

Roots  
The King of All Kings

It is only the second Sunday after Christmas – but we are still in the Christmas story. For a lot of us, we have the three wise men, or three kings in our Nativity scenes at home – I know we do.

But in reality, they probably came up to 2 years after Jesus was born.

The word in Greek for Jesus is “child”, not baby as it was in Luke 2. The wise men come to a “house” and not a manger.

But even though Jesus is probably a toddler by now, we still keep this story, as part of our extended Christmas story – because the wise men play an important part in how we treat Jesus.

So let’s read what happens in today’s story.

Matthew 2:1-18 (NRSV)

1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,[b] and have come to pay him homage.”

3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[c] was to be born. 5 They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd[d] my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” 9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw that the star had stopped,[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” 14 Then Joseph[h] got up, took the child and his mother by

night, and went to Egypt, 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men,[i] he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.[j] 17 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

18 "A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

Let's pray. Lord move in us today to hear your Word, to learn from it, and to apply it to our lives, even in the next week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So really we have the story of 5 kings today.

Herod – the evil king.

The three kings from the east visiting Jesus.

We see the King of all kings – as we saw in The Jesus Storybook Bible, Jesus the king.

Let's take a look at them.

Herod – the evil dictator.

If you are around my age – you remember movies that pit the bad guys against the good guys, called Westerns. The movies set in the old American west of the late 1800's where there were good guys and bad guys. The bad guys typically wore black hats and well, they were bad.

If you are younger you remember Star Wars – with Darth Vader as the bad guy.  
Just as bad as the bad guys in westerns or Darth Vader, was King Herod. He would wear the black hat.

Herod was about as bad as you could get. He did build a new temple in Jerusalem, and brought some stability to Israel – which was under Roman rule at the time. But he was ruthless too.

He had some of his own family members killed if he thought they might threaten his rule. The Jewish historian Josephus says that Herod had a plan in place that when he died, he would have elite Jerusalem citizens arrested and killed the same day – so even if people weren't mourning his death, at least they would be mourning someone.

So how do we relate to Herod?

One way we can relate to him is his fear and insecurity.

Herod feared that even his own family would take over his rule.

While we can't relate to Herod being a dictator and having people put to death, we can relate I think in our own lives to fear and insecurity. As Herod wanted desperately to hold on to his power and reputation, sometimes we have the same desires.

We certainly can be fearful of failure, of losing jobs, of what other people think of us. As Herod is we can be anxious about the future, and our place in it.

For me, I'm not I can tend to be anxious about things.

So like some of you, I have memorized Philippians 4:6-7, which says:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

When I am afraid, or insecure, or worried or anxious – especially about things I can't control – like what others think of me – or parts of my future – then I should pray.

Replace anxiety with prayers and thanks. Thanking God and praying to God allow me to focus on Him – the king of kings – and not myself.

Herod was insecure; powerful; and fearful. We can learn from how not to live.

I don't want to spend too much time relating to Herod but to relate to our other three kings and to Jesus the king of kings.

So for the three kings – who are they?

Janet Denison, a commentator, says,

"The Magi were kings and they were from the Orient, the 'east.'" The Magi presented three gifts to Jesus, but most people have come to believe there were only three kings – some scholars think there may have been more than 3.

Many scholars think they are from Persia – modern day Iran – so they were the first Iranians to worship Jesus.

We know that King Herod was impressed by the Magi and believed them to be knowledgeable.

But the wise men were not impressed by King Herod. The wise men were impressed by Jesus, and put their focus on him.

And they brought gifts, valuable gifts, of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

You may have given gifts to each other – I know many households who are trying to cut down a little on the materialism of Christmas where mom and dad give three gifts to their kids – because baby Jesus got three gifts from the wise men.

What can we learn from them? Well, how do we relate to Jesus the king?

They studied, they worked hard to get there, they worshipped him, gave gifts – and being warned in a dream to travel back a different way – to avoid Herod, they listened.

They followed a star. They studied, and worked – maybe traveling as far as 1000 miles – by camel or by foot – to find the new king.

It's amazing that they studied and traveled and brought gifts – to see a baby born to teenage parents.

Local religious leaders don't see the clues, and can't travel 5 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see the baby.

We have seen the signs of who he is, and need to seek him out in our own ways.

We can certainly learn from these 3 kings, but we'll come back to that in a minute.

Which leads us to the King of all kings – Jesus.

Like we heard on Christmas Eve, Jesus can relate to us. He was born a baby, to teenage parents, who had to figure out to help their baby when he cried, how to change his diapers, how to feed him, care for him.

