

## *The Marvelous Birth of the King*

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As we look to the Word of God this morning, I want you to open your Bible to the first two chapters of the *gospel of Matthew*, the first two chapters in the New Testament. They introduce us to the birth of the King. It never ceases to be a story of wonder, a story of blessedness, a story of supernatural intervention. No matter how many times we go over the birth of Christ, it still captures our fascination, fills our hearts with joy. I'd like us to focus this morning along with Matthew on the birth of the King, emphasizing the kingliness, the royalty of Jesus Christ. That is Matthew's great intent.

And certainly the carols that we sing at this time of year are reminders of the fact that Jesus Christ was born a King. We sing "Joy to the World" and that carol says, "The Lord is come, let earth receive her King." And then there is "It came upon a Midnight Clear," in which we sing, "Heavens all gracious King." "Angels We Have Heard on High" says, "Christ the Lord, the newborn King." And my favorite carol, "Hark the Herald, Angels Sing" says, "Glory to the newborn King."

"We Three Kings of Orient Are." We're familiar with that carol. There's a line in there that says, "Born a King in Bethlehem's plain." Another one says, "King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign." Another one says, "King and God and sacrifice." The carol, "What Child is This," says "This is Christ the King." "Come Thou long expected Jesus" says, "Born a child yet a King." And "Angels From the Realm of Glory" expresses, "Worship Christ the newborn King."

All of these emphasize the great reality about the birth of Christ, that He is in fact born a king. The wise men who came seeking for Him, stopped in Jerusalem and asked, "Where is He who is born King?" The Christ child was born to be supreme ruler, supreme monarch. In fact, the writer of Revelation, John, says He is King over all kings and Lord over all lords. He is the greatest, the most supreme of all monarchs. A king, as you know, has a sovereign right to rule.

A king is the final court of appeal. He holds in his hand the power of life, the power of death, the right to make every decision and all decisions. Jesus Christ was born a King. He is different than any other king but nonetheless a king. The difference is in His surpassing royalty, His surpassing regal character, His surpassing kingdom and dominion and authority and power. But Matthew wants us particularly to understand that Jesus is King, and that His birth is the birth of a King. So in the first two chapters he focuses on the royal aspects of the birth of Christ, and that's what I'd like you to look at with me this morning.

First of all, in chapter 1 verses 1 through 17, we have the genealogy of Jesus. That is, we have the line of descendants from Abraham down to the birth of Christ. This, Matthew wants us to understand, is His royal heritage. Anyone who is a king must have a royal heritage. A king has to have an authentic lineage. He must possess royal blood. In order to be fit to take the throne he has to have been descendant from a long line of royalty. And, in fact, that is precisely true of Jesus. In Israel, the racial line of Jews came from Abraham. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, so racially He would need to be a descendant of Abraham. Within the descendants of Abraham, the royal line began with David. And so in order to have the pedigree of a king, in order to possess royal lineage, one would need to be a son of Abraham and a son of David.

The racial line was promised through Abraham in Genesis 12. The royal line was promised through David in 2 Samuel Chapter 7. And so, to qualify, Jesus needs to be son of Abraham, son of David. And the genealogy begins with these words, verse 1, “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*” The most important two names in the genealogy are given first: Abraham for racial lineage, and David for royal lineage. And then, from verse 2, we have a more detailed presentation of that genealogy starting with Abraham and moving right on down through David in verse 6, ultimately, to Christ in verse 16. And so, the Lord Jesus is son of Abraham, son of David. He fits the royal requirement. And in order to ascend to the throne, He needed to have that royal lineage.

Now, I want to suggest to you that the detail of this genealogy is very important. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, primarily, who are tenacious about the matter of pedigrees. Certification is essential to them. Their whole culture is built around that. For example, when the children of Israel came into the land of Canaan and God gave them that land in which to dwell, He apportioned the land giving specific territory to every given tribe. So the tribe to which you belonged dictated where you lived and what land you possessed. Within the tribal territory, families assumed certain portions of land and your link to your family said where your home was, where your land was. And so, your lineage was very, very important to establish the place of your residence. Tribes, families, and ancestors’ houses were utterly essential in understanding your relationship and rights and privileges in the land of Palestine.

Whenever there was the need to sell or transfer or exchange property, it required a knowledge of family trees in order to ascertain to whom the property really belonged. And in the Jubilee Year, the fiftieth year when land all went back to its original family, again, it was necessary for one who would claim a land portion because he was descendant to be able to prove that he was descendant of those to whom that land was originally given. When the children of Israel were taken into captivity into Babylon. From around the year 600 down to 586 BC, they were taken into captivity. Their land was desolated; they were dispossessed. At the end of the 70 years when they went back into the land, Ezra tells us that when they set about to reestablish themselves in the land after a whole generation or two of absence, it was necessary for people to prove their descent in order to lay claim to the land which was rightfully theirs.

