

“Word and Worship” – Matthew 2:1-12

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.sobc.net.]

Welcome. Turn with me to Matthew, chapter 2. We are going to finish the story we began last Sunday, the story of the Magi coming to worship the young Jesus. Last time, I said to you that I wanted us to learn from this text something about the Gospel, something about God, something about God’s Word, and something about God’s Son. We discussed the first two of those things and will cover the second two this morning, followed by some reflections on how the various characters in the story respond to the news of Jesus.

So, just to recap, here’s what we saw so far:

The Gospel: The Gospel Is for Outsiders and the Nations (Not Just Insiders and Israel)

We learned this from the fact that it is Magi from the East who are drawn to Jesus. That may not mean much to us, but a Jewish reader in the first century the assumption would have been that these men, how ever many their number, would have been Gentiles (non-Jews) and pagans since Magi were wrapped up in astrology and typically other practices that God’s Word forbids. But the fact that they are drawn to Jesus as the King and as the Messiah is another evidence we have in Matthew’s Gospel that God is fulfilling those promises we find in the Old Testament concerning how God would draw the nations to himself through the Messiah, through the Christ. Well, that’s what we are seeing here. The nations are being drawn to Jesus. That’s good news for us, because we too are part of those nations and we too are outsiders to the Jewish covenant. But, for those of us with faith in Christ, we have been brought in.

Next we learned something about our God:

God: God Meets Us Where We Are to Make His Son Known and Worshiped

What prompted this thought was the way in which God gets the attention of the Magi. God used a star to get the attention of these pagan astrologers. Even though astrology was forbidden in the Old Testament, God used a star. That is not to say that God does anything sinful here. No! Far from it! Instead He does something merciful and gracious here. He uses a star to get their attention because that is where they were looking. He uses a star in much the same way that he may use the empty bank account of a gambler or the hangover of the drunk or the expulsion of a high school student. He uses it to get our attention and lead us to Jesus. Why? Because God loves us and wants us to love Jesus. And because He has to meet us where we are if we are to get to where He is. God initiates. God accommodates Himself to us to reach us. The Son of God comes to us, becomes one of us that He might save us. If you are a Christian, you have one of the stories of how God got your attention. When left to your own devices you were busy sinning, busy stargazing, but then God broke into your life. What an amazing God! He meets us where we are. He doesn’t wait for us to get it all together. He comes to us when we are a mess.

Today, I’d like to build on these lessons. But before we do, let’s read the text again. Matthew 2. Start with me in verse 1.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was

troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ " 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)

This is God's Word...

So, again, these Magi see a star when it rises and they connect that somehow to the birth of the King of the Jews. They reason that this is a significant moment in human history and so they ought to go worship this child. So they did what anyone would do who heard that the King of the Jews was born and cared to meet Him; they packed their bags for Jerusalem because that historically was the capital city of the Jewish people. So they journey from somewhere in the east to Jerusalem.

Nothing in the text says they are following the star, at least not yet. Nothing says they were kings. They are almost certainly not Kings. In Greek Matthew calls them Magi. And nothing says they were three. In fact, they were probably many more in number and traveling with an entourage since their arrival in Jerusalem was pretty noticeable and causes a bit of a stir and they are obviously prestigious enough figures to get an audience with Herod. Plus, if they are traveling with a large amount of riches of the kind they were carrying, it would be hard to imagine that they didn't have men around them to ensure their secure arrival given the dangers of travel in the first century. It was safer to travel in the Roman world than in most times in human history to that point, but there were still risks involved (cf. Good Samaritan).

