MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Child King

Reverend Scott Johnson | November 1, 2026 | Matthew 2:1-12

Old Testament Reading - Micah 5:1–5

The Old Testament reading is the prophet Micah, Micah chapter five, verses one through five. And this is God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's hear the word of God.

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops. Siege is laid against us. With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace.

New Testament Reading: Matthew 2:1–12

Now let's turn to Matthew 2. This is our New Testament text and our sermon text for this morning, Matthew 2, verses 1 through 12. Matthew 2, verses 1 through 12.

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? 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. And 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 least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who will 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 worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew

Last Sunday, we finished going through the book of Exodus. And for that reason, this morning, we are taking up another book of the Bible for our sermons at the morning services. And the book that we'll begin looking at is the Gospel of Matthew. Now, actually, we are going to resume looking at the Gospel of Matthew. I don't expect any of you to remember this, but last year for the Advent season, I preached three sermons from Matthew chapter one, and that was really the beginning of going through the gospel of Matthew. After those three sermons on chapter one, we went back to Exodus, but now that we have finished Exodus, we are going back to Matthew, but rather than going back to chapter one, we'll pick up where we left off, and so we'll start at chapter two. And Lord willing, by God's grace, we'll slowly work our way through this gospel. And I trust and I pray that by the end, we will have been encouraged and edified as we consider together the person and the work of our dear Savior, Jesus Christ, as that is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures.

As Christians, we love the truth of the Incarnation, and we ought to love the truth of the Incarnation. It is a glorious truth. We love the Christmas story. We love the story, the truth, that God sent his Son into the world to be our Savior, that the baby, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, that he was born, he came into the

world in order to deliver us, to save us from sin and death. And in fact, his very name, Jesus, tells us that that is why he came into the world. In Matthew chapter one, the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream and said to him about Mary, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And so Jesus was born to be our savior. This was the reason for his incarnation, for his coming into our world.

However, he was also born to be our king, our Lord. But because we naturally want to rule ourselves, but because of our fallen human nature, the truth that Jesus was born to be our king doesn't fill our hearts as quickly with joy and gratitude as the truth that Jesus was born to be our savior. And that's because a king demands obedience. A king lays down his law. We must submit to a king. And the last thing that we want to do, according to our sinful, fallen human nature, is to submit ourselves to an authority, to a king. The cry of our hearts is the same as the cry of the citizens of a nobleman in that parable that Jesus taught. They cried out, we do not want this man to reign over us. And so we naturally resist, we rebel against having a Lord, a king over us.

And not only that, but there have been too many evil kings in the world whose rule has been nothing but oppression and bondage. And so we tend to have a very negative perspective on a king or a ruler. But of course, the rule of Jesus over us is nothing like the tyrannical rule of wicked men. But the lordship, the kingship of Jesus over us is a gift from God. In fact, there is no greater blessing than to have Christ as our king. He is a king who rules over us for our good. He defends us from evil. He preserves us, keeps us in his care and in his kingdom forever. And so Jesus is like no other King the world has ever seen. And there is no other King that we should more happily submit ourselves to than King Jesus.

And this passage from Matthew in chapter two is all about the kingship of Jesus. He came into the world, not only to bring us salvation, but also to rule over us as his people. And Matthew shows us what kind of King that Jesus was born to be.

First of all, there'll be three lessons here. The first lesson is this, Jesus is a King who reigns with the power and authority of God. Secondly, Jesus is a King who reigns in righteousness. And thirdly, Jesus is a King who reigns over us in order to bring us salvation.

A King Who Reigns with Divine Power and Authority

So first, Jesus is a King who reigns with the power and authority of God. In chapter one of Matthew, Matthew tells us all about the birth of Jesus, the miraculous circumstances or the miraculous events concerning his birth. And now in chapter two, Matthew tells us what takes place about a year or two after his birth. And so there's a year or two between chapter one and chapter two. And Matthew says this in verse 1 of chapter 2. He says, 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.

