
Day 294 - October 21

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE – 30 CE)
Visit of the Magi and Flight into Egypt
From Infancy to Manhood

Readings: *Matthew 2:1-23; Luke 2:39-52*

Reflections:

Visit of the Magi and Flight into Egypt

- Matthew is writing to the Jews to show that Jesus is the Messiah. He uses every opportunity to highlight Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled by Jesus or even just verses that are parallel to his life. We will see this over and over again throughout those accounts written by Matthew.
- Wise Men Seek Jesus: The story of the astrologers (wise men) is incredibly scandalous for a Jewish reader. This account comes from Matthew's biography and is the perfect follow up to his scandalous genealogy. The Messiah's birth was not attended by the religious elite of Jerusalem but by Gentile priests of pagan astrology, probably Zoroastrianism. On top of that, God actually speaks to the pagan astrologers through their own pagan religion. Astrology was forbidden in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:2-3). So God in a very real way was using something that would have been considered contrary to the Law to complete his purposes. He could have sent an angel but instead he used a star to speak to these Gentile religious leaders. This would be like a pastor receiving his call into ministry by going to a palm reader or a drug addict coming to faith in Jesus because God meets him during a drug high.
- This story of the astrologers reminds us that God can do whatever he wants. He is not bound even by his own Law. As we will see with Jesus, he will be the Law breaker that reveals God's Highest Law, the law of love. It also shows us that God speaks to people in a way they can understand. God reached out in a way that met these astrologers right where they were at. Lastly, it reveals to us God's heart for those that are far off. These priests were both physically and spiritually a long distance from God but God reached out to them and used them to bring honor to his son. This account shows us God's heart for the Gentiles and this theme will be developed throughout the story of Jesus. All nations will be saved through Jesus.

- The astrologers go to Herod first and then seek out the child. Herod lies about worshipping him. We see Herod's evil character throughout this account. It was well known to the Jews of that time.
- Wise Men Visit Jesus: God actually continues to use their astrology as he guides them to Jesus' home via a star. The scandal continues.
- The three gifts are interesting. It may be simply that these were the gifts they had. There may be symbolism here that Matthew sees and captures. Gold is most closely associated with God and heaven. This could be a symbol of Jesus' divine nature and his eternal pre-existence as God. Gold was also associated with royalty and so it may symbolize his kingship. Frankincense was a beautiful resin that may symbolize Jesus' life and ministry. Myrrh was a resin used for preparing a body for his death. It may prophetically symbolize a foreshadowing of Jesus' death and crucifixion.
- Another interesting note is that after a star tells a king has been born and then a star leads them to Jesus' home, God then speaks to the astrologers in a dream to warn them about avoiding Herod on their return trip. The fact that God could have spoken to them in a dream (one of the normal Biblical ways God speaks to people) only heightens the scandal of his use of the stars.
- Flight to Egypt: Joseph is warned in a dream about Herod's intentions and so the family escapes to Egypt. Again this would find parallel to Israel's story and so Matthew highlights that and a verse of the Bible that refers to Israel as God's son. In a way, the Messiah is the founder of a new Israel, a spiritual nation that will reveal the story of "what does work to change the human heart" and will lead people into a full experience of intimacy with God and within community. So this parallel story in Jesus' life adds to this sense of Jesus being the founder of a new movement under God.
- Herod Orders Slaughter: There is no historical record of Herod killing the children in Bethlehem but this would have been a small number, maybe 40 or 50 at the most. This probably is not a big enough number for historians to notice as sad as that may seem.

From Infancy to Manhood

- Return to Nazareth: Joseph is met again this time by an angel in a dream and is told that it is safe to return to his home. Although Matthew doesn't use language around people being filled with the Spirit as Luke does, it is clear that God is working powerfully and in line with the prophecy in Joel 2. Joel indicates when the Spirit comes, people old and young, man and woman will have visions and dreams as God's Spirit fills their lives and opens up intimate communion with God.
- Jesus and his family take up permanent residence in Nazareth. Matthew states that this fulfills what the prophets (notice the plural) said: "he will be called a Nazarene." Nowhere in the Old Testament does it say that the Messiah would be a Nazarene. In fact

the phrase isn't even used. So it would appear that the phrase, "He is a Nazarene" was a phrase of contempt, maybe similar in Canada to Neufie jokes or in the United States calling someone a "hillbilly". It was probably a term indicating that this person was a lower class, nobody. In this way, Matthew is suggesting that the humility of the Messiah is declared by the prophets and so the fact that Jesus would be called this growing up was an indication of his humble heritage.

- Jesus Visits Jerusalem: We know nothing of Jesus childhood until he turns twelve where we have one story. Luke writes, "... the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." In this way, Jesus as fully human had to grow into his humanity just as all other people do. He grew well and matured as a child. We also see that Luke points out that God's favor was on his life. This will be most fully realized at his baptism.
- At twelve, Jesus and his extended family travel to Jerusalem for Passover. We may be tempted to blame his parents for not noticing that he had been left behind but no doubt this was a large travelling group of cousins and aunts and uncles. Jesus probably hadn't been with them before they arrived in Jerusalem as he probably hung out in the tents of his cousins. This gives us a little window into Jesus' life that gives us a sense of how much he was just a normal kid wanting to stay with his cousins. One of his cousins on the trip may have been John but the text doesn't explicitly say this.
- Jesus is found in the temple interacting with the religious leaders. Here we see that spiritually speaking he is not a normal kid. He has a wisdom and spiritual focus that goes way beyond his years. At this stage of his life, he only asks questions as obviously he would not be welcomed as a teacher at age twelve. Yet even in his questions he reveals an insight and wisdom that led people to be "amazed at his understanding and his answers." He apparently gave some answers to their questions even though his posture was that of one asking questions, not teaching. As we will see, Jesus throughout his ministry asks penetrating questions that help reveal the human heart.
- Jesus' mother approaches Jesus. Here we see that Mary plays a key role in Jesus' life. It would have been normal for the father to address a son, especially if there was discipline involved. The fact that Mary speaks on behalf of both her and Joseph is a clue that even they know that Joseph is not really Jesus' father. Mary does say, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you?" but Jesus replies, "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" Jesus uses a question (a sign of respect) to make a statement. Jesus makes it clear that he is God's Son and this no doubt could have been viewed as a disrespectful thing to say to Joseph who is standing right there but says nothing. Mary and Joseph apparently don't put it all together but Jesus does return to Nazareth and is obedient to them. Jesus demonstrates his submission and humble nature as he grows up as an obedient son to Mary and Joseph.

- Luke notes that Mary was his source for all of these stories. “But his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.” We know from Acts 1:14 that Mary, Jesus’ mother and his brothers, were a part of the early Jesus movement. Luke apparently talked to Mary and received these accounts from her first hand.
- Luke restates Jesus development now through his teenage years and twenties: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” Jesus continued his normal development, intellectually, physically, spiritually and relationally. As big of mystery as it seems, we see that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine.
- We know little else of this time period. We know Jesus has brothers, James (who become a key leader in the Jesus movement after Jesus’ resurrection), Joses, Judas (or Jude who wrote the book of Jude), and Simon. Jesus also had sisters who were never named. Joseph is not mentioned again and so scholars assume he died during this time. Jesus as the oldest would have assumed the responsibility to care for his mother and his family. Like his father, he becomes a tradesman, a carpenter. In his region, this was a common occupation as that was a key industry in that region. This again underscores that Jesus was definitely from the blue collar class. His heritage was that of the working poor. What a wonderful gift of grace to know that God comes into our poverty and meets us right where we are.