When they get there, Herod is alarmed by the news that a King of the Jews has been born. He's threatened by this because it would jeopardize his authority and power. So he hatches a plan, which we learn about later. But for now we are simply told that he gathers the Jewish Scribes (i.e., the Jewish religious leaders) and tries to get out of them where the King of the Jews was to be born. But notice, he doesn't ask where the King of the Jews was to be born, but rather where the Messiah was to be born. Messiah and Christ mean the same thing. It's not Jesus' last name. It's a title signifying that He was the promised anointed one that was to come, set apart to bring God's purposes for His people to completion. So from this inquiry, we see that even men like Herod connected the Messiah with the office of King by the first century. That was part of the expectations floating around back then.

Matthew gives us the impression that the question Herod asks was a no-brainer for these religious leaders. They tell him, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Then the quote from Micah 5 as proof. I should say, they paraphrase Micah 5. It's like the New Living Translation version of that verse. Here's a side-by-side comparison of the original verse and their paraphrase:

Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler of Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of
the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.
And he shall be their peace.

Matthew 2:6

And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of
Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.

“Ephrathah,” in the Micah text, means “fruitfulness” and it was either another name for Bethlehem, or a district in which Bethlehem was located, or perhaps a clan name.¹ A couple English translations say that Bethlehem was “too little to be among the clans of Judah” (though it was in the tribe of Judah), but most of the others say that Bethlehem was “small among the clans of Judah.” Both are possible renderings as the Hebrew is a bit debatable. But the point in both cases is the same. Bethlehem is a small and insignificant city.

Yet it was from that city, you’ll remember, that king David came. In fact, it was referred to as the “city of David” after David became king. Now David’s greater son, Jesus the Christ, came out of that city. So when Jews read Micah, they got the point. Though the city was small and seemingly irrelevant, it was “by no means” insignificant in the scheme of history because both Israel’s greatest king of old and the coming King of kings, the Messiah, would come from that city. That’s why these religious leaders in Matthew 2:6 paraphrase the way they do: “*And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.*” Of course that last part, about the Messiah ruling and shepherding Israel, comes from Micah 5:4. That He would be described in shepherding language is fitting, because of the David associations. David was a shepherd of sheep before he was a shepherd God’s people.

But notice what these Jewish leaders leave a few things out. Particularly, that Micah said about this coming king that his “*coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*” That’s a good translation. No doubt, the Jews, when they read that, took it as a reference to the lineage of this king. He from the royal line of David. An ancient line. A line “from of old.” And that’s true. But another possible rendering is “*His origin is from antiquity, from eternity*” (Micah 5:2; HCSB) or “*His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity*” (NASB; similarly: KJV). No one in Micah’s day would have read it that way. None of them would have seen this a reference to a eternal figure. But nonetheless the Hebrew would sustain that rendering. It may have been a subtle clue about the identity of the Messiah. He was more than a mere man. He was and is the God-Man. The Son of God in human flesh, whose divinity had not beginning and has no end. Perhaps Micah set before us a clue, hidden in plain sight (maybe even from him).

I don’t think the Jewish leaders who were consulted in Matthew 2 were trying to cover up those words in Micah 2. I think they were simply answering the question they were asked. They were asked, “*where the Christ was to be born*” (2:4). But what if they had been asked, “*who is this one born King of the Jews?*”

Well, perhaps then they would have said that he comes from eternity or that he would be “*great to the ends of the earth,*” in the nations (Micah 5:4). Perhaps then he would have understood that the Magi were a picture of this. God is bringing the nations to the Son.

But this is lost on Herod. He is consumed with snuffing out this newborn who from Herod’s perspective is a rival. So he gathers the Magi secretly and asks them when the star appeared so that he can gauge when the child was born (that will come into play later) and he sends the Magi to Bethlehem to locate Jesus, saying “*Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him*” (2:8). Do you believe that this is Herod’s intention? If you do, you’re probably one of those people who believe the Rangers are going to win the World Series this year. [Sorry...too soon? I’m a Cubs fan, so misery loves company]. My point is, Herod has no intention of worshipping Jesus. He wants nothing to do with Him, because he views Jesus as a threat to his way of life. But we will discuss that next time.

