Rediscover ChristmaS (2)

## (Matthew 2:1-23)

Welcome all of you. Today, as we continue with part 2 of Rediscover Christmas, I want to pick up where the Scriptures left off, because we tend to lump all of the events regarding the infancy of Christ into one great holy moment. And so, the reality is that it’s entirely possible that you can have all of these traditions and sentimental feelings about Christmas and completely miss the significance of what the Bible actually says.

As we turn to the word of God this morning, I want to pick up and focus on the moment in time where the Bible says in Matthew chapter 2, “After Jesus was born” (Matthew 2:1). And I think this is important because we get so caught up in the Christmas story, with a baby being born at the worst possible time with nowhere to stay, there is the chaos of the stable with the animals, and then we bring into the scene all the different characters. And so, we’ve got this pretty little manger scene in our minds as we bring in the angels, the shepherds, and the Magi, but we need to remember that as Joseph is going through this all he had to go on was what he heard in a dream.

I love the Christmas story, but I wonder if we don’t often miss the significance of the faith of Joseph and Mary. I mean, these are major life decisions that they are making, and I don’t know about you, but I don’t believe my dreams. And yet, Joseph and Mary are walking through this by faith, they have no idea how or where they are going to end up, and all their guidance has come from dreams and visions of angels. And so, we are watching Joseph and Mary walk through this by faith and it is possible to miss the significance because we are watching with the knowledge of the outcome.

Today, as we Rediscover Christmas, my hope is that we will discover hidden significance in the Christmas story, because it’s hard for us to understand what Joseph and Mary were going through. I mean, for them these were deeply troubling times, and yet we know that no matter what we are facing,

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

But they didn’t have this Scripture yet, the New Testament hadn’t been written, and it’s so hard to recognize the significance of what you’re walking through in the moment.

As we come to our text today in Matthew chapter 2, we stand in the afterglow of that first Christmas, cognizant of the phrase in verse one, “After Jesus was born.” We have seen how God stepped down from eternity into a virgin womb, enclosing himself in her humanity as if she were wrapping paper, and then presenting himself to us as a gift in human form. And so, here we are today, the paper is still falling away, and the Bible says,

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

God borrowed the womb of a virgin named Mary, he partnered with her to wrap his gift, but even before the gift was presented to us, Luke tells us that the gift was discovered,

“When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb…” (Luke 1:41).

John the Baptist started leaping with joy in the presence of Jesus, and yet today we’re still unwrapping Jesus, we have knowledge, but we’re just catching glimpses of his glory, and we haven’t yet been fully exposed to the fullness of all that dwells in him.

God presented himself to us as a gift, Immanuel, God with us, so that we could declare,

“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father” (John 1:14).

Fresh in our minds are visions of his humanity, “We have seen his glory,” a baby laid in a manger, surrounded by angels, shepherds, and sheep, we are captivated by the glory of the One and Only. But it’s after Christmas, as we Rediscover Christmas, as we fast-forward to Matthew chapter 2, that the Bible tells us,

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:1-2).

And so, this is later, this is after Jesus was born that these Magi from the east came. And we need to understand that these are not prophets, not theologians, they’re not Bible scholars, they’re not even Jews, but they are educated men, scientists or astrologers. The Magi are Gentiles who have traveled a thousand miles from Persia, not because of prophecy, not because of the Scriptures, but because they said,

“We saw his star in the East and have come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2).

Just as John the Baptist recognized the Savior when he was still wrapped in the womb of his mother, the Magi came from the east following a star, following something they shouldn’t have even been following, because they sensed that there was something greater happening. In other words, Jesus, the Savior of the world was hidden, the gift was wrapped, but there was divine revelation, there was discovery as David declared,

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there” (Psalms 139:7-8).

And so, the Magi didn’t need a preacher or a prophet, they didn’t need the Scriptures, because God revealed himself through a star that they had never seen before. It’s no wonder the Bible says,

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (Psalm 19:1-2).

