

**Matthew 2:1-12**  
**Christmas 2022 Preview**  
**The Circumstances Surrounding His Birth**

There is a new study guide for today's message, in case you did not pick one up. In case you did not notice, we are still in Matthew, but we are in Matthew chapter 2, as a preview to our Christmas service next Sunday. We are in Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 through 12. The title of today's message is The Circumstances Surrounding His Birth. Beginning at verse 1 and reading through.

**Now after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king behold magi** - we are used to the translation wisemen - **magi arrived from the east into Jerusalem.** *Magi* is the Greek word where we get our word *magic* from, and *magician*. They are magi from the East, from the Mesopotamian area. The magi were not Jewish. They were a caste of Persian priests that had come from the Mesopotamian area as priests. They are both religious priests and astrologers. They use the stars as a part of their counsels for their priesthood in the Mesopotamian Valley. These priests knew about the birth of Christ coming. They had the Scriptures in Mesopotamia. In Numbers chapter 24 verse 17 they knew that the Jews were expecting their Messiah. In Numbers chapter 24 verse 17 where it is prophesied that a star would come from Bethlehem. So they looked for a star. They also had Daniel's prophecy to the day that Messiah was to come. We have already studied that in Matthew chapter 24. So they are expecting something to happen in the stars that would indicate a great person had been born. So they know about the star, they know about the timing. They know that at any time there would be a miraculous sign in the heavens and then the Bethlehem star appears. They make their trek westward from the East to Jerusalem.

**And they came to Jerusalem, verse 2, saying, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the East, we came to worship Him. Now when Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all of Jerusalem with him.** These magi came when Herod was king. This would be Herod the Great. He ruled from 47 to 4 BC. He was a very evil man, and at the end of his reign he would murder friends and relatives who he thought were out to get him and to take over his rulership. So can you imagine Herod is on the killing rampage of everybody that wants to be king in his place? Now you know why he is troubled and all of Jerusalem with him. They knew that another killing rampage was about ready to take place when Herod heard the King of the Jews is born, and these foreigners have come to see Him.

Verse 4, **And when he gathered all of the chief priests and scribes of the people, he was inquiring from them where the Christ is being born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for this way it has been written through the prophet, verse 6, "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea, not at all are you small among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come out a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel."** Interesting quote. Right in the middle of this quote from Micah chapter 5 verse 2, **And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea, not at all are you small among the rulers of Judah** - right in the middle of this quote is the phrase *not at all are you small*. It is the opposite of what Micah chapter 5 verse 2 says. Micah 5:2 literally says, **You are small among the thousands of Judea.** You *are* small. The Hebrew word is the word *insignificant*. You are not small anymore Matthew is saying in this quote, in

this reference from Micah chapter 5 verse 2. You are not small and insignificant anymore, because of what God is using you for.

**Verse 7, Then when Herod had secretly called the magi, he inquired accurately from them the time of the appearing star. And when he sent them toward Bethlehem, he said to them, When you go accurately search concerning the child. And when you should find Him, report to me so that when I come, I also might worship Him. And after they heard the king, they went. And behold, the star which they saw in the East was going ahead of them. And when it came it stood over where the child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they came into the house, they saw the child with Mary His Mother. When they fell down, they worshiped Him. When they opened their treasures, they presented to Him gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh.**

Interesting that when the magi got to Jesus He was not in a manger. He was not in a stable. He is approximately one year old at this time, by the time the magi got there, and He was in a house. The reason we know He was approximately one year old is because when the magi did not return to Herod to give them the information, because they were warned not to go back, Herod calculated how old the child would be by the time that they would have returned but did not. And he figured he would be about two years old and that is when he made a decree. We are told later on in chapter 2, that when he realizes the magi were not returning to him, he made a decree that all male children two years and younger should be put to death. So we know that he is approximately a year old. We know that He is in a house by the time the magi got there. He is not in a stable. He is not in the manger.

**Verse 12, And after they had been instructed according to a dream not to return to Herod, through another way they did return, they departed into their own country.**

We are going to study the circumstances surrounding the time when Christ was born because it reveals the heart of God. It is important that we are involved in the circumstances to study them and to know them as part of our celebration, to know what part of our celebration is according to the Word and which is not. There have been parades. There is tinsel. Lots of lights, a great celebration. But when Christ came it was not a great celebration, other than in the fields where the angels appeared to the shepherds.

We saw before in Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 to 25 the hardship placed upon Mary and Joseph socially. It was in their engagement period that the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary and they had to experience the social shame of it all. Even to the point that in John chapter 8 it tells us that for thirty years Jesus was considered to be an illegitimate child of Mary and Joseph. So they had to live with that over their heads for thirty years until Jesus was revealed to be the Messiah. Hard circumstances. Nobody was celebrating, except out in the fields with the angels and individuals in various places.

We know, and we just studied, and I just spoke to you about in chapter 2 where Herod the king wanted to know where this Christ child was. Exactly his address, the exact place of his location, so he could come and worship him. But in reality, so that he could come and have him

killed. So there was a slaughter going on. Some estimate between 5 and 15 children were killed in that decree. So we remember the lowly means by which Christ came. He came lowly.

Our focus this morning is on verses 5 and 6. Herod wanted to know from the scribes where the Christ is being born. He says, **And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judea, for this way it has been written through the prophet,** quote from Micah chapter 5 verse 2, "**And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea, not at all are you small among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come out a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel.**"

#### 1) Place

So the first thing of three things we want to study this morning is the place where Christ was born. We know it is Bethlehem. It has been prophesied. We know He was born in Bethlehem. There were two Bethlehem's in those days, one six miles to the south of Jerusalem, which is the Bethlehem that we are dealing with here. Another Bethlehem is in the North, in Galilee. Again repeating what I said about the quote of Micah chapter 5 verse 2, it says, *though you be small among the thousands*. Matthew changed it to say, *though you are not small among the thousands*. The word in Hebrew *small* as I said before means *insignificant*. You are not insignificant anymore. This was prophesied some 600 BC, now fulfilled in Christ being born.

