

SERMON GUIDE

The Light to the Nations

Matthew 2:1-12



SERMON NOTES

In Matthew 2:1-12, we see Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy to be a Light to the Nations, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. Even as an infant, Jesus begins His ministry, drawing pagan wise men from afar to worship Him while exposing the darkness in Herod's heart and the religious leaders' complicity. This passage highlights the providence of God, the contrast between simple faith and rebellion, and the global scope of the Gospel. As we celebrate Christ's birth, we are reminded of His mission to restore all things, calling us to worship, trust, and participate in His work of bringing light to the nations.

In Isaiah 49:6 the Lord says, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This is a charge originally given to the people of Israel that is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Today, we'll see that before Jesus ever even learns to crawl or talk, He already begins His ministry as the Light to the Nations.

Exposition

V1-2 – 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, 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."

The mention of Bethlehem here in v. 1 set against "Herod the king" to contrast Jesus, the true King, with the puppet king, Herod. Herod was not from the kingly line. He did not have a claim to the throne of Israel. The Roman Empire propped him up to be a kind of figurehead for them as they ruled the region. Then in v. 2 we're introduced to these enigmatic figures, the wise men. These wise men, also called magi, are a mystery to historians and theologians. There is no conclusive evidence as to who they were, but there are some safe historical options. One being that they were from the area where Babylon and Persia once were and were similar to the Magi of Daniel's day. These would have been priests of a pagan religion, astrologers who read the stars, and/or men who practiced what was referred to as magic during that time period. Scholars aren't really sure, but what we do know is that

they were not Jews, yet God summoned them through a miraculous celestial event to come and worship the King of the Jews. These Magi from the east see a sign in the sky and are led by God to Jerusalem. They go to the most logical place to find a prophesied king – the residence of the reigning king and ask him where to find Christ. We know why they made this inquiry because the text tells us that they came to worship Him. Pagan men from outside of the covenant promises of God are summoned by God to come and worship His Son, and they obey. Jesus is serving as the Light to the Nations even in His infancy. In v.3, Herod responds.

V3-6 – When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “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.””

To fully appreciate what is happening here, I have to give you a spoiler. We find out later in Matthew that Herod wants to know where this baby is because he is going to attempt to kill him so that he doesn't have any challengers to his throne. In fact, he becomes so desperate to see this child die that he commands all the male children under the age of two in Bethlehem to be killed. This is some deep wickedness. Now, notice the contrast between Herod and the wise men here. The wise men were eager to obey a God who they were not even in covenant with, the one true God, yes, but not their nation's God. They were the least likely characters in this account to make a pilgrimage to worship the Jewish Savior, and Herod, who sat on the throne of God's people, was troubled (instead of rejoicing) when he heard that the Messiah had been born. He should have been even more eager to worship this King. The coming King is the signal that the restoration of all things is at hand. Yet, he is troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Meaning, in this context, all the other leaders who had heard about this birth. Herod is more concerned with keeping his illusion of power as the puppet king over Israel, Rome's lapdog, than he is about the best news that had ever reached mankind - the birth of the Savior. And this is not hard for us to understand. We all know that in our fallen, sinful natures, we continually choose lesser things because we'd rather have our own rotten, crumbling kingdoms than submit to an everlasting one. The Light that was shown for these foreigners to come to Christ, was something that Herod's own sin blinded him from seeing.

V7-9 – Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 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.” 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.

So the star initially led the wise men to Jerusalem, to Herod, who began scheming to kill the child, and then to the prophecy that informed them of the city to head towards. Then, the star led them directly to the house where Jesus was. This fits an interesting pattern we see in several other instances of God using some miraculous means in conjunction with His Word to lead someone to Jesus. Just like God giving the Gentile Cornelius a vision in Acts 10 and then sending Peter with His Word, just like the stories we hear of Muslims having dreams that lead them to missionaries who then share the Word with them – Christ is being the Light to the Nations in all of these situations using other means in conjunction with His Word. The wise men then arrive at the house in v. 10.

V10-11 – When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 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.

Despite our traditional depictions, the wise men didn't visit Jesus at the manger; it was sometime after – and nowhere in the text does it say there were three of them. Sorry, I know I just ruined all your Christmas cards and nativity scenes. What we know here at this point is that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were in a house. The wise men worshipped Jesus and offered gifts. Mary and Joseph had no way of knowing this, but these gifts, in God's providence, would have likely been used to fund their journey to Egypt to escape Herod's plot to kill the baby. Some scholars draw that conclusion because we know from other texts that Mary and Joseph were poor and that, historically, a journey from Bethlehem to Egypt would have been very, very expensive. God often provides what we need ahead of challenges, just as He did for Mary and Joseph. While God is calling the Nations to the light of salvation, in calling these wise men to Jesus, He is simultaneously caring for the needs of His people.