When you come to the second chapter of *Luke*, which I read a little earlier for you, even then all of the Jews in Palestine went to the place of their ancestry to register for a taxation being imposed upon them by the Romans. So they were very much into your tribe and your family and your ancestors. That was just a part of life, very necessary and very essential. We should note, however, that today all of that has changed, and there is no Jew alive on the earth today who has any idea of his lineage. There is no Jew today who knows what tribe he came from, what family he came from, what land he possesses because all of the records were destroyed in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was sacked by Titus Vespasian.

The interesting thing about that is that anyone who showed up today and claimed to be Messiah, son of Abraham, son of David and have justifiable lineage could never under any circumstances prove that to be true. Therefore, the last verifiable claimant to the Messiahship of Israel, to the Kingship promised through David is Jesus Christ. No other would-be Messiah could ever verify a right to the throne. Christ is the last claimant. And it was only a few years after His death that all the records were destroyed.

Now the royal line here is the royal line that comes through to Christ. It is interesting that *Matthew* gives us His lineage through His father, Joseph. *Luke* gives us His lineage through His mother, Mary. You’ll be interested to know that Mary also was descendant from David. She came through David’s son, Nathan, who never reigned, but nonetheless was royal blood. So from David through Nathan all the way down to Mary, there is royal blood. Mary is a descendant of David through his son Nathan,

not to be confused with the prophet Nathan. It is then through Mary, mark this, that Jesus is the real son of David, for Mary was His mother.

In fact, as we know from our last study, He was born of a virgin. Joseph had no part in His birth. Joseph planted no seed in Mary's body. It was planted by the Spirit of God. Mary alone was the source of His human birth. Therefore it was essential that she also be out of the line of David or He would have borne no royal blood. On the other hand, Joseph's line is the line of the legal right to the throne. It always comes through the father. So He had to have a father who also was a son of David and not only a son of David but a son of David through David's son, Solomon, for it was through Solomon that the reigning line came. And so, Jesus received His royal blood through Mary and the legal right to the throne from Joseph. Even though Joseph had no part in His birth because He was born to Joseph's wife, Mary, He then was the son of Joseph, legally, and therefore bore the right to reign as King.

It has been said that had there been a king, a rightful king in Israel in Palestine at the time of Joseph, it would have been Joseph. Joseph was the legal heir. So that the Matthew genealogy comes down through Joseph because there is the legal right to the throne. It comes from the father. *Luke* brings it through Mary so that we know He has not only a legal right but a real right because He bears the blood of David. Notice in verse 16 the emphasis. "*To Jacob was born Joseph,*" this being a Jacob other than the familiar patriarch in the Old Testament. It's a common Jewish name. We don't know anything about this man. "*But to Jacob was born Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom...that's in the feminine form in the Greek, referring only to Mary...by whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.*" Joseph is never in the Scripture called anything other than the husband of Mary, never is Joseph called the father of Jesus. "Of whom" is feminine. It refers only to Mary and emphasizes the virgin birth.

Now I want you to see something that's absolutely essential to understand. You will notice in verse 10 and 11 we have the flow of names. As you come to verse 11, it says, "*And to Josiah were born Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon,*" and it goes on from there. Now here in the middle of this lineage, this kingly line, this royal right to the throne, is a king born by the name of Jeconiah. Jeconiah was an evil man, also called Coniah. He was an evil man. And in Jeremiah's prophecy, chapter 22 in verse 30, the Word of the Lord says this about Jeconiah. "*Write this man childless,*" – In what sense? – "*A man who will not prosper in his days for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.*"

Now God said no son of Jeconiah will ever reign in Palestine in Israel. No son will ever bear the throne of David. And yet, Jeconiah is in the Messianic line. How then can Jesus be the King if He does not come through the royal line of Jeconiah? And how can He be the King if the line of Jeconiah is cursed? That seemingly hopeless dilemma is resolved in the virgin birth. Through that line Jesus received the legal right to the throne, but He was no blood child of Jeconiah, for that line was cursed and there could never be a child of Jeconiah on the throne of David. Therefore Christ was born of a virgin. There was no taint of the blood of Jeconiah in Him because He had no blood from Joseph in Him either.