With the new information from God’s Word, the Magi make their way to Bethlehem and we are told, “*the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was*” (2:9). So, now, for the first time it seems that the star is leading the way for the Magi. Up to this point, there is no indication that they were following the star, but rather that the star alerted them to the birth of the King. But here is what you have to see here: the star only got them so far. The star prompted a thought that made them suspect that something significant was happening, the king is born, he exists. But it only got them so far in their own reasoning. It didn’t get them to Bethlehem. It didn’t get them heading in the direction of Jesus. Did you notice what did? God’s Word. So here we are reminded of something about God’s Word...

God’s Word: *God’s Word Is Needed and Intended to Lead Us to Jesus*

I have always been fascinated with Christian apologetics. I love reading and I have always been drawn to literature written by skeptics of Christianity who became Christians. Like Lee Strobel, who set out to disprove Christianity only to be convinced of its truth.ⁱⁱ Or C. S. Lewis who was very skeptical until men like J. R. R. Tolkien shared the Gospel with him. Or Peter Hitchens, former atheist and now Christian, who is the brother of the late Christopher Hitchens, one of the most famous and witty atheist of our time.ⁱⁱⁱ I have a soft spot for skeptics, I suppose because I used to be one.

In recent years I have been intrigued by how many world-class scientists now believe in God because their research interests pointed them to intelligent design. They are looking at the data and concluding that their atheistic worldview does not make sense out of what they find. There is too much complexity to what exists to be chalked up to chance. It takes more faith to believe that, then to believe that there is design to what exists. And if there is design, there is a designer. Which is why many are adopting theistic worldviews now. Stephen C. Meyer is a good example. For him it was the study of DNA that led him to a belief in intelligent design. His findings created quite a stir in the scientific community. He records the experience in a fascinating book called, *Signature in the Cell*.^{iv}

Meyer was a world-class geophysicist and Cambridge grad and professor. But probably the most famous example lately was Antony Flew. The name may not mean much to you, but he was one of the most outspoken and well-known atheist philosophers of his generation. He taught at places like Oxford and Aberdeen. In 2004, Dr. Flew “announced that he had repudiated a lifelong commitment to atheism, citing, among other factors, evidence of intelligent design in the DNA molecule.”^v That shook up a lot of the atheist world. Anthony Flew just became a theist through...of all things...science.

But here is the point that we have to see. He looked into the world, saw in God’s creation evidence that there was a God, and became a theist (or more accurately a deist), one who at least acknowledges the existence of

a God. But he never became a Christian. When he died a few years ago, Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote an article reflecting on this, in which he says,

“Flew’s public announcement in 2004 that he had rejected atheism and embraced some kind of belief in God was a philosophical bombshell. Evangelicals championed his rejection of non-belief and were cheered by the public nature of his announcement. Nevertheless, a closer look is needed. Antony Flew never embraced Christianity...the conclusion of Antony Flew’s life must affirm for us the fact that the rejection of atheism does not always lead to an embrace of Christianity. Salvation comes only to those who come to belief and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—not to those who merely embrace the existence of a divine First Cause. Rejecting atheism is not enough. The Death of Professor Antony Flew should not escape Christian attention. His life and thought trace the transition from atheism to some form of belief in God. But not every form of belief in God leads to salvation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not rest on just any belief in God. Antony Flew’s rejection of atheism is an encouragement, but his rejection of Christianity is a warning. Rejecting atheism is simply not enough.”^{vi}

Do you see his point? It is not enough to simply believe that God exists. It is not enough to even look at the historical data for Jesus’ existence and crucifixion and resurrection, which is more abundant than anything you read in a history book in days prior to photography. In the book of James it says, “*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*” (James 2:19). Satan and the demons believe that Jesus existed, and died for sinners, and rose from the dead. They believe that but they’re not going to be with Jesus forever. We are not going to see them in heaven. Why? Because biblical and saving faith is more than merely believing facts about Jesus, it’s more than just cognitive assent. Biblical faith involves trust. It’s accompanied by repentance. It follows the poverty of spirit, which acknowledges a need for Jesus to save us and acknowledges our utter inability to save ourselves. Then when we take the facts of Jesus work on the cross in the place of sinners and his resurrection for our justification, we turn from our sins and turn to Him in faith. We trust in Him and Him alone to save us.