We'll consider Herod in a minute, but first I want to focus with you on these wise men who came from the east, somewhere from the east, we don't know where, but they came looking for the baby Jesus. In Greek, these wise men, as you know, they are called magi. But what exactly were magi? Well, one thing we know that magi were not, they were not kings. That idea came much later in the history and tradition of the church, that the Magi were kings, but we know that they were not kings. The same goes for the idea that there were three Magi. Because they brought three gifts, it's assumed and it's become a common idea that there were three Magi who came to see the baby Jesus, but that's not the case as well, and so the Magis were not kings. There probably were not three of them. Probably, well, we don't know. There could have been, but there was, the Bible just doesn't tell us exactly how many. If you happen to like the song, We Three Kings of Orient Are, I hope that the song is not ruined for you now, knowing that the Magi were not kings, and there may not have been three of them.

But basically, the Magi were astrologers. They studied the stars to get insight into world affairs. They were kind of astronomers, studying the movement of the stars and planets and so on, but also astrologers, deriving meaning from the motion of the celestial bodies. But they were also familiar with the various sacred writings of different peoples, and these wise men or magi, they were sufficiently exposed to the Jewish scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, the Word of God, They were sufficiently knowledgeable of the Jewish scriptures to know the prophecies that said that a king would be born in Israel, a king that would be the king of the Jews, who would reign over the people of Israel and one day reign over his people from throughout the world.

Now, these magi, they were pagan. Nevertheless, God in his grace, he revealed to them the truth about the birth of Christ, And he did so by the appearance of a star. The star told them, and also when they combined that with their knowledge of the scriptures and so on, God revealed to them in that way that the king of the Jews had been born. The star led them to Bethlehem and then, well, first led them to Jerusalem and then on to Bethlehem.

What was the star? No one knows for sure exactly what this star was. Some people say it could have been a natural phenomenon, such as a comet or supernova that God had ordained and that he used particularly to bring the wise men to the baby Jesus. What is more likely, I believe, is that the star was something entirely supernatural, that it was an extraordinary supernatural creation by God, a light in the sky that God created specifically to lead the wise men on their way. And I believe that is true because Matthew tells us that the star led them precisely to the place where the baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph were, the house where they were staying in Bethlehem.

Now, it was common then for dignitaries to pay their respects to foreign kings and to bring gifts to them, just as the Magi are bringing gifts to the Christ child. But Matthew makes a point of telling us that the Magi came all the way from the East, not just to honor Christ with their gifts, but they came to worship Christ, to bow down before him and to worship him. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they said this in verse two, 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. And when the star led them to Jesus, that's exactly what they did. Verse 11 says, and going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And in worshiping the infant Jesus, they were bearing witness to the truth about who Jesus was. This was not just the birth of another human king, as extraordinary as that may have been, but this was the birth of the Son of God. This was the incarnation of God who came and took on human flesh. The Magi may not have been able to understand all of that or to explain all of that. Nevertheless, they knew by the grace of God that this child was worthy of their worship. Somehow they knew that this was the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and they worshiped him.

And that was fitting because Jesus is truly God in the flesh. 2.9 tells us, in him, that is in Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. And that was true for Jesus. Even from the moment of his conception, from the moment that he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, he was worthy of worship because in him, the fullness of deity indwelt bodily. He was worthy not just of the gifts, the honor of the Magi, but he was worthy of their worship.

And because Jesus, he is the incarnate son of God and he is king. It means that he rules with divine sovereignty. And so to say that Jesus is king is to say not only that he reigns over you

and me as our Lord, our king, but he reigns over the church. He reigns over all the nations of the world. He reigns over the whole earth. He reigns over all creation. The entire cosmos is under the authority, the power of King Jesus, and he reigns with the absolute power and sovereignty of God because he is God. He is Lord, and if you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, you have the unspeakable joy and peace of knowing that his reign over you and all things is for your good, for your salvation, for your eternal joy and bliss.

And another implication of this truth that Jesus reigns as the Son of God is that his reign is one which will continue forever into all eternity. We certainly cannot say the same thing about human kings. We cannot say the same thing about the other king in this passage, who is King Herod. When Jesus was born, King Herod was at the peak of his reign over Judea. By this time, he had already ruled for several years. He had already completed several major building projects. He built theaters, cities, palaces, fortresses. It was King Herod who built the massive temple complex that we read about in the New Testament.

But what about King Herod today? What can we say about him? Well, if it wasn't for the Bible, first of all, Virtually nobody would know about him. There might be a smattering of academics and historians here and there that would be familiar with King Herod, but if it wasn't for the scriptures, he would be just another forgotten king in history. And nobody would really care much about him as well. And what about all the building projects that Herod built that presumably would last beyond his lifetime and for centuries and millennia? Well, they are nothing as well. It's all mostly rubble now. Everything that he built is dusty ruins for archaeologists to dig out of the sands.

