

Sent: Wed, Oct 2, 2019 3:45 pm
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 2

"Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20)

Matthew 2 begins with the record of the "magi" (or the "wise men") coming "from the east" to Jerusalem "in the days of Herod the king" to seek Jesus who they said, "was born King of the Jews"! They told Herod (the "Great"?) that they "had seen His star in the east and had come to worship Him"! Wow! You can imagine the reaction--and you know response--of Herod!! Matthew says (in Matthew 1:3) that he was "troubled, and all Jerusalem with him"! As Paul Logan put it last nite: he had "scrapped and clawed" his way to becoming king of Judah--thought to be an "Idumean," a descendant of the Edomites (therefore a descendant of Esau's)--who had somehow (who knows how!) gotten to be appointed by Caesar Augustus himself to be the king of Judea! He obviously wasn't about to allow anyone or anything to usurp his rules--even after having "inquired of all the chief priests and scribes" and been told that "the Messiah was to be born...in Bethlehem of Judah; for this is what has been written in the prophets"! (vs. 4-5) They all knew! (Unger's Bible Dictionary describes Herod as "an Idumaeon in race and a Jew in religion but a heathen in practice and a monster in character"!)

You know the rest of the story. How the wise men "went on their way" and how the star, "which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was"! And that "when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy"! Matthew continues: "When they saw the Child with Mary His mother, they fell to the ground and worshipped Him! Then opened their treasures, which they presented to Him, gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (gifts be-fitting a king)!

What's really neat about all this is how God obviously attended, and intervened, all along the way to bring it all about! He set the star--specifically for the "wise men" who were probably from Babylon (from the vintage of Daniel, who conferred with and oversaw astrologers who became experts in studying the stars), and who somehow, at some later point, became aware of the connection between the star and the Messiah, or King, who was to be born! John Piper wrote about "how amazing it was to think that God arranged (maybe re-arranged?) the sky to announce the birth of His Son--exercising His authority as the Sovereign over the Universe"! And how amazing to realize that God would include Gentiles, right from the start, in His eternal plan to offer His Beloved Son to the whole world! How ironic, also, that these Gentiles would become the first ones to "worship" the King in Matthew's Gospel! Matthew Henry notes that "whatever sort of wise men they were before, now they began to be wise men indeed when they set themselves to inquire after Christ!"

In Matthew, we also see God using dreams as a "vehicle of revelation in the birth and early days of Jesus" (notes "Shepherd's Notes"). Last week, when an "angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream" and announced that "the Child had been conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit" and that Joseph "should call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins"! And this week, to the Magi, in 2:12, that they were not to return to Herod to tell him where they found the Child; and to Joseph, in vs. 13, to "flee to Egypt; and to Joseph again, in vs. 19, announcing that

Herod had died and that they were to return to "the land of Israel"; and to Joseph a fourth time, in vs. 22, that they were to live in the unassuming city of Nazareth! In all these interventions, we see God protecting and overseeing--and "orchestrating"--the events of Jesus' life as a babe and a child (something that we'll see continuing through all His earthly ministry)! How awesome is our God!

So, what do we know about Nazareth and about Jesus growing up in that out of the way place? Truth is we know very little! We do know that "He was to be called a Nazarene!" (2:23) And according to Matthew, that was another "fulfillment of prophecy" (although we can't cite a specific Old Testament reference)! We do know that the term was de-meaning! Remember in John 1:45-46 when Philip announced to Nathanael: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also of the Prophets wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!" And how Nathanael replied with the sneering words: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (And that was apparently the perception of most people at the time--and the basis for the prophetic assertion that He would be called a "Nazarene"!) Interesting that Philip would reply: "Come and see!" which was what Nathanael did! Which reminds us of the wise men who did that too! (And which juxtaposes how Matthew would end his writing with the charge to "go and spread" the gospel story, in Matthew 28:19)

There is one--and only one--passage in the Gospel which tells us a little bit of Jesus' life as a boy growing up in Nazareth! And it's not in Matthew (which leap[s] ahead in chapter 3 to introduce His public ministry as an adult), but in Luke! Luke 2:41-52 tells us about how Mary and Joseph, while living in Nazareth, apparently made an annual sojourn (by caravan) to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover! And on one such journey, when Jesus was 12, He apparently "stayed behind" in Jerusalem and was later found, much to the astonishment of Mary and Joseph, in the temple, "sitting in the midst of teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions"--and how "all those who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers"! When His mother, Mary, questioned "why He had treated His mother and father this way," He replied: "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" But Luke adds that He returned with them to Nazareth and "continued in subjection to them" (but that His mother "treasured all these things in her heart.") Luke also adds that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men"! And that's about all we know of those years!

Well, there are lots more we could say about Matthew 2, including four more fulfilled prophecies, which Matthew uses to prove that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah! Dr. Constable and others suggest that Matthew is trying to show his readers how Jesus was received by three different groups of people--groupings still existing in our world today! (1) The "rulers" (represented by Herod) who rejected Him outright, were hostile, and wanted nothing to do with Him! (2) The "religious leaders" (represented by the Scribes and Pharisees) who were "indifferent" and made no effort to follow-up on the information (including the Old Testament prophecies) they had, or were given; and (3) those who heard and believed and "worshipped" Him (represented by the "wise men") And the happy realization that "wise men" still seek Him!

Matthew 1-2 "serves as a finely wrought prologue for every major theme we'll see in this Gospel" (so says Dr. Constable)! The rest of the book "shows the reader who Jesus was--His identity--what He said and did, and the reactions and responses of various groupings of people!

They also provide instruction for us in knowing how to respond"! (So, in which group would you place yourself?)

And so, Matthew begins his message to the nations, as noted above, to "come and see" the Kingdom--and, as we'll eventually see, end it with the challenge for us to "go and share" the Gospel of the Kingdom! (Now you know where all this is going!)

Next week, we move many years forward in the life of Jesus to Matthew 3, with His entry into public ministry! Wow! Didn't learn much about His growing up years, huh? But thanks to Luke we can learn some! (Someday we'll know it all!)

Our memory verse for next week is taken from Matthew 3:17--with God once again intervening in the life of Jesus--clearly establishing His identity--after He was baptized by John the Baptist: "And behold, a voice out of heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased"!

Be wise, men, and go with God this week and be a blessing!

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