He was human like us. I'm sure he experienced other human things as a boy – learning to walk, then tripping and falling, scraping his knees, so he can relate to us. Then finally as a man, he was persecuted, rejected by the establishment, and his best friends abandoned him after their last night together.

We can relate to him, feeling rejected, having friends turn from us. It's encouraging to know that Jesus the King of all kings – can relate to who we are – in our messiness, when we struggle, when we are hurting.

So we go to him, pray to him, ask him to help us with our fear and anxiety – to instead give thanks and ask for the peace that passes understanding – from the Prince of Peace.

Matt Proctor, a pastor, says that his young boys, ages 5 and 3, want to be the same as him. They want him to put on blue jeans and t-shirts and when they wear the same clothes.

When they see him with blue jeans and t-shirt they have the same clothes on they say, "Look, Dad—same, same."

He says,

"When I play living room football with my boys, Conrad will not let me play standing—so big and scary and towering above him. The theological term for this is "completely Other." Instead he insists I get on my knees. When I am down at eye-level, Conrad puts his hand on my shoulder and says, "There. See, Dad—same, same."

Matt Proctor says,

Here's the point ... God himself has felt what we feel. In the Incarnation, he chose not to stay "completely Other."

He got down at eye-level, and in the Incarnation, God experienced what it's like to be tired and discouraged .... He knows what it's like to hurt and bleed. On the cross, Jesus himself prayed a psalm of lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus was born as a baby, and grew up as a boy and became a man, Jesus can relate. As his children, when we hurt and know he hurt before us – we can look at Jesus and say "Same, same."

I love it that Jesus told his disciples near the end of his time with them, that he no longer called them disciples, but friends.

We too can relate to Jesus as human, but we also need to recognize him as the king of kings.

We know that Jesus – after his resurrection – sits in heaven in the place of authority – at the right hand of God the Father – and will be the eternal judge for all men and women.

Knowing that should generate **respect, reverence, and worship**. The wise men knew that.

The three wise men worshiped – and brought gifts. It even says in verse 11 today, they bowed down, or paid homage to Jesus.

We can do the same. We can come to this room, bow down our hearts – bring gifts of our hearts and lives to him, and come with reverence and worship – because being God – Jesus deserves our worship and praise.

I heard a friend say we need to Love God, Love others. That's what we do. Love God, love others. It's a simpler version of the great commandment – Love God with all your heart, soul mind and strength – and love your neighbor as yourself. Love God, love others. Easy to say, not always easy to do.

One of the ways we love God is through our prayers to him – just talking to him. As we pray, it's good to remember that Jesus is truly God – the one who sits at the right hand of the Father. Who we can bow our hearts and raise our hands in worship to.

We want to bring ourselves to him as a gift in worship and prayer. Remember as we pray that God is not some sort of heavenly Santa Claus – certainly he hears our prayers and we can ask him for anything – but we don't start with making requests – we can start with an attitude of thanks and praise to God, out of reverence for him.

Since we can't touch God, we can love God by touching others.

I don't know about you, but I love the musical Les Miserables. I've seen the musical live 3 times, and seen the recent movie more than that on DVD. I love the music, but really love the underlying message of redemption. One of the key lines of a song late in the musical is also a key line in the book by author, Victor Hugo, who says:

"To love another person is to see the face of God."

An amazing line:

"To love another person is to see the face of God."

I said before that one of my heroes was Billy Graham, I would love to meet, but never met him face to face. When there was a Billy Graham crusade in Indy I had quietly hoped to meet him, but I didn't. But even if I haven't met Billy Graham, I've certainly had the chance to meet Jesus in others.

In Matthew 25, Jesus, now as an adult, tells a parable and in the story the people who follow him say:

"Lord, when did we see you?"

In the parable Jesus says,

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Furthermore, Jesus says,

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." (Matthew 25:35-37)

When we love God – by the way we worship Jesus - the way we bring him our treasures, the way we love him and others - is to praise him.

As we heard in the The Jesus Storybook Bible, Jesus is the King of Kings. We worship him as the three kings did – that he is special – worthy of worship.

For all his evil, Herod gave some good advice when he said, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and worship him."

Herod didn't mean it – but we can follow his advice.

We can be like the wise men. They took a journey, they sought out a different king – not King Herod – but a child king – born to poor peasant parents – and when they found him – they bowed down, they worshiped him, and they brought him their treasures.

In this new year, let's seek him and worship as the wise men did.

Let's pray.

O Lord, help us to live for you in this new year. Help us to follow you, search for you, to see you, to love God with praise and worship, and to love others as we love ourselves.