So in a marvelous working of God, the curse of Jeconiah is bypassed by bypassing Joseph and having Jesus born of a virgin. And yet it was essential that He be in the legal line of Jeconiah, for that was the line of David that had the right to the throne. Every detail carried out with precision. So, *Matthew* wants us to understand that Jesus has a genealogy that brings out the reality of His royalty. He is the authentic King, born to the kingly line, bypassing the curse of Jeconiah through the virgin birth. So He has impeccable credentials. Now that is His royal heritage.

Secondly, I want to talk about His royal nature...His royal character. A king is a king not only because of his royal lineage but because of his nature, his character. If you think back about your experiences in reading and perhaps seeing a film or a story about a king, you will recall that frequently kings are referred to as "Your Grace." Have you heard that? We don't know a lot about kings in our society. We're a whole nation that revolted against a king and kings aren't a part of our understanding. But the one thing you have to keep in mind about a king is that a king was a supreme ruler. Forget the Supreme Court, forget Congress, forget legislatures on a state level, and put yourself in a situation where one man rules absolutely unilaterally and you have an understanding of what it is to be under a king. A king is the single sole authority and power over a people. And by the way, that's the best form of government if you have the right king. It is the worst if you have the wrong one. It is the form of government in which we will live in the millennial kingdom and throughout all eternity where there's only one King, God Himself, as revealed in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

But the king was a supreme ruler. He had the right of life and death. And by his wisdom or his whim, by his justice or by his bias, he could say living and dying to any person under any circumstances. Kings were then the source of grace. If you wanted mercy, you bowed before the king and pleaded for mercy. If you wanted grace, you bowed before the king and pleaded for grace. And so, the king who was a good king, a noble king, a just king, a righteous king would be a king known for his mercy, his kindness, his love, his grace because the king is the Court of Appeal to which all who seek mercy must go, for he holds the power of life and death. And you see, as you look even at the genealogy that Jesus will be a King of grace. There's no question about it. He will be a King to whom sinners can go for pardon, forgiveness, and favor. He will be a King to whom those who have violated His very law and despise His very name can go to seek forgiveness.

How do we know that? It's bound up even in the genealogy. May I show you why? Look at verse 16. It says that Jesus was born of Mary. And here you have the choice of one woman out of the whole world in the line of David to be the mother of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And what is remarkable about this is that Mary was not without sin. Mary was not a perfect woman. She was not a sinless person. She was a sinner like all other men and women. She needed salvation from death and hell like all other men and women. She was on her way to an eternity without God if she did not trust God, believe God, and embrace her own Son, the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is evident from the New Testament record that Mary knew no special holiness, that she possessed no unique sanctification.

For example, in *Mark chapter 3 in verse 31*, Jesus was teaching in a house and His mother and His brothers arrived. And standing outside, they sent word to Him and called Him. They wanted Him. *And a multitude was sitting around Him and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You. And answering them He said...this is amazing...who are My mother and My brothers? And looking about on those who were sitting around Him He said, Behold, My mother and My brothers, for whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."*

Now if Mary was some kind of sinless person, He never would have said, "*Who is My mother or My brothers.*" He would never have said, "*Well, anybody who does My will is My mother and sister and brother.*" If His mother was something special, unique, something holy, something sinless, He would have set her apart. In fact, had she called Him, He would have gone immediately at her bidding to what it was that she desired, because he would have known that any expression out of the lips of a perfect person would be the perfect will of God.

He ignores His mother which means to say that what His mother says cannot overrule what He says, which means His mother is less than He, and He being perfect, she then must be imperfect. And the fact

that He said anybody and everybody who does the will of God is equal to My mother and sister and brother puts Mary down at the level that all people are. And that is by faith in Christ and obedience to God's Word, we rightly relate ourselves to Him.

He is saying, in effect, it is of no special benefit to her that she is My earthly mother when it comes to spiritual matters. She, too, is required to do the will of God. From Mary's own lips in *Luke 1:46*, from her own lips in what is commonly known as her Magnificat, her song of praise, she speaks to God, and this is what she says, "*My soul exalts the Lord,*" – then verse 47 – "*and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.*" Mary is the savior of nobody. Mary needs a savior, and she says God is my Savior. He is the one who delivers me from sin.

Mary, while being the best of sinners, if there is such a thing, the noblest of young maidens, the most beautiful of virgins, Mary must have been the finest of young girls in every way, but Mary needed a savior. And Mary, by virtue of being the physical earthly mother of Jesus could claim no spiritual privilege and make no claim on the time, attention, and life of Christ. She was a sinner in need of a savior. And isn't it something that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords allowed a sinner to be His own earthly mother? Yes He is a King of grace and even before He's born you see His grace as He arranges for His mother and chooses a sinner.