But how do we get from that point of unbelief to that point of encountering Jesus? Not without revelation. You’re not going to reason yourself there, any more than Antony Flew did when he studied DNA. Your reason can tell you your need, it can tell you your inadequacy, it can lead you to the logical conclusion that God exists, but for you to get to Jesus and the salvation He alone extends it’s going to require revelation, a special kind of revelation. For some He reveals Himself in dreams and visions, just ask Mary and Joseph. For others it was in the personal in-the-flesh encounter with Jesus when he walked the earth. But for the vast majority of God’s people it comes through the revelation God has provided in His Word.

It’s the Word of God that needs to be shared with us, because we need to hear the meaning of what Jesus has done to save us. We have to hear the Gospel, the good news that Jesus died in the place of sinners and saves those who repent and trust in Him. We need God’s Word to get us to Jesus. And listen all of God’s Word is pointing to Jesus and our need for Jesus and the implications of the work of Jesus and the glory of the Risen Jesus. All of it. Even remote passages in Micah! So we have to proclaim what is in this book! That’s why Paul said in Romans 10...

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:14-17)

The star and the reason of these men only got them to Jerusalem. God's Word was needed to get them to Bethlehem. God's Word was needed to get them all the way to Jesus. Why? Because God's Word is needed and intended to get us to Jesus.

Now, notice what happens when they get to Jesus. Verse 10 says, "*when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*" That may sound awkward in English, but that's the ESV's way of telling us that there are four words in Greek to emphasize the incredible joy they experienced. I'm not sure you could emphasize their excitement any more in Greek than Matthew has here. Then verse 11 says they arrive at the house (not the manger; many months have probably passed since Jesus' birth [see previous sermon]) and then it says, "*they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*" From this we are reminded of something important about God's Son.

God's Son: *Jesus Is King and Worthy of Our Honor and Worship*

This is where the Magi set us an example. And here is where the contrast becomes most pointed between the worshiping Magi and all the other characters in the story. Consider how each character responds to the news of Jesus.

First, there is Herod. He reacts with hostility. In the ensuing verses, he starts murdering children. Why? Because he is so threatened by Jesus and His authority that He was willing to go to those lengths to snuff Him out. But that's us too. When your kingdom or queendom is challenged, you tend to act hostile to the threat. "That's my money. My choice. My sex life. My power. My preferences. My rights." There is a little Herod in all fallen sinners, because the arrival of Jesus necessarily challenges your right to the throne of your life. There are some reasons for Herod's hostility, which I will explain next time. But the point here is simple enough. Some people respond to Jesus (and His followers for that matter) with hostility.^{vii}

Second, there are the people of Israel. Did you catch how they responded? Look at verse 3—"*When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*" They were afraid. But why? Because they were scared of Herod and his reaction, which is understandable given what we know about Herod from history and the second half of Matthew 2. One commentator put it this way: "Think of Herod as a prototype of every tyrant through the centuries: talented, fearless, vain, cruel, and violent. In Jerusalem, if Herod was disturbed, everyone was disturbed."^{viii}

They were afraid. They let their fear of Herod, keep them from going to Jesus. That's the way a lot of people respond to the news about Jesus. They are curious. They want to know more. They want to go to Him perhaps. But that all gets drowned out by fear. They are afraid of what people will think if they do. So they don't. That's the kind of fear that will keep untold numbers out of heaven. A fear of man.^{ix} That's the kind of fear that has kept some of you away from saving faith so far. "What will people think?" That's the wrong question. Do we fear man more than God? What does God think? They were worried about what could go wrong, more than what was actually right.