The poet Percy Shelley wrote a poem about an ancient ruler named Ozymandias. And this was a king who was a powerful ruler in his day. But in Shelley's poem, all that remains of this great king is a statue of him lying in ruins in a desolate wilderness. And the poem that he writes about this once mighty king ends this way. The poem says, and on the pedestal, these words appear. My name is Ozymandias, king of kings. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair. But then the poem goes on to say, nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away. And that could describe the reign of King Herod as well. As powerful as he was, as feared as he was, as mighty as he was, as great as his works were, nothing remains of his rule but his name.

And the same can be said of every human ruler that comes and goes. Eventually, all his power, all his works, all that he has done turn to nothing. They are forgotten. But the child who was born the king of the Jews, he is still king. He is still reigning as Lord and sovereign over all creation and over this world. And as a Christian, you have the assurance that because Jesus has an eternal kingdom because he is king forever and ever. Therefore, your salvation in him is secure. You have an eternal salvation as one who belongs to this great king.

And the truth that Jesus is the sovereign and everlasting King over everything means this as well, that we cannot put our hope of salvation in man. We cannot put our hope of salvation in a leader or a politician or a political party. The scriptures explicitly tell us not to do this. Psalm 146 says, put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth. On that very day, his plans perish.

This is a truth that we need to remind ourselves today. Unless you have been somehow insulated from the world over the last several weeks. You know that we are in an election season. If you've opened your mailbox, you will have all kinds of advertisements from different politicians. But you can have the assurance as a believer knowing this, that no matter what the outcome of these elections may be, no matter who may come into power, no matter what law may be passed, As a Christian, you have the assurance of knowing that the one who truly holds the reins of power over all things is no politician, no leader, but it is the Lord Jesus Christ. He rules over our nation, He rules over all things, He reigns over all for our good, for our blessedness.

Now in the providence of God, He may raise up rulers that are corrupt, that do evil. Nevertheless, as Christians, we can still take comfort and joy in knowing that Jesus Christ is the true King of Kings. And so, if someday, God forbid someone as cruel and corrupt as a Herod should come to rule over us. Nevertheless, Jesus will still be ruling over him in glory, just as he was even in this passage. Jesus was the king even over Herod here, and in that we can rejoice.

And since Jesus is a king who reigns with the power and authority of God, it means that you owe him as a believer in Jesus Christ, you owe him all that you can give Him. And that is more than mere external conformity to what He commands, but you owe Him your praise, your adoration, your love, your worship, your devotion, and all from the heart. The wise men give us an instructive example here. They came to Jesus and they worshiped Him. They gave Him expensive gifts, but this is just a picture of the kind of wholehearted devotion and consecration

and obedience that you owe to your King, the Lord Jesus Christ. And you can give him something that is far more precious than all the frankincense, gold, and myrrh in the world. You give him your very life. You give him your very heart. And that is the way in which you show your devotion to this King.

John Calvin had a personal motto that he had made part of his seal, and his motto was this, my heart I give thee, Lord, eagerly and earnestly. And your King Jesus demands nothing less of this from you, that you give him your life, your heart, your resources, your energy, your strength, all that you have, all that you are, you are to lay at the feet of Jesus. And he not only demands this, but he is worthy. He is worthy of this. He is the one King, the only King who is worthy of your total devotion. And so Jesus is a King who reigns with the power and authority of God.

A King Who Reigns in Righteousness

The second lesson is this, Jesus is a King who reigns in righteousness. We've already talked a little bit about King Herod. He is somebody that we do know, not just from the scriptures. So there is some historical information about him apart from the word of God. But we know that he reigned from about 37 BC to about four BC, which means that Jesus was actually born not in the year zero, but he was born sometime between four and six BC. Technically speaking, this is not the year 2026. We're more like in the year 2030 or 2032 or something like that, but we're in the ballpark. It's close enough.