The second aspect of His royalty that we see related to His graciousness, His character, His nature comes not from one woman but the choice of two men. Back to verse 1. "*Son of David, son of Abraham.*" Now if you know anything about Abraham, you know that Abraham was a sinful man. He was called the friend of God and there were some marvelous things about Abraham. He was a man of great faith, eventually believing God. But Abraham also was a man who was known by his sin. He lied blatantly and flagrantly about his own wife to try to protect her when he was in Egypt.

He doubted the power of God. He committed adultery because he didn't believe God could really give him a child. So he went in and had a relationship with his own handmaid out of wedlock and produced Ishmael, a cursed child in many ways. Abraham was a sinful man, liar, doubter, and adulterer. His son Isaac, who came also in the Messianic succession was a great disappointment. The story of Isaac is a story of weakness. It's a story of disappointment. It's a story of a man who basically failed to do the work of God. Abraham yet was the source humanly of the Messiah. And God's grace is seen again in the choice of Abraham.

How about David? David, though he was a man after God's own heart, was also a man who was well known for his sin. He lived a life of appalling sin. He was a bloody man, many battles, many massacres, many deaths. He sowed seeds of dissipation by marrying many women. He was a horrendous excuse for a father, losing his children and allowing them to fall into dissipation, evil, and even rebellion. He was exceedingly sinful in his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. He played the fool one time because he doubted God and acted as if he was insane to try to escape from a circumstance he thought God was unable to deliver him out of.

His son Solomon was worse than he was, exceeding his folly in massive proportions, marrying women and having concubines to an almost innumerable counting. And because of the many foreign women who occupied his attention and his tremendous preoccupation with riches and wealth, he plunged the whole kingdom headlong into evil and eventually split it into two parts. And yet both Abraham and Isaac and David and Solomon are in the royal line. They're in the line of Messiah. That speaks of the grace of the King. The character of the King is a character of grace.

And then not only is there one woman and two men but there are three eras given here. This genealogy has three sections of fourteen names. The first fourteen names, and then the second fourteen and then the third fourteen. The third fourteen end with the name of Christ. Each of those fourteen names, and we don't know why the Holy Spirit picked fourteen. We don't know what the strategy there was. But each of those three sets out a different period. The first fourteen names include the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so forth and the judges, familiar judges in that first group. The second fourteen names are the kings, the monarchy, David and Solomon and Rehoboam and Abijah and Asa and Jehoshaphat and Joram and Uzziah and Jotham. Those are all kings.

The third fourteen deal with the captivity period. Period number one, patriarchs and judges. Period number two, monarchy. Period number three, from the captivity in Babylon to the coming of Christ. That's a 600-year period we know very little about. The names in that group are dark to us. We don't know really much about them at all. Names like Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Sadok, Achim, Eliud, and down those lists. We don't know who they are. They're shrouded in darkness. Very little if anything is known about them at all, they're obscure people.

The age of the patriarchs and judges was an age of sinfulness. They were all sinners. The age of the monarchy was an age of decline, degeneracy, apostasy, captivity, and destruction. And from the captivity to the coming of Christ was a time of evil, a time of deceit, a time of hostilities, a time of war in the land of Palestine. All of these times, times of mixed pathos and glory, times of heroism and disgrace, times of men of renown and men of obscurity.

But one thing we see in all of these lists is these were all sinful men who lived in sinful times, and yet they were chosen to be a part of the Messiah's line. So whether you're talking about the one woman who was His mother, the two men who stand out in the genealogy, or the three eras of history, all of them point to the grace of the King, who, even though He's not born yet, shows His grace in the choice of those who are His ancestors.

But it comes through even more clearly in one final look at four outcasts, four outcasts. Four sinful women for whom God provided grace. There are four women in the genealogy that are just remarkable by their inclusion. The first one is in verse 3, back into that patriarchal period, a woman by the name of Tamar. It says in verse 3, "*To Judah were born Perez and Zerah by Tamar.*" You have to understand from *Genesis 38*...if you get a chance to read that, read it carefully. Tamar committed incest, and Perez and Zerah born to Tamar were born out of incest, the ugly gross vile evil of incest. She was guilty of harlotry, guilty of incest, gave birth to two sons born out of incest. Not only is she in the line but so are her two sons. Now that will tell you something about the grace of God.

