the point of death on a cross.
Matthew 3:13-17 Exodus 3	The Commissioning of Jesus – at the Baptism of Jesus The Commissioning of Moses – at the Burning Bush	Now God has placed an infant child in the lap of a young couple to protect and defend Him. While Israel was in Egypt, they grew into a great nation. While Jesus was in Egypt, I am sure he grew in stature and wisdom. We do not know how long Mary and Joseph needed to stay in Egypt. It could have been a few months or a few years. After the death of Herod, it was time to return home.
Matthew 4:1-11 Exodus	Jesus – 40 days in Wilderness Israel – 40 years in Wilderness	
Matthew 5 Exodus 20	Jesus – Sermon on the Mount Moses – Mount Sinai – Ten Commandments	



These Old Testament and New Testament comparisons between Jesus and the nation of Israel are striking in their similarities.

They intended to head back to their homeland, but instead settled in Nazareth, in a small out of the way village. While in Israel several years ago, I stood on a mountain outside Nazareth. Today it is a thriving village nestled on a hillside. During Jesus' day, there were probably only a dozen or so families in that city. No wonder one of Jesus' disciples later commented with scorn when he said, *"nothing good ever came out of Nazareth."*

But that was the place where Jesus grew up. Not much is mentioned about his years there. The Gospel of Luke records a brief story of Jesus when he was twelve years old, how he stayed behind in Jerusalem teaching in the synagogue instead of going home with his family. Other than this one instance, there is nothing about Jesus' early life in the accepted canon of scripture.

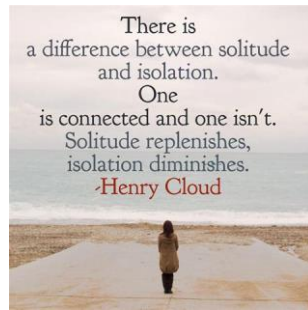
Our scripture today acknowledges that the King of the Jews spent time in exile away from His homeland. But once the threat was gone, His family returned home.

Our Exiles

How many of us today feel as if we are in exile? That place where we don't want to be, trapped waiting for something else to occur so we can go home again.

Maybe you are a young adult searching for a place or a person to fill that place you have identified as empty. Can you imagine how Mary felt living in Egypt away from her family and friends? She trusted God while in exile and you can too.

Maybe you are a young couple striving to reach a place of stability – financially, emotionally, and relationally – and feel as if you are in a place of unsettledness. I cannot imagine how Joseph felt – responsible for this young family – worried about how they would make ends meet. But Joseph trusted God while exiled in Egypt.



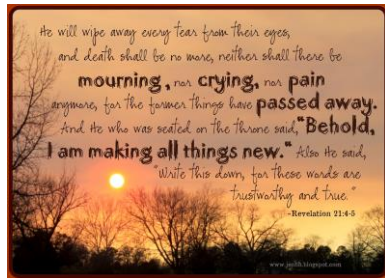
Maybe your marriage is not working and you feel trapped and in exile. Give your marriage to God and let Him become the center of your relationship.

Maybe your job or work is not accomplishing its intended purpose and – you feel lost, trapped, and far from your planned place of accomplishment. Your business could be posting more losses each year and you feel as if you have no where else to turn while in economic exile. I would encourage you to put first things first – put God first in all your relationships – live by, and trust God's ways of honesty and truthfulness in every business transaction. You may not succeed in the way the world calls success – but at the end of the day, you can sleep well knowing you tried to live up to the standards of Christ's kingdom.

Now today, as we are in our 49th week of exile as a church and community, exiled in our self-quarantined period of time due to the COVID -19 pandemic, we all feel some or all of the emotions related to being in exile. We may feel completely estranged from family, friends, and even church. We may experience a feeling of being disconnected, unsteady, uncertain, lost, and alone. We long for conversation, laughter, a warm touch, a handshake, a smile that can be seen and shared. Some within our church have lost loved ones recently and that loneliness is compounded by the isolation we feel as we wear masks and social distance.

Exile – all of us will, or have experienced this place away from where we feel we want to belong. Maybe you are there now, maybe you have been there.

I have come to understand that the life we experience here on earth is really one of exile. For those that have come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, He is our resting place. He is our haven of rest. He is the place we come to when we are searching for rest and renewal. When we come to the end of our life, He will be the One we will be looking forward to seeing.



Jesus told His disciples that in His house are many mansions. Jesus told them He was going to prepare a place for them. *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* (John 14)

Our hearts longing will not find rest until we find rest in Jesus Christ. There is a God shaped void in our life and it will not be filled with anything except God Himself. We travel to this place searching for that thing that will fill our void – and we come up empty. We get in our car and drive there to see this special thing, purchase that prized item, experience this latest thrill – and we come away empty. Until we find our rest in Jesus Christ, we will never experience true rest and peace.



I want to encourage you to look deep in your heart.

What is keeping you from fully surrendering your life – all of your life – over to the will of God for you?

What is drawing you away from committing your future to the one that holds the future?

What is keeping you from accepting the free gift of grace offered by Jesus Christ?

Christ came as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He came to lay His life down as an atonement for our sins. No one took His life; He willingly laid it down to restore our broken relationship with God. God is a gentleman – He will not force us to accept Him. He is waiting – receive Him now.



LET US PRAY