Next, we have the religious leaders. How did they respond? You could argue that their response was fear based too, because they may have been just trying to please Herod. Stanley Hauerwas described the religious leaders in this way: "They are the intellectuals of the day—educated, as intellectuals usually are, to serve those in power. They know their Bible and, like many who know the Bible in our day, know how to read the Bible in a manner most useful to suit their ruler's desire."^x He's probably right. But that's the part that freaks me out a little bit.

What this text teaches us is that it is not enough to simply know the Scriptures. It's not enough to know about Jesus. You have to respond to Him in the right way. But Matthew leaves us with the impression that these

men hear the news of the birth of the King of the Jews and they do nothing. They don't go investigate in Bethlehem. They don't "rejoice exceedingly with great joy." They don't join the Magi and lead them to Bethlehem. They answer king Herod and they go home. Who knows, maybe they even tell their wives, "you're never going to believe this honey! King Herod asked for my help today! Yes, he sought me out. I quoted some Scripture for him and he was really pleased with me! This could mean great things for us baby! We're moving on up!" They served king Herod beautifully, but they would not rise to go serve King Jesus.

If I were to sum up their response in a word, I'd call it apathy. And this kind of apathy is startling, but is all too typical. We are going to see this time and time again when religious people encounter Jesus in this book. Jesus himself said that if the pagans saw the signs that he performed in in front of the religious leaders and heard his preaching, they would have repented (Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42). But most of the religious people never did. "Sometimes those who most know the faith in the mind know it least in the heart."^{xi}

I mean, for crying out loud, it's five miles! Five miles! That's all they would have had to travel. That's it. They had a chance to meet the Messiah. The King of Kings. The guy generations of Israelites had been waiting for. The one who would be Lord over the nations. Five miles. How many of you have been to that Hollywood Theater on the Loop. That's five miles. Going to Bethlehem to check it out, even if you were skeptical, would be like us catching a movie after church. But they hear the news from the Magi and how do they respond? "Ehhh. Nah" "I got more important things to do today." "We don't have time right now to put together a Messiah committee." "Maybe I'll check it out later." "Ehhh. Whatever." Apathy. Glaring apathy and indifference. But this is all too common.

How do you respond to Jesus? How will you respond today after I have been talking about how Jesus died for your sins, and is your only hope for salvation, and he saves those who put their faith in Him. How will you respond to the invitation in God's Word to turn from your sins and trust in Christ to save you. In a little bit I'll give you the opportunity to come forward and receive Christ as Lord and Savior of your life. You can just come forward and meet me at the front and say "I need Jesus in my life" and we can pray together for that very thing. He will save you this morning.

Or you can even fill out one of those response cards in the pew in front of you. Tell us what decision you sense God calling you to make or what questions you have by checking the appropriate box and giving us a way to contact you this week. Drop that in the offering plate that will be passed toward the end of the service today and someone from our pastoral staff will contact you this week.

Or following the service there is a room just outside those doors right there. And one of our pastors will be there to visit with you, pray with you, answer any of your questions about Jesus, whatever. After the service is over, you can just go there. Like if you want Jesus in your life and want to talk to someone about it, you can go there after the service (maybe we should call that the "Bethlehem Room," Tony). That's another opportunity for you to respond to whatever it is you sense God doing in your life.

You have all of those options. Pick the one that makes the most sense to you. But respond appropriately to the good news. Look I've been preaching and pastoring for about a dozen years now and I know that there will be some of you in this room who have heard the good news about Jesus today and will be tempted to respond like Herod—walking away from the truth threatened; or like the people of Jerusalem—"I can't respond in one of those ways because what will people think?"; or like the religious leaders—"ehhhh...maybe later. I got things to do." Is that going to be you today? Do you really want to be identified with those characters? I hope not. I hope today you will come like the Magi. Not having all the answers. But just knowing that you need Jesus and want to be with Him. And in faith, you come to Him to worship.