Somehow, they understood with the coming of that star in the heavens that a promised King had come on earth. And of course, God can use anything, he can speak to you through a donkey, you can experience God in the valley of the shadow of death, and in the same way, God preached a message through a star to the Magi telling them that a new King had come.

“When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3).

You may have heard the phrase, “If mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy,” and that is exactly what we see happening here. King Herod was disturbed by this news and all of Jerusalem because when Herod is upset, when he gets angry, “Ain’t nobody happy.”

And so, “He called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law” in verse 4, and he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah…” (Matthew 2:4-6).

We read this prophecy from Micah chapter 5 last week. We saw that from that little town of Bethlehem, out of that little place, out of that place of Jacob’s greatest pain, “Out of you,” Micah said,

“Will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (Matthew 2:6).

And so, it was out of that little town of Bethlehem that came God’s greatest purpose, but Herod certainly wasn’t going to sit back and watch silently as his throne was threatened. The Bible says in verse 7,

“Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 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" (Matthew 2:7-8).

In other words, when Herod heard that the Magi were looking for a new King, he became jealous and fearful. And so, pretending that he wanted to go and worship this King too, he directed them to Bethlehem, but secretly he wanted to kill their dream.

Now, the Magi only had 5 more miles to go, and so, “After they had heard the king, they went on their way.” And verse 9 tells us,

“The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed” (Matthew 2:9-10).

Now, you would’ve thought that Jerusalem would’ve been the place where Jesus was born, because that’s where the temple was. That’s the place where the chief priests were, that was the center of religious life in Judea, but Jesus was born 5 miles away. The Bible says, when the Magi arrived at the little town of Bethlehem they were overjoyed because they knew something big was happening. When the star stopped over the place where the child was the revelation was validated, their journey was successful, and so verse 11 says,

“On coming to the house, they saw the child…” (Matthew 2:11).

In other words, Jesus was no longer in the stable, he is bigger now, he’s in a house, he’s not a baby anymore. I know that for some of you that destroys your theology, because many of us have complicated the truth with tradition, we’ve diluted the Scriptures, believing Christmas carols instead of studying the Bible. But the Bible says on coming to the house, they saw the Christ, the child who is now a toddler,

“…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” (Matthew 2:11).

This was most likely a large caravan of travelers coming into Bethlehem, were not told that there were three Magi, but that there were three gifts, and each of these gifts are symbolic. The gold represents the divinity of Jesus, incense represented the priesthood of Jesus, and myrrh represented the preparation for Jesus’ burial at his death. And so, the Magi presented Jesus with these gifts and then verse 12 says,

“Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route” (Matthew 2:12).

God tells the Magi in a dream to go back another way because there was a trap waiting for them. I can’t help but wonder if God is going to take us back another way, he wants us to learn how to go back another way in the new year, because some of us can only have church one way, only do business one way, only interact with people one way, because I believe God wants to do something new.

The Bible tells us that the Magi went home another way, and Herod was left waiting and looking, but he couldn’t find Jesus because an angel had spoken to Joseph in a dream. The Bible tells us that the angel said,

“Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him" (Matthew 2:13).

Now, to the Jews that would’ve been the last place that they would expect God to keep his son safe, because that was the place where they spent 400 years as slaves, but Matthew tells us,

“Joseph got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod" (Matthew 2:14).

And so, now Jesus is back in the place that God brought his people out of, and on one hand it looks like Jesus is going to Egypt to escape Herod, but on the other hand the Bible says,

“So was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matthew 2:14-15).

Maybe you have noticed that sometimes God reroutes you, taking you to unexpected places, and so Jesus had to go to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, but he was also fulfilling the word that God had spoken through the prophet Hosea.

However, “When Herod realized,” in verse 16, “that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi” (Matthew 2:16).

Here we find that Matthew is giving us a panoramic view of the sovereignty of God, because sometimes we get stuck in our own human perspective. In other words, we get stuck trying to answer questions at the level of Herod, wondering why so-and-so said that, why did they do that, or why is this happening, when the question can only be answered by heaven. Matthew gives us a deeper understanding, telling us in verse 17,

“Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (Matthew 2:17-18).

