Celebrate Jesus!

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 2.

! I want to just focus on a part of the Christmas story today. And I purposefully wanted to do just some personal study a couple of months ago about these guys that we don't know a lot about, the wise men, the magi.
There are certain characters in the Christmas story that are talked about a lot and that are pretty well understood. Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, even the angels.
When you read Luke 2, the account of the birth of Jesus, we encounter all of those characters. But when you come to Matthew 2, we are introduced to a different part of the narrative that surrounds the early years of Jesus.
These wise men, but they tend to be a bit shrouded in confusion. Kind of nebulous characters. A lot of uncertainty about who they are and what they were doing.
[1:14] When they actually made it to Jesus. There's a lot of assumptions and tradition associated with the wise men that's based far more on just plain tradition than it is biblical truth.

When people think about the wise men, they often think of kings, but they're not really kings.
They're often referred to as kings because of the Christmas song, We Three Kings from Orient Are.
They're not really kings though. And we don't have any idea how many there were. Again, most of us assume there were three just because we know the song, We Three Kings. The Bible doesn't tell us there were three.
The general reason, I think, why tradition held to three is because there's mention of three gifts.
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But nothing really should make us think that there were necessarily three.
We don't have any idea how many there were. And a lot of confusion about when they arrive. Now, there's no confusion in the Bible with when they arrive.
[2:22] The only reason there's confusion is because of your nativity sets and your Christmas cards. That's the only reason there's confusion. Nobody reads the Bible and thinks, when did they, were they there the night? No, they weren't there the night that Jesus was born.

We know that. And if that's ruining Christmas for you, you should read your Bible more because I'm not telling you anything that should be new to you. Matthew tells us some details that are very helpful.
Now, just in case you're wondering, I do have nativity sets in my office that have—well, that's not true. I don't have them this year, but sometimes I put it out—that have wise men there. So don't go home and throw your nativity sets up.
Don't go home and take a hammer to them. It's all right. Just understand it's compressing a bit of the story together. The wise men did not travel 800 miles in one night.
All right? That did not happen. And if it weren't for our Christmas plays and Christmas cards and Christmas carols, that wouldn't be that hard to understand because the Bible tells us about that.
[3:19] But these wise men are just kind of this kind of strange part of the Christmas story or at least the early years of Jesus.

And I want us to not base our knowledge of them on a song or a card that you got in the mail.
I want us to base our knowledge of them on his word. And the visit of the wise men, it's an important part of the story. It's an important part of the early days of Jesus.
So let's look at it together here in Matthew chapter 2. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

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For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
[4:24] In assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea, For so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah.

For from you shall come a ruler who shall shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.
And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way, and behold, The star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.
When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, And they fell down and worshipped him.
And then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in the dream not to return to Herod, They departed to their own country by another way.
[5:42] Let's consider what we can learn and what we can take away from this detail and this account of the wise men. Let me give you four points to consider this morning.

Number one, let's just start with this. The wise men. The wise men. What we know is that this is in the days of Herod the king.
Verse 1 tells us that. Herod is nearly 70 years old. He will die soon after this. Herod was known by history as an evil man, a paranoid man, a self-centered person.
He was a great builder of public works. He was a shrewd politician. But he was an evil man.
He had 10 wives. Had one of them murdered. Had several of his own family members put to death. And it said that he had as many as 8,000 people killed.
[6:51] You may be familiar with the quote attributed to Caesar Augustus that says, I'd rather be Herod's swine than Herod's son. The verse tells us these wise men came from the east to Jerusalem.

Now here's what you need to know about Herod. Herod was declared king of the Jews by the Senate in Rome. And that had been true for about 40 years. He's a paranoid man.
He doesn't want anyone challenging him. And here come these magi, these powerful men in the east, probably traveling with a large entourage, probably with soldiers with them and servants with them.
And it would have appeared to be a very threatening scene to Herod. Again, we don't know a lot about these wise men. The word magi is a name given to this group of men.
It was a name that was familiar with those who served as priests from the Medo-Persian time, also the Babylonians. We don't know their names. We don't know how many there were.
[8:04] What we do know about them is they were skilled men, influential men, men who were well studied in areas of science and philosophy and medicine.