Now, King Herod was a very talented, a very competent ruler. We've talked about his building projects, but he was also exceedingly cruel, exceedingly ruthless. At one point, he even had his own wife and sons murdered in order to secure his hold on power. Caesar Augustus testified to the cruelty of Herod. He said, it is better to be Herod's pig than his son. And of course, Matthew also testifies to the terrible cruelty of Herod. When the king learns that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he orders all the boys who lived in Bethlehem and in that region, two years old and under, to be slaughtered. And just like so many despots before Herod and after Herod, His political philosophy boiled down to this, murder anybody who is a threat to my power and my rule. And that's how he ruled.

And therefore, because he feared any potential threat to his own power, he was naturally alarmed, very troubled, when he heard that wise men from the East had come looking for one whom they said was born king of the Jews. Matthew says in chapter two, verse three, When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Now why was all

Jerusalem troubled with King Herod? It was because when King Herod was troubled, it usually meant trouble for everyone else. And so all Jerusalem was also troubled with the king.

So when Herod heard the news of the birth of this one called the King of the Jews, he summoned all the chief priests and scribes together, for a Bible quiz, a one-question Bible quiz, and that is, where is the Christ to be born? And all the Bible experts, they answered, they answered correctly. They said that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. And once Herod understood that, he devised a plan to destroy the so-called king of the Jews. He would send the wise men to Bethlehem to find the child, and once they came back to Herod and told him the location of where this baby who was called the King of the Jews was. Herod, of course, would not go to worship him, but he would send his henchmen there to kill him, to murder this baby.

Now, one thing Matthew is showing us here is the tragedy that God's own people, not only Herod, but the chief priests, the scribes, the leaders of the Jews, the leaders of the nation who were supposed to be looking for the coming of the Messiah, they had no interest whatsoever to discover the truth, whether this was truly the Christ child. As far as we can tell, not one of the religious leaders of the Jews made the six mile journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see if indeed the ancient prophecies had come true. In Matthew, puts that in contrast with the wise men, these pagans, these Gentiles who came from the East, perhaps as far away as Babylon. They made this journey in order to find and to worship the Christ child, and yet the Jews themselves and their leaders would not go to see whether these things were so. Of course, these same leaders, they would be seeing a lot of Jesus in the years to come, And as we'll find out, as you know, they hated what they saw.

As for Herod, his only interest in the child was to have him destroyed. But Matthew tells us how God and his providence and his sovereign rule over all of these circumstances, how he brought it about to keep that from happening. The wise men went back home another way. Therefore, they did not disclose to Herod the place where Jesus was. And as you know, as we'll see next week, when Herod realized that he had been tricked by the wise men, he flew into a rage, he became furious, and he ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem to be murdered.

Now, Matthew describes the depravity of Herod in order to give us a side-by-side comparison between these two kings. There are two kings in this passage. One is Herod, the human, evil,

wicked king, and the other is Jesus. Herod's reign is one of deceit, injustice, corruption, the reign of Jesus is one of righteousness.

Now, Matthew doesn't say it in so many words in this passage, but we know that Jesus is the King who fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah chapter nine, verse seven, of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. And so the rule of Jesus is one of righteousness, one of faithfulness. It is also a reign of love. Jesus, the righteous King reigns in love.

Compare again, Herod with Jesus. Here, Herod is willing to sacrifice innocent children in order to maintain his rule. Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself. He was willing Himself to die in order to bring eternal life and forgiveness to His people. And so as your Lord, Jesus reigns over you with both His righteousness and His love. He always has your best interests at heart. His commandments are for your good. He will fulfill because He is righteous, because He is true. He will fulfill every promise that He makes to you in His word.

And therefore, although Jesus calls us to submit to him, and although by nature we are reluctant to submit ourselves to another, nevertheless, this is the only way for you and me to find true freedom, true life. salvation, eternal joy, eternal blessedness, it is by giving ourselves, by coming in subjection to this gracious, this righteous, this loving King Jesus. And so Jesus is a King who reigns in righteousness.

A King Who Reigns to Bring Salvation

The third truth concerning Christ is this, Jesus is a King who reigns in order to bring us salvation. After King Herod asked the chief priests and the scribes, where is the Christ to be born? They told him in Bethlehem, and then they quoted scripture. They quoted from Matthew, or they quoted rather from Micah chapter five, verse two. 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 least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Now in this prophecy from Micah, and actually at the end, there's added some words from 2 Samuel, but in this prophecy, as it's quoted for us here in Matthew, Jesus is called not only a ruler, but a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. And for him to be called a ruler who is a shepherd or one who will shepherd means that he is a ruler who brings salvation. Because in

the Old Testament, as you know, A shepherd rules for the good of his people. The rule of a shepherd is one of protection, deliverance, preserving life, giving life.

