

Series: Christ The King Is Born #1853

**Title: *Matthew 2.1-3*
*Jesus Is King***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. It is good to have you here with us, and there are just three weeks left until Christmas Day. This year I will be concise and draw your mind and heart towards Jesus Christ the Lord, whose birth we celebrate, by emphasizing that Christ is King! Hence, the title of this short but I trust poignant series, *Christ The King Is Born*. Our text will be the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1-3. Let us begin by reading this passage. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2, verses 1-3.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.' ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

These three verses, near the start of Matthew's Gospel, focus on the main character who is Jesus. By my count Christ is mentioned four times in three verses. "Now after Jesus was born..." This marks out Jesus as the One around whom this whole narrative will be built. In verse 2 the question is asked, "Where is He (that's Jesus)...where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" This identifies Jesus as King, and specifically King of the Jews. And then, still in verse 2, we read about "His star." This star belongs to Jesus. The magi declare they have "come to worship Him." Him is Christ. The One the magi have come to worship is Jesus.

While there are two kings mentioned here – Jesus and Herod – the focus is clearly on Jesus Christ the King. Each one of the four Gospel writers have a different emphasis on the Person of Christ. In Matthew, the emphasis is on Jesus the Messiah, the King of the Jews. In Mark, the emphasis is on Jesus the Servant of God. In Luke, the emphasis is on Jesus the Perfect Man. And in John, the emphasis is on Jesus as The God-Man. Because we will live in Matthew chapter 2 Christ the King is our focus. I hope you will be with us in the lead up to Christmas Day as we discover all these verses offer us.

Christ is *The One King* we worship. The world has plenty of kings and queens, but none of these are now nor have they ever been worthy of worship. Only Christ the King is worthy. To set these verses in context we must remember that at the time of Christ's birth, Rome was in-charge. Israel was under Roman rule. And the Romans believed in the veneration and worship of their emperors. The Roman worship of human rulers began with Julius Caesar. This was certainly true after his death by assassination, but even while he was living an attempt was made to deify him. After the victory that essentially gave him his mandate to rule all of Roman civilization a statue was erected on Capitoline hill in the city of Rome that gave him the title of demigod. While Caesar had that erased, he certainly was very comfortable with the honor it bestowed upon him by the people under his rule.

In a moment we will see that after his death, worship of him as a god became a different story. But first we should keep in mind how the ancient Romans thought of divinity. Henry Fairfield Burton, writing in the periodical *The Biblical World* in 1912 gave us the following insights. "The Romans did not sharply distinguish religion from politics; for religion was a function of the state, and the worship of the gods which were recognized by the state was part of the duty of the citizen. Emperor worship therefore expressed the attitude of the worshiper toward the emperor as the embodiment of imperial power...the reigning of the emperor [was] a sort of earthly providence...[Emperors] accepted the religious devotion of the people as an evidence of political loyalty (*The Worship of the Roman Emperors*, 86)."

Emperor worship, as the Romans considered it, was really about *power*. Burton continues telling us the logic was this: "if the essence of divinity is the possession of power, then surely the all-powerful emperor must be divine...In the thought of the worshiper the divinity of the living emperor can only have meant a decided superiority to other men (87)."

Ah, but after the emperor died (in 44BC by assassination), this was another story. Caesar's death is what began emperor cult worship in Rome. Professor Burton continues, "Popular enthusiasm over his achievements and indignation at his death found expression in religious adoration. It was really the Roman populace that raised Caesar to the rank of a god. The common people...were convinced of his deity...the Senate formally confirmed upon Caesar the title of Divus, 'the deified,' and ordered a temple to be erected for his worship (82)."

You and I know the sinfulness of man and so it will come as no surprise to us that Octavian, the grand-nephew and adopted son of Caesar, when Octavian became Emperor, he used the title for deity on documents and coins. And the very title Augustus means the venerable. This title had a religious significance and designated him as worthy of reverence, making him out to be more than a man (82). It is true that Octavian, called Augustus, rejected being worshiped as divine during his lifetime, but immediately after his death in 14AD, the Senate passed decrees giving him the title of Divus and providing for him to be worshipped as a god (83)," says the historian Henry Fairfield Burton.

He adds some stats. "The total number of persons who were raised to the rank of Divi during the five centuries from Julius Caesar to Valentinian III was seventy-four, of whom thirty-eight were rulers of the whole or part of the empire, and sixteen were women (83)." Furthermore, the Emperor Tiberius and his mother Livia are said to have offered sacrifices to Augustus as a god and the Emperor Vespasian, on his deathbed remarked, "I suppose I am becoming a god." And while that may have been said in jest, the conviction still stood that Roman emperors were to be treated as gods. Of course, this belief was more common among the superstitious and uneducated people – the intellectuals only paying homage to the idea.

I share this with you to say it is into this context that Jesus Christ is born King! Immediately in the birth narrative Matthew tells us He is King Jesus. And how do you think this is going to make men like King Herod feel and behave? Under Roman rule, where emperors are built up into deity, comes a baby declared to be King. "Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.'" Christ is King and men have come to worship Him. Christ is God and only God is worthy of worship. But this goes straight up against Roman religion and politics.

Obviously Christ and the Christians who follow Him are going to have something to say about any person who claims deity for themselves. We have one God who alone is Deity. Therefore, we have *one King* and His name is Jesus the Christ! We too should be careful that we do not, even subtly, turn one of our rulers into gods or goddesses and that we do not in any way worship them. Many Americans, for example, have a bad tendency to turn a president into a king. Oh, we brag about having no royalty. In fact, we beat back the British in the Revolutionary War, the first shots of which were fired not far from where I live. And yet, we often exalt politicians to the status of gods. We give them our time, attention, money and worship.

We have no king, but Jesus Christ the King. I urge you, I plead with you: do not make any man your king. Do not make any woman your queen. Bow in honor and in total surrender to King Jesus. Exalt Him! Glorify Him! Worship Him! Pledge to Him your allegiance and life. Bow before King Jesus who wears the Crown of God and who sits on heaven's throne. Make it your practice to revere King Jesus far above and beyond any human being, no matter what may be at stake in your country, in this earthly kingdom. Ours, my friends, is a heavenly Kingdom and Jesus reigns and rules over us!

Come with us to Jerusalem, not far from Bethlehem of Judea, as we meet Christ the King who is born. And we also meet Herod, the magi from the east, and we talk about a star, "His star." King Jesus holds our imaginations in a way unlike any other, including ancient and modern emperors, and what better Gospel and text than this: Matthew chapter 2, verses 1-3.

Let's ask God's blessing on our time together. God, King of kings and Lord of all lords, we ask You to open our eyes to see Your Son, and our King, Jesus Christ. Teach us to get our interests aligned with Yours. Remind us in a powerful way of the Kingdom of heaven and the One who sits on the throne of heaven. Forgive us for sometimes exalting a man or a woman over You. We pray You will meet with us this month, and reveal to us more of who You are.

We pray for people all around us who are much like the ancient Romans. They do not believe in You. They do not honor You as the One and Only God. We ask the Holy Spirit that this Christmas they will hear the gospel, repent of their sins, believing in Jesus and serving Him as King of their lives. Amen.

Join us next time because Jesus is King!

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