They arrive, it tells us, in Bethlehem, this small town five miles south of Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus' birth, in that time in history, there were probably not more than a thousand people that lived there.
Bethlehem is a significant place, though, in our Bible. It's the place where Jacob buried Rachel. It's the place where Ruth met Boaz, where David attended his sheep. And if you look at verse 2, they were saying, where is he who has been born king of the Jews?
For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. They declare their motivation for being there is worship. Now, Daniel 2, in the Old Testament, Daniel taking place during the time of the exile, so roughly 600 years before the birth of Christ, Daniel speaks of wise men in his day.
Daniel has taught them Scripture, and now some 550 years later or so, these prophecies that Daniel had spoken of and taught of has now come to pass.
[9:40] What had been taught by Daniel, two wise men of his day, no doubt, has been passed down through the centuries. We don't know exactly when they arrive.

We know that it's not at his birth. There's a few reasons we know that. We'll look at that in just a moment. But one of them is they're in a house. Time has passed because Jesus is not born while living in a home.

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We know that from Luke 2. The wise men make it to their house, and so we know some time has passed. But it's not just the wise men we see. There's a second character, and it's the wicked king. Verse 3, When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. This is interesting. History tells us some things about Herod.
Not only was he a wicked man, we know that, but before he died, he had prominent members of the people who lived in Jerusalem.
[10:50] He had them arrested. And the reason he had them arrested was he wanted them to be put to death when he died.

The reason is, Herod was so wicked, he knew nobody would really mourn or grieve his death, and so if there were other people who were put to death when he died, there would be widespread grieving in the land.
That's next level kind of wicked stuff. That's the kind of man that he was. The text tells us in verse 3, he was troubled. It means he was disturbed. He was agitated.
Same word would be used if you had a pool that people were jumping in, and the water was all stirred up. That's what was going on within him. He was troubled.
Old Jerusalem referring to the leaders there in the land. From the very beginning of the life of Jesus all the way through his crucifixion that we've just been studying about as we've walked through Mark, there was with the leaders of Jerusalem great disappointment.
[12:00] Disappointment because Jesus was just not the Messiah they wanted. From the very beginning, they wanted a leader, a warrior, a savior who would lead them into freedom as they would define it.

Christ, from the very beginning of his public ministry, was talking about repentance and salvation. His forerunner, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for him, talked about repentance.
That's not what the leaders of Jerusalem were wanting to hear. They didn't want someone to come and talk to them about sin and confession and repentance. They wanted someone to come and tell them how great they already were, how worthy they already were, and they were looking for a redeemer, a messiah, this warrior king who would come and defeat Rome and give them political freedom and economic freedom and military freedom and be able to usher in this golden age of life on earth, not because of repentance or spiritual renewal, just by someone who would come and do everything on their own political agenda.
Well, everything about the life of Christ does not meet up with their desire. His message didn't because he talked about repentance, which is a beautiful thing to one who would hear it, but for those who are self-righteous, repentance is a clinging symbol.
And then this story is told of a baby who was born who is Christ the Lord, and if your desire is for a redeemer to defeat Rome, a baby is not what you're wanting.
[13:46] How is a baby going to be able to do that? From the very beginning, the leaders in Jerusalem were quite disappointed with who Christ was and the work he would do and the message he would bring.

Jesus is born in a time when the Jewish people are very religious, but exceedingly worldly.
That's the world you and I live in today, isn't it? Our nation hasn't stopped being religious. Just very worldly.
Verse 4 says, Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes and the people, he inquired them where Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet.
And you, O Bethlehem, the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who shall shepherd my people Israel. So Herod asked these people about the birth of the Christ child, and they respond by taking him back to Scripture.
[15:00] So what does Herod do? Verse 7, Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared and said to them to go to Bethlehem, go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

Now Herod has no intention of worshiping anybody. Herod's a wicked king with a wicked motivation. His desire is not to worship the baby.
His desire is to destroy the baby. But Herod, who is not only wicked and evil and powerful, he's also paranoid, will not feel safe as long as anyone is alive who was born between the time the star first