Church, I want you to see something else before as we close today. The Magi's actions in the text teach us about the characteristics of true worship. Real quick, let me show you what I mean.

Biblical Worship Is Always a Response

When the Magi see Jesus for the first time, they fall down in worship. They recognize Him for who He is—the Messiah and King. The sight of Jesus, produces worship. That’s true for us too. Worship is our response to who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. When we see God clearly, it should result in our worship. It’s a response. And the response may or may not involve singing, by the way. That’s just one aspect (as we will see). And our worship is a reflection of what we believe about God. So we better believe the right things about God or our worship will not please Him. A. W. Tozer once wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”^{xii} He’s right.

Biblical Worship Is Offered in Humility and Joy

How did their worship express itself? They fall down to the floor, on their knees before the king. What is that? That’s a picture of humility. And they rejoice exceedingly with great joy. Humility and joy. Those two things better be a part of your worship, however it is expressed.

Biblical Worship Is Costly

They bring these gifts to Jesus. Gold. Frankincense. And myrrh. These may have a symbolic significance, but that is somewhat disputed (you can see the footnote of this sermon online, if you are curious).^{xiii} But the point is that these things are valuable. Their giving cost them something. They sacrificed to give to Jesus. They didn’t do it to get something in return. This isn’t a transaction. This isn’t the prosperity Gospel trash. This is Magi giving to toddler King in worship and getting nothing back but the joy of the act of worship. This is not duty. This is joy. Our giving is an expression of our worship. That’s one of the reasons I like the offering at the end of the preaching. It is a response to what we have seen in God’s Word about who He is and what He has done for us in Christ (and by the way, Paul follows that same pattern in Scripture when it comes to collections).

But listen, the worship of these Magi cost them more than material things. It cost them time. Months of travel and sacrifice. It put their lives at risk. But they counted the cost and decided it was worth it to worship the King. Paul said to the Romans (at the turning point of that letter, the point when all of the theology pivots to application), “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship*” (Romans 12:1). You see his point? What God has done for us in Christ should lead us to lay down our lives in every aspect for Jesus, the King. And Paul calls this worship.

Biblical Worship Is Accompanied by Obedience

Where do I see that in this text? Verse 12—“*And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*” These worshipping Magi obey the Lord. They obeyed the leading of the Word of God in Scripture earlier. And now they are obeying the word of God in this dream. It would seem incongruent with their worship, if they disregarded the command of God wouldn’t it? It does in your life too. Obedience problems are worship problems. That’s why God always sets up our obedience as a response to who He is and what He has done. You know how the Law of God (i.e., the Ten Commandments) begins in Exodus 20? With these words, “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” And then the laws are given. What is that? That’s God reminding them of who He is and what He has done for them so that their obedience would be a response of worship. Grace first. Then obedience. If obedience is not worship, it’s not pleasing to God. And finally...

Biblical Worship Fuels Missions

This is a point that is taught clearer elsewhere in God's Word (e.g., Psalm 66), but may be an inference here as well. Why did they want to go to Herod? Because they wanted to tell Him about Jesus. Now that they had seen and worshiped King Jesus they wanted to tell Herod about Him that Herod too could come and worship. God intervenes because Herod has no intention to worship Jesus and wants to kill Him instead.

But the point is worship leads to outreach. True worship leads to evangelism. You know this from experience. What do you do when you encounter something that excites you and you think your friends have not heard about it? You can't wait to tell them. Nothing keeps you from telling them.

I've been so stoked the passed few weeks because the Chicago Bulls have a monster team this year. They're deep, they've got arguably the best player who has been playing international basketball on the team, they added Pao Gasol too, Derrick Rose is back and is playing like a Ferrari among Nissans,^{xiv} and it's really exciting. I just love talking about it, because y'all guys just don't know. And, in my mind, you need to. Eventually you will. But I want you to hear it from me. So occasionally I work into conversation....or sermons.