V12 – And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

The wise men were faced with the choice of obeying the earthly ruler, Herod, or the heavenly Ruler, God, and they chose to obey God rather than man. The light of the truth gave them the courage to put themselves in harm's way for the sake of Christ. Peter and John said it explicitly to the religious leaders in the book of Acts about thirty years after this – likely some of the same religious leaders that were accomplices to Herod in our text. When they were commanded to stop preaching Christ, they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard. To summarize, Matthew gives us this very specific account that points to the promised Jewish Messiah, the coming King, being born in Bethlehem. The Lord gives a miraculous sign in the heavens to lead gentile, pagan, wise men from the east to come and worship Him while the reigning king of Israel conspires to kill Him to protect his illusion of power. The Lord leads the wise men to the house where Jesus is, they worship Him, and their act of worship likely becomes the vessel of God's provision for the family to make it through the trouble that is getting ready to hit. The wise men are then faced with the choice of obeying this God of the Jews or the man in power, and they choose to obey God rather than men. All the while, showing that this baby is the Light to the Nations, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth just as He was prophesied to do!

When we read this passage, the first thing we should see is the realness of the story of Christ's birth. Christmas is a joyous time of love and light as we celebrate it every year, but it is only joy and light against the backdrop of the depravity and darkness in which it came to us. This isn't a time of year to just turn the hallmark channel on and pretend like the world is some idyllic place that we know it's not the other eleven months of the year. Our text reminds us that Jesus came into the darkness. Herod, the wicked puppet king who was more concerned with keeping his own little fiefdom, was willing to kill as many babies as it took to get rid of the Savior of the world because he'd rather have what he wanted than bow to the true King – and we can be more like him than we realize. That's our first takeaway:

Application

1. There's no limit to the darkness our hearts will engage in if we refuse to bow to the King of Light.

We've all had moments of clarity after falling into darkness where we asked ourselves, "How did I get here?" The answer always goes back to a desire to have what you wanted over submitting to the King.

Herod is the villain in this story, but until we submit to Christ, we are the villains in our stories, not someone else.

2. Our religious knowledge, apart from faith in and submission to the true King, doesn't protect us from the darkness.

Herod's advisors who interpreted the prophecies for him, were the religious experts of the day, and they were complicit in all that we read. You knowing and saying all the right things actually intensifies your condemnation if you don't trust in and submit to the King of that truth you profess. Look at the contrast between the wise men, who knew very little yet sought to worship Christ, and the advisors who knew it all and worshiped their status.

3. God's providence is always at work to bring about the restoration of all things.

When Rom. 8:28 says that He causes all things to work for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose, and when Eph. 1 says that He works all things according to the counsel of His will, it means all things.

- God **provided** a census while Mary was pregnant to lead them to Bethlehem so that Jesus would be born where He was prophesied to be born.
- God **provided** a sign in the heavens to lead the wise men to Christ because He wanted them there to begin His ministry as a Light to the Nations.
- God **provided** religious experts, wicked as they were, to send the wise men to Bethlehem.
- God **provided** gifts of considerable wealth to fund the upcoming journey to Egypt.
- God **provided** a wicked king who set in motion a course of events that led Jesus to Egypt in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt, I called my Son."

This season of joy and light still contains much darkness for some of us. For some of us, Christmas can be a profoundly painful time of year for many different reasons. Be reminded that the whole story started with pain and darkness, but even in that pain and darkness, He is restoring all things. You can't see it now, but neither could Mary and Joseph. They just kept doing what they needed to do to honor God and survive. All the while, He's writing this masterpiece in the background that we now celebrate. Lastly, that restoration of all things which He is working out includes a mission for us who have already submitted to the King of Light.

4. Jesus is the Light to the Nations.

He is the Light to the Nations because one day, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will be around His throne, worshiping Him. When we speak of the Gospel, we often speak as if it ends at personal salvation. Like this: We are sinners in need of being saved from God's just wrath against our sins. We are separated from Him and need to be brought back into a relationship with Him. But we can't fix this. We are sinners who are incapable of ever being what God requires us to be. We are utterly unable and disqualified. But because of His great love for us, God sent His Son to live a perfect life on our behalf so that He might credit that to us and count us as if we were not sinners so that we could be in right relationship with God. His Son then died a sinner's death on our behalf, taking all that just judgment for our sins upon Himself, and now, for we who trust in Him, there is no judgment left for us. We are still incapable of acquiring any of this by our own efforts. All we can do is call out to Jesus and trust Him to give us these things freely. And the Bible says that if we do turn to Him in faith, He will freely give us the credit for His perfect life, the credit for His substitutionary death, and eternal life in relationship with God.