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appeared and the time these wise men showed up.
Whatever Herod thinks, whatever he believes, what he will not tolerate is any thought that someone has been born who is king of kings and lord of lords.
So, from the time the wise men tell him they first saw the star to the time they have shown up, if you're a paranoid wicked man willing to kill your own family, it's nothing to you to make decrees to go kill those who were born in that time.
[16:39] And just to be safe, let's take from the time the star first appeared to the time the wise men showed up, and let's add just a little bit to that even to make sure we've got our bases covered as Herod's thought.

So, anyone born in that two year span. He tells them to go and search diligently, carefully, be exact, report back to me exactly with great precision what you find.
that brings us to a third part of the story, and that is the wandering star. The wandering star. Verse 9, after listening to the king, they went on their way, and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.
I have, probably like many of you, have seen a lot of documentaries or read many articles of people trying to research and try to say exactly what this star really was.
The Bible doesn't tell us much about it other than what we have just read. what we do know is that it's some kind of a heavenly light that is supernaturally controlled by God that leads them to the place where Jesus was.
[18:07] This is a way the Lord leads His people. There are many men who believe this was the kind of glory of God.

The explanation of what this is is not found in looking at comets or shooting stars or any other. This is a supernatural work of God where He is in the heavenlies controlling this light to direct these men exactly to the place where they are to go.
Now, here's some things that we know. They're journeying from Babylon to Israel. That location, that area is going to take them about 800 miles to journey.
Historians tell us that people typically could travel about 20 miles a day. So, if you're going approximately 800 miles at approximately 20 miles a day, it's going to have taken you at least six weeks, probably a little more to get there.
here, we know they arrive within two years because of the decree that Herod gives. We know that Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day and then taken to be presented to the temple on day 40, and all of this is happening after that.
[19:40] So, these wise men show up somewhere between Jesus being two months old up to maybe a year old.

We can't be exact with when they show up, but it's somewhere around that time. Not the night of His birth, somewhere around probably two months to 12 months they arrive.
verse 10, they saw the star and they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Fascinating that the magi, these Gentiles, coming to worship the Lord, rejoicing exceedingly with great joy, while the very ones right where Christ was born, ignore, neglect, and could care less.
It's the wise men, the wicked king, the wandering star. Let me show you one last thing, number four, the worshipful gifts.
The worshipful gifts. Verse 11, going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. We're not at the location where he was born.
[21:00] We are again somewhere between two months, maybe up to a year after his birth. They go into the house, they're in a house now, and they fell down and worshipped and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There is a bit of an interesting prophetic element to the gifts that they bring. Gold was symbolic of royalty, it was a gift for a king.
frankincense was used in temple worship with sacrifices symbolic of a priest. Myrrh was mixed with wine as part of an anesthetic and as we've been looking at was also made to be a part of a perfume that was used at grave sites speaking of his death.
And here are gifts that remind us that Jesus is a king, a high priest, and our sacrifice who was born to die to save his people from their sins.
Verse 12 says, being warned in the dream not to return to hair, they departed to their own country by another way. Just thinking metaphorically about that, that verse 12 is giving you a literal word

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that they left a different route.
[22:33] They were warned not to go back to Herod because Herod did not want to find the baby Jesus to worship him. He wanted to find the baby Jesus to kill him. So the wise men were warned in the dream, don't go back to Herod, you need to leave a different way.

And metaphorically, isn't it true that everybody who looks upon Christ with faith never leaves the same way.
There are some in our culture, maybe some in our church today, who year after year after year have heard the Christmas story, have sung the Christmas carols.
Christmas. But if you don't know him, if you don't love him, if you don't have faith in him, nothing changes.
You come to the end of a year, you start a new year, and if you don't know Christ, you're just looking every year, maybe this year will bring me joy, maybe this year will bring me what I'm missing.
[23:52] And it won't take more than two or three days into 2025, and you'll realize the same sin of the world that affected you today affects you then, and if you think just writing a different date on a piece of paper is going to change your life, you will soon find out once again in a couple of weeks, no, it will not.