Then you will notice in verse 5, "*To Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab.*" A man named Salmon married a Canaanite woman, really a pagan woman by the name of Rahab. Rahab was a prostitute who ran a brothel in Jericho. If you read carefully the account of *Joshua chapter 2*, you will read about Rahab who came to believe in the true God and hid the spies who were spying out Jericho. But she was a prostitute by profession and yet she is included in the Messianic line. She is given the privilege of giving birth to Boaz who is a really a pattern of the redeemer himself.

Then there is a third woman in the genealogy, verse 5 again, Ruth. Ruth, again, was a Moabitess. The Moabite people had come out of incest as a people. The whole people were cursed. And here this woman out of a cursed people, this pagan woman, this idolatrous woman comes into the line,

marries the kinsmen redeemer Boaz and becomes the great-grandmother of David. So God takes two prostitutes and a pagan idolatrous cursed Moabite and puts them in the Messianic line.

And then amazingly in verse 6, “*And to Jesse was born David the king and to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah.*” Who is that? Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11, the adulteress. Two prostitutes, a cursed Moabite and an adulteress. Yet she’s the mother of Solomon, wife of David. Incredible. The grace of God in choosing one woman, in choosing those two most significant men, in choosing the people in those three eras and in choosing the four outcasts, indeed a King of grace. Royal lineage, royal nature.

Thirdly, and just briefly on this one, verse 18 and following instructs us regarding His royal birth. He had a right to be King by lineage. He had the character to be King; He was gracious. And now we see He has the power to be King because of the unique birth. *Now the birth of Jesus Christ*, verse 18 says, *was as follows: “When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,”* – that means to be engaged. And by the way, that was a binding engagement by legal contract, not like engagements today. People get engaged today and they give their rings back without a lot of falderal. A lot of emotion in it but not a lot of legality, in fact none. Engagements are not legal today at all, but in that day they were. There was a legally binding promise made, according to *Deuteronomy 20 verse 7*. This period of betrothal was nine months to eighteen months, at the most. And the purpose of the period of betrothal was so that the bride to be could demonstrate her virginity.

In other words, the fear of a young man would be that he would enter into a relationship with a young woman, he would marry her and then discover her to be pregnant and realize that he himself was not the father, but now he’s in a binding marriage relationship. And so in order for her to verify her virginity so that he would enter that relationship knowing her purity as well, as the whole community knowing it, there was a period of nine to eighteen months for her to demonstrate her purity, to show that she was not pregnant. And then would come the chupah, which was the ceremony itself that consummated the marriage.

But in the case of Joseph, he was betrothed to Mary. “*But before they came together,*” – that is before the chupah, ceremony, the consummation, physically, of their union – “*she was found to be with child.*” He had his worst fears realized, the shock of all shocks. This young girl, Mary, must have been the most beautiful of young women in terms of character. This would have been something Joseph never in a million years would have imagined to be true. But in his betrothal period before they had come together he discovers that she, in fact, is going to have a child. And the child is placed in her womb by the Holy Spirit but, initially, Joseph doesn’t know that. And so it says in verse 19, “*Joseph her husband, being a just or righteous man, a man of integrity and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to divorce her secretly.*”

The law of God provided that in a case like this, divorce could take place. The legally binding betrothal period could be broken. And he was a just and righteous man, and a just and righteous man had the right to do that when he had been violated by the one in whom he had put his trust and to whom he had given his promise of life and purity. But he loved her also. And in the confusion of his love and disbelief that a woman like Mary would ever become pregnant by another man, he decides to opt out for a lesser option in terms of public disgrace and to divorce her secretly. The law which was perhaps the law of that time, which was perhaps a lax interpretation of *Deuteronomy 24*, permitted that he could put her away in a private ceremony, rather than in a public one.

He had every right to publicly disgrace her, to publicly charge her with adultery, to sue her outright for divorce in an act of public dishonor that would label her the rest of her life. But he couldn't bring himself to do that. And so they allowed a private divorce secretly between two parties with just two witnesses. And that would break it up and it would just never be said any further as to why. And he decided to do that. But before he could go about doing it, verse 20 says, "*When he had considered this, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David,*" – there's the emphasis of *Matthew* again to show you that if there had been a king in Palestine at that time it would have been Joseph. "*Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit, and she will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus for it is He who will save His people from their sins.*"

Here you're going to be given some information that is absolutely so far beyond your imagination that you cannot conceive of it. Your betrothed and beloved is pregnant. You are told by an angel in the midst of a supernatural dream that this pregnancy is a direct result of the implanting work of the Holy Spirit to produce in her a son whose name will be Jesus which means "to save," and He will save His people from their sins, that your betrothed beloved carries in her womb the Savior of the world conceived by God. And so, the word comes to him that she will give birth to a Savior. And just to give it a context, *Matthew* says, "*All this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled.*"

This should be understood because this is what the Old Testament said, "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child.*" That's a physiological impossibility. But the virgin shall be with child miraculously, shall bear a son, they shall call His name Emanuel which translated means "*God with us.*" And so, this should not have been something that shocked anybody because the Old Testament made it clear. "*Joseph arose from his sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, took her as his wife...note this...and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son, and he called His name Jesus.*" He had no relationship to her at all until that child was born so that that child was never thought or assumed to be the child of Joseph. She was a virgin until the child was born.