This is all true. This is the Gospel. But this is not all of the Gospel. The Gospel doesn't end with your personal salvation. He saves us to make us part of His bigger plan of making all things new. You are just one of those things. The world we long for, the world where death and disease, and pain, and suffering and sin are all no more – that world is being pre-populated with the people who receive that personal salvation, but it's that world, that restoration of all things, that we are headed towards. Your personal salvation is a means to an end. You were saved so that you can be part of the final salvation of all that God is saving. This is why God cares about the Nations. This is why international missions are more than just charity projects for Christians from first-world countries. This is why God called pagan, gentile wise men from outside of His covenant people to come to worship the newborn Savior in contrast to Herod and the religious leaders who refused to worship Him. Because He desires the Light of His salvation to extend to the ends of the earth. Jesus was the Light to those wise men just as He is the Light to Turkey, Nazareth, Indonesia, the Philippines, Rome, and everywhere else TJC sends to [Plug to join a short-term trip or receive more info about long-term pipelines from Shawn]. He is calling people from all over the world to be a part of the restoration of all things. He is the Savior of the World. And this is why we must go, why we must send, why we must welcome, and why we must pray for the nations.

As we think of how God might want each of us to respond to this text this morning, know that He is expecting every one of us to respond, and every one of us will respond. Even ignoring the message is still a response. He revealed truth to Herod through the wise men, the scriptures, and his advisors, and Herod responded by tightening his grip on his own desires. He revealed truth to the wise men and they responded by going, sacrificing, worshipping, and obeying. How will you respond this morning?

Christian, if you need more light this Christmas season because this is a dark time for you, worship the King of Light and trust in His providence even when – especially when – you can't see it. He is at work for your good just as He was in this passage. Just as He always is.

If you haven't opened your hand to let go of your hold on your life and placed your faith in Jesus, do that. Your little kingdom will fall. Better that you give it over to the rightful heir to the throne of your life than to have it ripped out from under you. He is worthy of your worship. He is willing to receive you.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**
 - Read Matthew 2:1-12 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
 - Additional Scripture
 - Jeremiah 23:5
 - Isaiah 60:6
 - Zechariah 9:9
 - Micah 5:2
 - Luke 2:1-15

- John 7:42
- What big takeaways did you have from the sermon?
 - What did this teach you about God?
 - What did this teach you about man?
 - What did this teach you about salvation?
- **DISCUSS**
 - What is the significance of Jesus being born in Bethlehem?
 - Why is the reaction of the wise men so remarkable, and what does it teach us about God's global mission?
 - How does Herod's response to the news of Jesus' birth contrast with that of the wise men?
 - How is God's providence evident throughout this story?
 - What broader purpose of salvation is highlighted in this sermon?
 - What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?
- **MEMORIZE**
 - **Luke 1:35 – *And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.***



- **BUILD UP:** How will you grow in your love and knowledge of the Lord this week? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
 - **Life Groups** are a time and place to connect and learn to better follow Jesus together while abiding in Him. Life Groups are the primary means of disciple-making at TJC. Our groups focus on connecting, learning, following, and abiding. Groups meet weekly on various days/times across Wilson County. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month. Contact Laura DiLeonardi (laura@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Men** exists to equip men to show Jesus as incomparably glorious in every sphere of their lives. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a in the student center. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group. Contact Larry Davis (larry@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **TJC Kids** believes that the Gospel saves, sanctifies, gathers and sends. It is our desire to see our kids understand that the Gospel truly does change everything and we will do this primarily by teaching our kids to love Jesus, showing them they can have fun in the process, and making sure they stay safe. Contact Nick Judd (nick@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life in Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship, and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets Tuesdays at 7:00p. Contact Hunter Christian (hunter@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **SEND OUT:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story, or the gospel? We have several opportunities for local and international missions.
 - **For the City:** Acts 1:8 calls us to be engaged where we live and among the nations. The people of TJC seek to bring truth, grace, and hope to Lebanon and the surrounding area by mobilizing the church to be salt and light, not only for the city, but for your city. Take part in faithfully and obediently using your gifts to declare God's glory among those who are hopeless living among you today. Contact Jeff Long (jeff@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **For the Nations:** At TJC we exist to show Jesus as incomparably glorious to Lebanon and beyond. We are ambitious and passionate about strategically taking an active role in finishing the Great Commission as we actively pursue the unreached peoples of the world by mobilizing the entire church to pray, send, go and welcome international friends among us. Contact Shawn Casto (shawn@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **PRAYER**
 - **Pray over any request from your group members.**
 - **Pray for our staff:** Jeff Long (For the City Director)
 - **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship (Gallatin)
 - **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Central Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
 - Southeast Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
 - Europe Team departing on March 21, 2025
 - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on April 25, 2025
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks

- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>