

Matthew 2:7-12

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men 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, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped, 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 (NRSV).

Today we pick up where we left off last week. We are following the progression of some very significant events that take place after Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The wise men arrived in Jerusalem and asked "Where is the child born king of the Jews?" They proclaim that there is this great astrological phenomenon that they have taken to be a sign from God. So, they have come to pay their respects. Herod freaks out because he is afraid of the new born king of the Jews and has to ask the religious leaders where the prophecy reveals this is to take place.

A major point of biblical history is that all of this has to do with the covenant; Jesus, Advent, and the birth of Christ relates to the covenant. The lesson "I will be your God and you will be my people" is repeated many times in the Torah. The Bible specifically points out the history of this covenant relationship. God was with them during their flight from Egypt. God reinforced the covenant during the forty years in the desert. They received the Promised Land as promised according to the covenant and they lost the Promised Land just like Moses said they would when they broke the covenant. After the exile they returned to the Promised Land as promised just like the prophets said they would. The promises from God to the people comes from angels, heroes like Moses, and the prophets to the people. So, the people know, trust, and believe that our God is the one true God. This is because the God of Abraham is proven to be all powerful and sustains and guides the chosen people. The people know this because it is their history and it is recorded in the scriptures. Herod knows this and the religious leaders know this. But Herod freaks out because he is afraid of the new born king of the Jews. So, he calls on the religious leaders to ask where. This shows that he knows this is a sign from God. Herod knows this is an act of God. The religious leaders tell him it's Bethlehem. This shows that they also know. They know the prophecy but when they find out that the prophecy is being fulfilled they fail to respond. The fulfillment of prophecy is a very significant thing. The Bible goes to great length to prove fulfillment of prophecy from the Old Testament books of prophecy to the New Testament gospels. Matthew shows very early on, right after the birth of Christ that people in positions of power fail to respect God's plan for human redemption. This is a corrupt political and religious system. The corruption is so bad that God had to take action.

Today's Scripture shows us the corruption of King Herod. He feigns piety and pretends to be interested in paying his respects to the new born king of the Jews. But, he is an evil tyrant that wants to kill the competition. When the wise men find Jesus they are overwhelmed with joy. They find him at a house and enter the house to pay their respects. They offer him three gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They give the gifts at a house. We do not know how many wise

men there were, tradition assumes three because of the three gifts. Then they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. This shows God's providential care and the wisdom of the wise men who trust in God's method of communication over the false piety of Herod.

The story provides insight into who Jesus actually is by the behavior of others. Matthew sets out to prove the divine significance of Jesus through the behavior of others; the appropriate behavior of the wise men, and the inappropriate behavior of those in positions of power. Their action reveals who Jesus actually is. Herod would not respond in fear if this were not a real threat. The religious leaders knew where the promised Messiah was born. The wise men respond to a real celestial revelation. The wise men further avoid trouble by trusting in the God of Abraham. Outsiders trust in the God of Abraham when insiders do not. This is due to corruption.

This is God's pattern of intervention. Adam and Eve had it made in the shade until they were corrupted. The great flood was because the world was corrupt. With Noah God wipes slate clean and starts all over again. The people spent forty years in the wilderness because they failed to obey and trust God. The exile occurred due to bad kings and corruption. Now they are back in the Promised Land and there is a corrupt political and religious system. It is so bad that God intervenes once again but this time God's interaction is different.

God's Old Testament method is to instruct the people to obey, and punish them if they don't. God through the prophets reminds them of covenant, warns them when they violate the covenant, offers an opportunity for the people to repent and get back into covenant, and then punish the people only if they fail to change. God's New Testament method is love. Our God is a God of love. The one true God is a God of love. God is in covenant with the people because of love. So, instead of punishing the people, God sends God's love to the people to teach and nurture the people back into covenant relationship with God.