But it is interesting that God chose the lowly town of Bethlehem for the Christ child to be born. Not in Jerusalem, the great city where all the religious elite were, but in the town of Bethlehem. Luke tells us that after Jesus was born, He was placed in a feeding trough of one of the animals. Can you imagine being born in a small insignificant town? It has nothing going for it. And after you are born, you are placed in a feeding trough. Lowly conditions. He did not come with great fanfare. He came with lowly conditions. The place was Bethlehem. It is in Bethlehem that God has chosen Christ to be born.

#### 2) Provision

Secondly, not just the place - lowly conditions - but the provision of God. The circumstances reveal the provision that He came to save lowly people in a lowly way. He came as a human being. He was born as a baby, insignificant at its time, but He came humble.

Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 verses 6 and 7, **Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, literally *He emptied Himself of reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*** He emptied Himself of His glory to take on human form, to live amongst us. That is a very humble thing for God to do.

The text that we have studied so many times in Proverbs chapter 3 verse 34, where it says, **God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.** To the lowly. Jesus came humble and lowly. And in coming as a man, He came to identify with the lowly.

In Hebrews chapter 4 verses 14 and 15 the writer of Hebrews tells us, **Therefore having a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we should hold firm the confession. For we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses; but having been tempted according to all things according to our**

**likeness** (that is our human likeness) **yet apart from** (or without) **sin**. So He came as a human being not only to reveal God to us, but also that He might experience what it is like to be a baby. What it is like to grow up from a baby. He came to experience what it is like to be a young person. He came to experience what it is like to be a teenager. All the experiences in the progression of aging, up to the age of thirty years of age where He was revealed to be the Messiah. So we are told that we have a high priest who sympathizes. He does not challenge us or chide us. He identifies, He sympathizes with our weaknesses. It is very important. He came to be amongst us, to experience what we go through so that he can sympathize with our weaknesses. Again, let me repeat that - He does not challenge us or chide us to be better, He is sympathizing with our weakness.

Paul when he was suffering some health situations in II Corinthians chapter 12 verses 9 and 10, he prayed to the Lord for His healing. And the Lord's answer to him in verse 9 was, **My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made complete in weakness**. God identifies with weakness. You see, the weaker I am the more the more I rely on His strength. Because the weaker I am, the more powerful He is in my life. To the point that Paul would go on to say, **On account of which I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in calamities, in persecutions, and in difficulties on behalf of Christ, for whenever I am weak then I am powerful**. So he says, bring on those circumstances that make the human being weak, so I can experience the power and the strength of Christ. Bring it on. We are constantly struggling with the issues of life making us weak, and we are struggling in the Lord to get out of that weakness, when in reality He has left us in a weak form. He has left us in a weak condition so that we would rely on His strength and His power.

So the place where was Christ is born reveals God's heart. He identifies with the lowly. A lowly insignificant city was chosen. But not only the place, but the provision. God provided for us as He came in a weakened condition, except without sin, to identify with us. But going through these experiences we are told at the end of Hebrews chapter 4, that we can come freely to the throne of grace to get help in time of need. Why? Because He sympathizes with us.

### 3) Purpose

But thirdly - we have seen the place, we have seen the provision - but thirdly, the purpose. The purpose for His coming. He came to be glorified in lowly people. In God's wisdom He saw saving lowly people and keeping them in their humble lowly condition would magnify His glory and His grace and His mercy. He did not save us so that we could outshine Him. He came to be glorified in lowly people.

Paul said in II Corinthians chapter 4 verses 7 through 11, **But we have this treasure**, the very Spirit of Christ, **in earthen** (or dust) **vessels in order that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us**. So He has purposely chosen that we live in this body of dust, broken by sin and by the sin of the world. By receiving the Spirit of Christ into my spirit I have the treasure of the fullness of God himself. But He dwells in a person of weakness and has not changed that weakened lowly condition. In fact, we keep getting weaker, we keep getting older. The breakdown of the human flesh, of the human body. We pray about it all the time. We pray for people all the time because of the lowly human condition that God has left us in purposely, so

that when He moves and lives in us and through us others might see Him and give Him the glory, and not us.

He goes on to say in II Corinthians chapter 4 verses 8 through 11, **While being pressed in every way, yet not being restricted; while being perplexed, but not completely despairing; while being persecuted, but not being forsaken; while being thrown down, but not being destroyed; always carrying around the dying of the Lord Jesus in the body in order that also the life of Jesus might be manifested in our body.** Verse 11, **For we always (that is we who are still living) are being delivered over unto death on account of Jesus, in order that also the life of Jesus might be made manifest (or revealed, or evident) in our mortal flesh.** We have this treasure in earthen vessel - a vessel of dust, and it will return to the dust - so that He might receive the glory, so that we might rely on Him for our provision.

So in Christ's birth we see God's plan and purpose and provision for man to identify with the lowly so that He might be our strength. To live inside of the lowly so that others might see Him, and He might receive the glory. It was not with tinsel and lights and parades, but lowly humble conditions that God chose to come into this world. And He ministered to and chose to reveal Himself and minister to the lowly, humble sinners in the world. That is you and me. He came lowly to minister to the lowly that He might have the great glory. People might see Christ in us in the midst of our weakened condition. Those are the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ.

Let's close with prayer.