Friends, that's something trivial I know. But do you see the point? When you are excited about something or someone you are dying (in some cases literally) to tell the world about it. And that's true with Jesus too! It should be. David Platt nailed this point in a sermon I heard this week, preached from Psalm 66. He said, "Passionate worship always leads to personal witness. Always." Do you get that? Are you tracking with me? That means "if we're not witnessing, there is a problem with our worship. We're not seeing God for who He is! We're not realizing what He's done!"^{xv} We are not excited and moved by what Jesus has done of the cross for us! And that is why we are not telling the world!

Listen, church, if we will not be a witnessing church, if we are not be a church that is salt and light to the city of Tyler, if we are not a church that is going to take seriously the mission of God and our part of the Great Commission...then we have a worship problem. It's that simple. And we will never take those things seriously until we get our worship right. That's why we don't graduate from the Gospel. We go back to it again and again and again...because that's what fuels our worship. And, by extension, our witness.

The Magi put before our eyes the Old Testament paradigm of mission. It is a "come and see" kind of mission. That was because in the Old Testament the presence of God dwelled in the temple and the Jerusalem temple was therefore the center of the worship activities. But when Jesus dies, that curtain in torn and a new paradigm of mission is established. Matthew begins with the old paradigm. He ends the book with the new one. And the new one, found in the Great Commission, is not a "come and see" kind of model. It's "go and tell."

Listen church, don't wait for people to come to us. You come. You worship. You get excited. And you get out there. You "go and tell." That would be an appropriate response of worship if you know King Jesus.

Let's pray...

ⁱ K. L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (New American Commentary; Nashville, Broadman & Holman,

ⁱⁱ Some of Lee Strobel's books include *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, *The Case for a Creator*, and *The Case for Easter*.

ⁱⁱⁱ A recent book by Peter Hitchens was *The Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

^{iv} Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

^v *Ibid.*, 2.

^{vi} Taken from the article written by Albert Mohler, titled, *The Death of a (Former) Atheist—Antony Flew, 1923-2010*. This article can be accessed here: <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/04/29/the-death-of-a-former-atheist-anthony-flew-1923-2010/>

^{vii} Daniel Doriani writes, "Herod's violent response makes sense in one way, but not in another. If the Magi are wrong about the prophecy, why bother with the child? If they are right about the prophecy, why attempt to resist it? Does he think he can thwart God's purposes? Herod's actions remind us that rebellion against God is irrational. It is folly to fight God, but sin makes people foolish." Daniel Doriani, *Matthew, Volume 1: Chapters 1-13* (Reformed Expository Commentary; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 31-32.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, 30.

^{ix} "Sadly, the hatred of Herod is only the first failed response. *The people of Jerusalem* were troubled by the word of Jesus' birth. Their question is 'Could this somehow lead to my harm?' It is a sensible question. Herod was likely to kill at random, as too many dictators have been. Still, we cannot live by fear. Even in the face of threats, the Bible says, 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened' (1 Peter 3:14). Fear must not govern our decisions. It is all too easy to let fear of disapproval or financial loss or relational strife govern our decisions, but we must let the truth guide us. This is what the people missed. They asked, 'What can go wrong?' They failed to ask, 'What is right?'" *Ibid.*, 33.

^x Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 39.

^{xi} Doriani, 31.

^{xii} A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 1.

^{xiii} The usual suggestions are that gold signifies the royalty of Jesus, frankincense the deity of Jesus, and myrrh His humanity. For more of a justification to these associations, see David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2013), 38.

^{xiv} This was a remark made by Andre Drummond. See, <http://dimemag.com/2014/08/andre-drummond-calls-derrick-rose-ferrari-amongst-nissans/>.

^{xv} The sermon is titled "The Cosmic Cause of Christ," which can be viewed here: <http://www.radical.net/media/series/view/1698/the-cosmic-cause-of-christ?filter=series>.