By the way, that also says after the child was born she was no longer a virgin. That's the intent of the original language. And for people to advocate the perpetual permanent virginity of Mary is to deny what that text very clearly says. Furthermore, the New Testament is clear that Mary had many other children by Joseph, the brothers and sisters of Jesus who were named in the passage I read you from *Mark chapter 3* being an illustration. So Mary entered upon a normal conjugal relationship with Joseph and they produced other children, but not until the birth of the Son of God. That's a royal birth, folks.

You say, "In order to be a king you have to have royal blood. How about the blood of God as it were? How about being born of God? God actually has no blood but in the spiritual sense being the offspring of God who is King of all kings, King of the universe?" So Christ has not only a royal lineage, not only royal character but definitely royal birth, born of God. And it says in *Isaiah 7:14*, "*His name shall be called Emanuel, which being interpreted is God with us.*" God in human flesh. He was born royally.

The manger wasn't royal and the stable wasn't royal and the animals weren't royal and the shepherds weren't royal, and there wasn't a whole lot of regality about any of the events around the birth of Christ. But it was a royal birth for God, infinitely rich, had become utterly poor. God in divine glory assumed human nature. God in absolutely eternal holiness entered into the polluted stream of man's existence. He, however, was untouched by sin like a sunbeam shining on a dump. It's there but it is untouched. God in perfect holiness took on man's guilt, bore the sinner's griefs, and on the cross paid the



price for all who sinned. What a truth. A royal birth, a regal birth, a majestic birth, no other birth in the history of the universe like it.

So, *Matthew* says He's a king by royal heritage. He is a king by royal nature. He is a king by royal birth. Fourthly, He is a king by royal worship. And *Matthew* goes into that in chapter 2. We don't have time to fully develop this, but I'd like to give you a little bit of background briefly. Verse 1, "*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.*" And by the way, we don't know how long after, sometime after though, perhaps by this time the young couple and the child were living in a house rather than in the stable. They had found a place to accommodate them, some time has passed. "And behold, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem."

Now, who are the Magi? Just exactly who are these kings that always show up at the birth of Christ? Let me give you a little bit of background. They came from the Persian Parthian Empire east of Palestine, the great eastern area. The area once ruled by the Babylonian Empire, followed up by the Medo-Persian Empire. And they really were descendants of the Persians, the Medes and the Persians. The Magi were a tribe of people from that part of the world. I don't know whether it was genetics or whether it was the plan of God or whether it was environment or whether it was circumstances or what it was, but they were unusually capable and gifted people. And they had risen to great leadership in the Middle East.

At the time of the birth of Christ they were the ruling body in that part of the world. They had ascended to the highest levels in terms of political power. They had known that power ever since the Medo-Persian Empire. The Magi had been around since Daniel. In fact, when the Jews were taken captive into Babylon and stayed for the time of the Babylonian Empire and into the Medo-Persian Empire, these Magi were greatly influenced by those Jews, many devout Jews, and no doubt Daniel himself, who in his own prophecy is said to be the chief over the Magi. No doubt he influenced them greatly. So, they had come to understand that there was coming a great king to that part of the world. They no doubt were familiar with Daniel's prophecy and with the teaching of others of the people of Israel.

They had risen to power in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, Nergal-sharezer, who is chief of the Magi, is named in *Jeremiah 39* in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. So they were very, very powerful, highly influential, and elite men. When we read about the law of the Medes and the Persians, that is really the teaching of the Magi. They had been, as I said, instructed further by Daniel. Their religion had meshed with Zoroastrianism and then had been influenced by the teachings of the Jews. They were so powerful by the time of Christ that nobody could ascend to the throne in that part of the world unless appointed by the Magi.