And if you think that there's a certain gift out there you can give or you can receive, and if Christmas to you is nothing more than the exchange of material goods, you may have some temporary happiness while you open it or while you watch someone else open your gift, you'll very soon find out that if you don't know who Christ is, if you don't know the Christ of Christmas, you come and leave and nothing has changed.
But when you come to faith in Christ, when you begin to understand just how sinful you are, and how gracious He is, and when you understand that Jesus dying on a cross is not just some story, it is the truth of the gospel that has forgiven your sin and saved your soul.
Nobody encounters the living Christ with faith and leaves the same way. Now, verse 12 is talking about a literal physical thing.
They took a different route home, but spiritually it's also true that nobody meets Christ with the eyes of faith and leaves the same way.
[25:42] We're changed. We're different. And the change, of course, as you well know as believers, is not that everything now gets easy.

As John's mentioned to us, for none of us in this room was this year easy. No year is easy. easy. It's not supposed to be easy.
That's part of our hope of the return of Christ, when the curse is done away with. Don't expect now what can only be then.
But everything is different. There are some who come to church, and coming to church is just something they do, just something they feel guilty or they don't come, or just something that their parents make them come to, or something a spouse drags you to, or whatever it may be.
And the songs are fine, but do we have to sing so many, and the preaching's okay, but why does that one guy talk so long? It just becomes something, I mean, I'm willing to endure it because maybe there's some good luck charm in this, but nothing ever changes for you because you don't believe.
[27:01] And just singing a song and just taking sermon notes on a piece of paper, none of that is going to change your life if you don't believe in the Christ of Christmas. But when you believe the message, when you receive the truth, nobody leaves that the same.

Nobody does. That's why there's people in the sanctuary right now, and you've been believers for 50 years, 60 years, 70 years, and you are more hungry to know the Lord today than you've ever been.
Because when the Holy Spirit's within you, everything changes. Everything changes. Nobody meets the living Christ and departs the same way.
It changes us. It doesn't make us perfect. We still sin. But 1 John 2 says, in Christ we have an advocate. We find forgiveness.
And when you come to the end of this passage with the wise men, there is something very compelling here. That here in Matthew 2, at the very early parts of Matthew's gospel, we find these wise men from the east who come to worship Christ.

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[28:31] It's not the people who are near him. It's not the people who have the law and the prophets. It's the people from the outside, the Gentiles who have come to find and come to worship Christ, led by the sovereign hand of God.

God, and when you get to the very end of Matthew, chapter 28, it will end, the gospel ends with the great commission, with the command of the Lord to his people to take the gospel to all nations. Matthew begins with God's gracious invitation from the nations, and it ends with God's gracious command to take the message to the nations. To put that together, we understand that Christmas is not only a message to be believed, it's a message to go and tell.
Christmas is not only the great invitation, Christmas is the reminder that as the church, this is our task to take the gospel to the nations, into the neighborhoods, wherever we can, and let people know who Christ is, what he has done, and to call them to repentance.
And when we look here at Matthew 2, this story of the wise men, you have the Magi seeking Christ, you have Herod opposing Christ, and most all the Jewish people just ignoring him.
[30:25] This is a picture of humanity. Some hate, most ignore, few worship and believe.

I wonder today where you would fall in that group of people. Could it be that like Herod, you despise the things of God?
that you're kind enough to come to church and to act civil, kind enough to come because your parents told you to, kind enough to come because your spouse begged you to, but in your heart you really just hate the things of God.
Not saying that like Carid you want to go and kill people, but maybe in your own heart if you could, you would just kill all together the message or the preaching or the talk of heaven and hell and sin and judgment.
There could be some even in this sanctuary who so strongly oppose the things of God. The only difference between you and Herod is Herod had no control, no self-control, whereas you clearly do.
[31:52] Yet in your heart, you could have the same opposition to the gospel that Herod had.
There could be others, maybe you are more like the Jewish people.