And so, once again we find prophecy fulfilled as the Holy Spirit reminds us of Rachel whom we read about last week. It was her tomb that was just outside of Bethlehem, it was Rachel who died giving birth to Benjamin, and so she is considered by many to be the mother of Israel which is why she is seen weeping for her children.

For 2 years Herod was searching for Jesus, killing the children, but Jesus was hidden in Egypt. That is, until one day, verse 19 says,

“An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead” (Matthew 2:19-20).

God said, you can go home now, those who were trying to kill Jesus are dead now. You don’t have to worry, you don’t have to hide, you don’t need to go into another year being afraid of what you used to be afraid of, because your enemy is dead. Those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead now.

The prophecy of Hosea chapter 11 is fulfilled,

“Out of Egypt I have called my son” (Hosea 11:1).

Matthew gives us a greater understanding of these words, not just speaking of the experience of Israel as God’s chosen son, but giving greater depth and power to Hosea’s words, he points to a more significant event, predicting that the child, Jesus, the Messiah, would be called out of Egypt. And so, God was doing something different, something more significant, as heaven spoke to the prophets, and spoke to Joseph as he brought his son out of Egypt.

There are some of you today whom God is speaking to, because you thought Christmas was all about Bethlehem, and some of you missed it, but what about Egypt? God says, “wait for it, you don’t have to understand why you are where you are, or what is going on in your life right now, or why you had to go through everything you had to go through.” You see, the Bible says,

“For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay” (Habakkuk 2:3).

And so, it doesn’t have to make sense right now, you just need to wait for it, it’s going to make sense in a minute, because God is going to show you.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

Some of you are waiting for your circumstances to change, waiting for your situation to change, but God is waiting for your obedience. You see, you thought Christmas was all about Bethlehem, but what about Egypt, what has God called you to do, where has God called you to go, and yet he is still waiting for you to move? God wants to do something significant this year, he is speaking to you, but you’ve got to get in step with his purpose, you’ve got to be in alignment with his will. And I believe that is why some of you haven’t seen your breakthrough, you say that you believe, but until you step out in obedience doing what he already told you to do you will not see any yokes broken in your life.

Matthew tells us that Joseph got up in verse 21, “took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee” (Matthew 2:21-22).

You see, most of us thought we understood the Christmas story, we thought we understood the significance of Bethlehem, with an unexpected delivery in an unexpected place. But the entire context of the Christmas story is obedient faith, that God doesn’t ask your opinion, he doesn’t need your input, because he had planned this from before the creation of the world. And so, sometimes there are things that God is bringing into your life that are born in Bethlehem and then there are things that are brought out of Egypt.

When Joseph left Egypt with his family, he wanted to go back to Bethlehem, he intended to go back where Jesus was born, but he didn’t because once again he was warned in a dream. He heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, and so he was afraid to go there, and the Bible says in verse 23,

“He went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene” (Matthew 2:23).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but he escaped to Egypt where he was kept in safety until the time that those who sought his life were dead. In the same way, there are some of you whom God has been keeping you in this season, but God is about to give you my new assignment.

Joseph understood the assignment, he didn’t understand his dreams, he didn’t understand why, he didn’t understand how, but he just took God’s word by faith. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, escaped to Egypt, only to be raised in Nazareth, but Joseph wouldn’t call him what other people called him. Joseph called him what God called him, the prophet Isaiah said,

“And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Even though Jesus was born in obscurity, born in a little place, and even though his birth was followed by mothers crying and grieving over their children who were no more, we must recognize that the coming of Jesus is really an opportunity to see God’s faithfulness in our lives. The coming of Jesus wasn’t intended to leave us holding onto our past, mourning and grieving over what was or what should’ve been, but to empower us by his grace to step out with hope into the future. Our past only magnifies the story of what God has done for us, and even now God is still working to fulfill the plans he has for you and what he wants to do through you.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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