They were the ruling...ruling people. They appointed the kings. In fact they are called by historians "the kingmakers of the east." They controlled also the judicial office. We learn from *Esther* that the royal judges in the court were appointed by the Magi. They appointed the kings, they appointed the judges; they dominated that culture in terms of authority. They had vast knowledge of astronomy, astrology, natural history, architecture, and agriculture. Their religion was monotheistic. They believed in the conflict of good and evil. They believed in a hereditary priesthood, blood sacrifices, supernatural revelation, and even believed in prophecies, so they had much in common with the teaching of the Old Testament. And that perhaps gave them an ear for what they heard from Daniel and others.

Now at the time of Jesus' birth, they really had wrapped up the control in that Middle Eastern Empire. Their great enemy was Rome. They had fought against Rome in 63 BC, 55 BC and 40 BC, and they would like to have power over Rome. One of the things they wanted back was the land of Palestine which Rome now occupied. And so when the prospect of a great king rising in the Middle East

came about, they were very anxious to come and see that king. And if indeed that was a king, have that king rise to authority and take back the land of Israel and defeat Rome. They had the absolute choice and selection of the next king for that Empire.

By the way, there was trouble in the Empire at the time of Christ. The king who was named Phraates IV had been deposed. Nobody was on the throne, and the Magi were seeking someone to succeed that man. From Daniel's prophecy of the divine king and from the star in the sky to which the Lord Himself, supernaturally, must have drawn their attention...and they must have received information about what that star meant...they decided to follow that star to find this one who was to be the king, to crown Him king, as it were, and lend their support to His authority and His rule.

You can only imagine what it was like when they rode into Jerusalem. They probably came in on fine Persian horses. There's no reason in the world to believe there were only three of them. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh but that doesn't have anything to do with how many of them there were. Estimates go into the hundreds, and some say they were probably accompanied by about a thousand men on horseback. This is an army, folks, and it's little wonder that Herod was a little nervous when they arrived. They were politically powerful and they were also honorable God-fearing believers in Old Testament prophecy.

They arrived. They come to Jerusalem...notice verse 2, "*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?*" It's as if they're saying, "We're on a search for a king and we want to check this one out. We believe this to be the king we're looking for. We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." No king they ever saw in the past had His own star. This was some king. "*When Herod the king heard it he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.*" He was so threatened and so intimidated, frightened that another king would come along. When he heard it, he was troubled. And it says, "*All Jerusalem was troubled with him.*" You know why? If Herod was troubled, so was everybody else because when Herod got troubled he started killing people, and everybody else got troubled and feared that it might be them. "*Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, quoting out of Micah, "In Bethlehem of Judea" – it's been written by the prophet Micah – "And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.*"

So Herod secretly called the Magi, ascertained from them the time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "*Go make careful search for the child and when you have found Him, report to me that I may come and worship Him.*" And you know the rest of the story. He didn't want to worship Him. He wanted to kill Him. "*And when they found the child, the Magi were warned by God in a dream to go back to the Persian Parthian kingdom another way.*" They never went back to tell Herod where he was. Herod was so furious he massacred every male child under two years of age, thinking he'd catch the king in the killing of all of the children.

What I want you to notice, particularly, is that when the Magi arrived, verse 11, *they came into the house...again, we remind ourselves that time has elapsed and they're now in a house, not a stable... saw the child with Mary His mother, they fell down and worshiped Him.* Now there is the indication that these non-Jewish kingmakers from the east acknowledged that this is the promised Messiah. They are non-Jewish. They are, they are gentiles, and they understand the words of Daniel and the others, and they realize that this indeed is the king. And the people of Israel missed what these Gentiles saw. They worshiped Him.

He is king by royal worship. He was worshiped by the established kingmakers of the world. And opening their treasures, they presented Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Gold for a king; frankincense which is a pure incense rising speaks of deity. It was offered to God as a sweet fragrance. Myrrh speaks of His humanity. It's a perfume to make life more bearable and life more pleasant, to push away some of the odors of life. He is a king, the gold. He is God, the frankincense. He is God/Man, the myrrh, the God/Man who is king. They worshiped Him. Royal worship... *Matthew* says He is King because the kingmakers of the world bowed to Him. In a sort of a backhanded way, even Herod confesses Him as King by his desire to murder Him.

And so, the royalty of Christ is established not only by His lineage, not only by the fact of His incredible grace seen even in His genealogy, not only by His royal birth but by His royal worship. And lastly, *Matthew* wants us to know that He is King by royal decree. Not just these things but He was decreed to be the King by God Himself. God who is His royal Father has so decreed. How so? Back to chapter 1 verse 23. God said back in the Old Testament, "*Behold a virgin shall be with child, shall bear a son and they shall call His name Emanuel which translated means God with us.*" God said the King would come born of a virgin. It happened, the divine decree.