I think of Psalm 23. It begins with, the Lord is my shepherd. And it ends with, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And that's because the Lord is my shepherd. And so Jesus, as king, he is the good shepherd. He is the good shepherd king who brings salvation, deliverance, life to his people.

And Matthew is also showing us something else in this passage, something that will become clearer as the New Testament unfolds, and that is that Jesus was born to be the King and the Savior, the Good Shepherd, not only of those from among the Jews, but He came to be the King of all those from throughout the world who come to Him in faith. And what shows that in this passage are the Magi. Again, these are pagans, these are Gentiles, usually in the New Testament, Magi or magicians are looked upon very unfavorably because they don't know God, they don't worship a God, but these do, these do. And just like with the magi, whoever comes to Christ by faith, whoever comes to Him to worship Him, to receive Him as their King and their Savior, receives from Him the gift of salvation and eternal life.

And one thing that this means for us as Christians is that you cannot have Christ as your Savior if He is not your King. You cannot have half of Christ. Christ cannot be divided, the Savior part and the King part. I'll take the Savior part, thank you, but not the King half of Jesus. If you will have your sins forgiven, if you will receive the gift of eternal life, This gift which Jesus holds out to you in the gospel, you must submit to him as your Lord. This means by the grace of God, you must turn from your sin. You must repent of your sin. You must forsake it. You must turn to Jesus Christ and submit to him and ask him for the grace and the spirits to keep his commandments, to obey his word. You must walk with him as your Lord, if he is to be your savior. And there is only one Jesus Christ, and He is both Savior and Lord. And you can only have the whole Jesus. You either have the whole Jesus or you have no Jesus. And so you can have Him only as your Savior if He is not your Lord. And so Jesus is a King who came to bring us salvation.

And so with the birth of Christ, God fulfilled those wonderful promises that he had made to his people from throughout the centuries to raise up the son of David, the stump of Jesse, the son of David who would reign over a redeemed people from throughout the world. And as we've

seen, Jesus is the king who reigns with the authority, the power of God. He reigns in righteousness, and he reigns as a savior.

But it's not as though there was not a ruler over the world before Jesus came into the world. There was a ruler over this world. He still rules in some ways, and that ruler is Satan, the devil, the evil one. And his rule is not one of freedom in life, but his rule is one of bondage, oppression, and eternal death and destruction. And the beauty, the wonder, the glory of the story of the birth of Jesus is that what was the beginning of the end for the reign of Satan over this world? What was the beginning of what would be the destruction of his rule over us? It was a tiny little baby boy, an infant, cradled in his mother's arms. born in this backcountry place in Judea of Bethlehem, a seemingly weak and helpless infant.

And yet, because of who this child was, because he was God in the flesh, he came to establish a kingdom of righteousness and love and salvation. Because of who he was and what he came to do, his birth was the death knell for Satan, the beginning of the end of the works of the devil. And this is why the angels in heaven rejoiced. Of course, that's from Luke's gospel. We know that the angels in heaven praised God at the birth of Jesus Christ. And this is why you and I should praise God at the birth of Christ as well. Because he was born to be our king, to bring us salvation, to bring us under his lordship, which is true freedom, true life.

And the joy of the Magi is an example for us here. The way that Matthew describes their boundless joy, it's almost as though he's straining at the limits of the proper use of language just to show us how intense the joy was of the Magi when they saw the star that would lead them to Jesus. Matthew doesn't just say that they rejoiced, he says, they rejoiced exceedingly. But they did not just rejoice exceedingly, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Now, if you were to write that as part of an essay for your English teacher, he or she would probably take a red pen and strike it out and say, too redundant, fewer words. But this was the way that Matthew was trying to convey to us. the intensity, the abundance, the overflowing joy that filled the hearts of the Magi, because Christ has come, the one who came to save us from our sins, the one who came to rule over us. He is born. He has been enthroned forever as King and Lord.

Do you have that joy in your hearts? Does the coming of Christ fill you with joy? Put your faith and hope in Christ that you may experience both the freedom and the joy of his gracious rule over you. Let's pray.