



Finding Your King

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV84)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." 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 Christ 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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" 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 make a careful search 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 in the east 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 and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Christmas scene is completed today as we hear about the Magi making it to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. Reading and rereading through this section, I started to feel like the Magi are on an epic quest of sorts. As far as we can piece together, the Magi are researchers...wise men...people who know things. They may very well have been astrologers - people who looked to the stars to predict the future. They were accustomed to watching the skies, but somewhere along the way they were given a different reason to be scanning the skies: a prophecy.

It had been nearly 600 years prior that a man named Daniel came to Babylon, where these Magi are most likely from. After proving his worth by interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the king placed Daniel in charge of all of Babylon's wisemen. (Daniel 2:48) Daniel started to have these astrologers look at the stars differently. Instead of trying to determine their own fate and future, Daniel taught them about the Chosen One to come, the King above all kings, a king who would bring peace to their hearts by ruling over them - not by bringing different laws, but by vanquishing their sin and leading them to everlasting life in heaven. This King would be heralded by a star. As the prophecy foretold, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." (Numbers 24:17) That prophecy was foretold by someone who was not even a Jew, someone who was trying to curse the Jewish people. Yet God had Balaam utter those words, which gave the Magi something to look for among the stars, searching for when the King of the Jews would arrive.

Long after Daniel was gone, the Magi kept looking to the stars. Maybe they went back to their own ways, but even if they did, they noticed when it happened. A star rose up out of the east, out of the land of Israel. It was uncharted; they had never seen it before. Maybe they remembered the prophecy right away or they had to search through their history and find what Daniel had said so many centuries ago. Regardless of how quickly they realized what it was, they got into gear. They packed up their belongings, loaded up with fine and expensive gifts, and they set out to meet this King of the Jews, their true King.

After their long journey, they reached the most logical place to search for the one who had been born king of the Jews: Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. They sought direction at the palace inquiring where the new baby royalty was. They were inching closer and closer to completing their quest. They needed just a little bit more direction to find the long foretold King.

For every hero on a quest, there are also obstacles, villains who wish to thwart their plans. Enter another king: King Herod. He was a man known for both his humanitarian aid efforts and for his harsh, inhumane treatment of people. For every beautification effort in Jerusalem and new building constructed, there were also covert operations taking place to get rid of any potential threats to his throne and his power, even going so far as to not only kill his brother-in-law, but also his own wife and three of his sons. When Herod finds out from these Magi that there is a rival to his throne, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him because they don't know what Herod will do to keep his throne.

One reason why Herod is so disturbed is because he knows that he is not a rightful descendant of David, the kingly line about whom God said the kingdom will belong forever. Herod knew of the prophecies. He knew that a king of the Jews would reign over all the nations, but Herod wasn't Jewish. He had no right whatsoever to the throne in Jerusalem. This threat, this rightful heir of the throne must be eliminated.

To get rid of this threat, Herod tried to play the Magi. He called the chief priests and the teachers of the law together and found out from Micah's prophecy in the Bible that the King of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod told the Magi to "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." (verse 8) This was never Herod's intention. As the rest of the story goes, Herod would "worship" the King of the Jews, Jesus, by ordering his execution. Herod would kill little baby boys two years old and younger in Bethlehem to secure his throne, to keep his position of power.

At this point, I don't think any of us can relate to Herod. He's obviously the villain, the bad guy on this quest. I'm more like the Magi. I come to church to see Jesus, my newborn King. I'm the hero of the story. But is there any of Herod in us? Are we threatened by this idea of having a king in our lives other than ourselves?

We don't generally look at our lives that way, that we are kings and queens of our own lives, but we know that we like to be in control. We don't want to be told what to do. We don't want to hear that we belong to someone else. The idea of bowing down to a king just kind of makes us chafe. "You can't take my freedom from me. I make my own path in life. I'm sure this one born the King of the Jews is a really nice, benevolent King, but take away my freedom, no thank you." Maybe even we as Americans feel this more than others. Our nation's forefathers rebelled against a king. They wanted independence. They wanted to be represented fairly and be heard. They wanted freedom. We want that too. We want to rule our own lives. And out of that selfishness, we want to cut this other King out of our lives. Because if I don't, then I have to give up control of my life, to think first about serving this King of the Jews before serving myself. When I don't because I don't want to give up control, we cut God out of our lives and become our own villain, our own obstacle in the quest to find the King of kings.

On our own, we cannot overcome this selfishness that wants to cut God out of our lives so that we can be our own kings and queens. Instead, the King of the Jews must seek us first, just as he did with the Magi. Most likely through the words of Daniel, the King of the Jews had found the Magi centuries ago and brought a new rule to their lives. Instead of trying to make their own fate and future, Jesus gave them a new future with him as their king. He gave them peace with their Almighty Creator, the Father in heaven, because he, their King, would pay for their sins. This King promised to suffer and die for them so that they would always belong to his kingdom. No earthly king dies so that people would belong to his kingdom, but this one does. As a marker to prove that he would keep his Word, he gave them the sign of his star. He led them to Bethlehem by Micah's prophecy. He sought them and brought the Magi into citizenship in his eternal kingdom.

As the King of kings sought the Magi with this message and these words, the Magi in turn sought to worship him as the King of their lives, guided by his Word. This King that the Magi sought is the same King that has sought and found us. He has won us over with who he is and what he has done for us. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He gave his life for me. So now, I give my life to him, instead of demanding to be my own king.

That's exactly what the Magi did when they made their way to Bethlehem and finally found this baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph. They were completely filled over the top, to the max with exuberance and joy and happiness when they found their King, Jesus. They immediately paid homage to him by bowing down and worshiping him. They lavished him with expensive gifts of gold and incense and myrrh – expensive, sweet smelling ointments. This was the King of the Jews - their King who ruled their lives.

I don't know all the twists and turns that were in your journey in finding the King of kings or how exactly he sought you out, but I do know that your King, Jesus Christ, has found you. How do you worship him as your King? Have you given up trying to rule your own life, gotten out of your own way as the villain opposing the King of kings? Do you do everything in life thinking about how this action or these words bring honor and please your King? Do you give to him your very best of your time, talents, and treasures? How do you make the one who has been born the King of the Jews the most important person in your life?

With Christ as our King, we look at all our blessings, our family and friends, our entire lives differently. It's not about how I can get all that I want, make my own decisions, be in control of my life, but it is about how I can serve my King. What gifts can I bring him, like the Magi? Maybe I will give more to him, increase my offering in church. Maybe I will spend more time in prayer asking him to rule my heart and the hearts of those around me. Maybe I will purposefully set aside time to read about him in his Word and worship him, that I would give my time and talents to help my fellow human beings when I am able to. And there is so much more that we can do to serve our King in our lives.

In all these things, whatever we do, we do it for the glory of our King. We give him our best in all that we do in life because he sought us out to be our King and give us all those benefits of the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting in heaven. He found us. Now this is our quest, like the Magi: we seek to honor him as the King of our lives. Amen.