In the early days, it's not so much that they hated or opposed Jesus as much as it is they just wanted to ignore him. He wasn't what they wanted.
So they just looked for something else. People like that are in church all the time. Not haters of the church, not haters of Christ, just looking for something.
Will this fix what I'm after? We see it all the time. People come to church, get super involved, they're everywhere all the time doing everything, just trying to fill some emptiness in their life, but there's no conversion, there's no transformation, there's no heart change, they're just trying something else.
And when that doesn't do for them what they hoped that it would, they just leave and go try the next thing.
That's why the world is so religious. You say, well, why would people be deeply religious if they have no desire for holiness? Because they're not interested in giving their lives to Christ through repentance.
[33:16] All they want is Christ to give them what they've already in their flesh desired. That's how you get worldly religious people. And that was the majority of the people in Christ's day.

I would argue that's the majority of the people in our day. And some, and I pray in this sanctuary many, do believe.
And you love the Lord. And you trust Him. And your greatest desire this Christmas and your greatest desire week by week, indeed day by day, is to live a life of praise to the King.
Just understand that you and I live in a world today, just like in the days of the wise men, where some will believe, many will ignore, and some will despise.
That hasn't changed. But the greatest way to know that you are one who truly believes is that you did not leave the way you came.
[34:41] That the gospel has taken root in your life. And it's changed you. Relationships with people you love is not just about facts and dates and details.

It changes you. When husband and wife have their first baby, they're forever changed.
Not just because they know a birth date or because they picked out a name. No, there's a part of their heart that's forever completely changed.
You're never going back to where you were before. In an even greater way, that should be true for us as God's people.

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When you meet Christ with faith, you never go back the way you came. Forever changed. [35:50] So let's learn the lesson of Matthew 2 today. And make sure our hearts are following the Lord's invitation to come to Him.

And that we would respond in worshipful obedience. Let those two words be the last words we consider this morning.
Worshipful obedience. If you take obedience out and you just say, I'm worshiping, I'm just singing, I'm just closing my eyes, I'm just singing a song, I'm just taking notes, I'm just raising my hands, I'm just worshiping.
Worship without obedience is nothing more than emotionalism. If you say, well, I obey, I want to do what He says, but I have no worship, I have no love, I have no passion about, I have no care for Him, I'm just going to go try to do certain things, you will wear yourself out fast.
The lesson from the wise men is a picture of worshipful obedience. Love, joy, hope, peace, expressed through obedience to His word and His command to come and worship and go and tell. [37:24] Let us, like the wise men, celebrate Jesus every day of our life. Celebrate who He is, celebrate what He has done, celebrate the fullness of the revelation of who our Savior is, and with worshipful obedience live our lives in a way that shows we will never be the same again.

Lord, we do thank You today for Your word and pray that Your Spirit would use it to bring hope and encouragement, that the truths we have studied would change our lives, that we truly would never be the same.
As Your Holy Spirit lives within Your people every day, illuminating Your word and helping us to understand its beauty and its truth, convicting us of sin, leading and guiding us to use our spiritual gifts for the good of others and the glory of Christ.
Lord, may we never be the same. And for any in this sanctuary who may not know You as Savior, who perhaps in their heart are just looking for something, trying anything, would I pray that they would come to realize that what You offer them is not the completion of their selfish agenda, but a whole new will, a new heart, a new way of life, where they would, with faith, call upon You and believe and be saved.
And as the wise men physically left a different way, they would spiritually leave a different way. [39:42] We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. As you exit, as John mentioned a moment ago, if you are a guest with us, we don't ask you to put any money in our giving box for our members and regular attenders.

You can, if you're worshiping through Faithful Giving today, you can use that. For any of you, use the giving box to drop in a prayer request or your connection card if you are a guest with us. Christmas Eve, Tuesday night, six o'clock, eight o'clock, child care for babies through two at the six o'clock service only. Next Sunday, December 29th, one service, 10 a.m., preschool Sunday school during that hour.
The rest of us will all be in here together. All right? Have a Merry Christmas. Love you, church family. God bless you. You're dismissed. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. God bless you.
God bless you. God bless you.
[41:11] God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

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