Chapter 2 verse 6, the prophet said, speaking for God, "*He would be born in Bethlehem.*" That's exactly where He was born. Chapter 2 verse 15, "*Out of Egypt did I call My Son,*" said *Hosea* in chapter 11 verse 1. You remember that in order to escape the wrath of Herod, they were told to go to Egypt where they stayed. And then out of Egypt they came on their way to Nazareth. That was prophesied in *Hosea 11:1*. So God, by decree, said a virgin will bear a child. God, by decree, said that child will be born in Bethlehem. God, by decree, said that child will come out of Egypt.

And then in verse 18, Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled, "*A voice was heard in Rama weeping in great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and she refused to be comforted because they were no more.*" Rachel is sort of the mother of all Jewish mothers, and they're weeping and crying at the massacre of all their little babies. And so, the decree of God was given in that passage in *Jeremiah 31:15* that when the Messiah came there would be a weeping of Jewish mothers over the loss of their children at the time of His birth. And finally in verse 23, *He resided in a city called Nazareth that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled. He shall be called a Nazarene.* "The prophets" is plural there, we don't know the specific prophecy...in fact it may not even be recorded. But the prophets said He would be a Nazarene and that's exactly where He went to live.

God said when the King comes He will be born of a virgin. When He comes He will be born in Bethlehem. When He comes He will come out of Egypt. When He comes there will be a massacre that causes weeping of women for their killed children. And when He comes He will take up His residence in a place called Nazareth in order to be called a Nazarene. Jesus fulfilled every element of the royal decree of God. He is King in every sense. He is King by birth. He is King by decree. He is King by lineage. He is King by character. He is King by homage and worship.

And the carols say it, don't they? "Born a King, born a King," over and over again. "Christ the newborn King." But what kind of king, in closing? Is He a king over an earthly nation? Is He a king over many nations of the earth? The Bible tells us that He is a divine king. The Bible tells us that He Himself said, "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" He said, "*The kingdom is within you, or among you, or in your midst.*" And we learn it is a spiritual kingdom. He rules the hearts of those who believe in Him. He is sovereign over those who love Him. He is sovereign over those who bend their knee and bow to Him and seek His gracious forgiveness for their sins. He is King over those who accept His death

and resurrection for their salvation. And some day He will be King over the earth and the whole universe will submit to Him.

He is King now in the spiritual sense, He is to be King in the earthly sense, and He is to be King in the eternal sense. He is not a king like any other king. That's why Pilate couldn't understand Him. He couldn't understand what kind of king it is who lets Himself be killed. He couldn't understand what kind of king it is whose subjects don't fight for Him. He couldn't understand what kind of king it is who possesses no earthly authority, no earthly power, no earthly sphere of domination. He couldn't understand that kind of king.

He is a king and He rules over the hearts of all who love Him and serve Him and give Him their lives. And one day He will rule over this whole world, "*when the kingdoms of this world*" – says the *Revelation* – "*become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever*. That spiritual kingdom will become an earthly kingdom and blossom into an eternal kingdom where He will reign forever and ever and ever and we with Him. Jennie Hussey, many years ago in the hymn so familiar to us, wrote these words which give us the proper response. "King of my life I crown Thee now, Thine shall the glory be." Let's pray together.

It is not enough, Father, for us, that Christ came. It is not enough that He was born a king if we do not bow the knee to His sovereignty, if we do not enter His kingdom, if we are not passed out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Your dear Son. It means nothing that Jesus came, God incarnate lived, died, rose again, ascended to heaven, lives forever, reigns forever. It is not enough. It has no meaning unless I personally open my heart to Christ to crown Him King of my life, to confess Him as Lord and sovereign master and ruler of my heart. I pray, O God, for every person here that Christ, born a King, might be King in their life, that all of us might bow the knee and seek forgiveness and seek mercy from the gracious King, forgiveness for sin, and that we might seek to be made subjects in His glorious kingdom to know the blessedness of all that He bestows upon His subjects.

We thank You, Father, for the clear presentation in Your Word of the purpose of the coming of Christ. The world didn't see Him as a king, and everything was so humble and so veiled and so hidden that most people missed it. But those who looked closely saw His majestic birth, His majestic character, His majestic words, His royal power in the miracles He performed. And we would put ourselves among those who crown Him King. The world crunched a crown of thorns onto His head and mocked the idea that He was king. But He is King, King over all who love Him and soon to be King over all the universe in His glorious Second Coming. We pray that every heart would be open to the royalty of the Son of God. We pray in His name. Amen.