

## INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to Matthew chapter 2. Matthew 2. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to Matthew 2.

## INTRODUCTION: CHRISTMAS SONGS

Listen, I am usually a post-Thanksgiving, Christmas guy.  
Except for 2020, alright! We legit thought about putting ours up in April during lockdown!

But now that we can all agree it's appropriate to be in the Christmas spirit: I've started listening to Christmas music. But I've noticed some problems with some of my favorite Christmas tunes. They're just not quite right...

So, here for you today, I want to present my top incorrect Christmas lyrics, which I hope, in turn, ruins your holiday experience. Happy 2020!

First, from the song, "**I Saw Three Ships.**" You know this one?  
*I saw three ships come sailing in on Christmas day on Christmas day.*

Well, there's a verse that goes like this:

*"O they sailed into Bethlehem,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;  
O they sailed into Bethlehem,  
On Christmas Day in the morning."*

Yo, Bethlehem is landlocked. What is going on here?

- I read some nonsense
- that the three ships represent Mary, Joseph, and Jesus...
  - NOPE!
- Is this some attempt at a maritime Christmas carol?
- Pitch that one in the trash.
- Sorry Nat King Cole.

Second, from the song, “**Silent Night.**”

*“Silent night, holy night,  
all is calm, all is bright.”*

Now, we went through a natural birth class before Harper was born. And here’s the deal...

- there’s nothing silent,
- calm,
- or bright
- about the birth process...
- even after the epidural!

That song should be renamed *Crazy Night* or something like that.

Third, from the song, “**Away in a Manger.**” There’s this one line that always gets me in this song.

*“The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.”*

Ok, you tell me...

- if your baby wakes up
- and a cow is mooing in his face,
- you think there's no crying coming from that kid.

And finally, the song, "We Three Kings." Listen, this one is just plain historically inaccurate. But that's what we're going to get into today.

### **EXPLAIN: CONTEXT**

So, welcome to Advent, week 2. You feeling festive yet?

Well, as Eric told you last week, we are working through the Gospel of Matthew and his account of the Christmas story.

Now, just as way of context. We really only have four chapters in the Bible dealing explicitly with the birth of Christ.

- Matthew 1 & 2,
- and Luke 1 & 2.
- So, four chapters of material that we must cover
- every December...
- until Christ returns.

Now, what has been fascinating to me as I've studied this year:

- is that almost NONE of what we find in Luke's account,
  - is found in Matthew's.
- And almost NONE of what we find in Matthew's account,
  - is found in Luke's.

Now, that's strange. You'd think if there were REALLY important stuff, they both would have handled it.

- But the genealogy that Eric covered last week...
  - it's only found in Matthew.
- Luke does record a genealogy later in his gospel,
  - but it's very different from Matthew's.

Now, again, Eric told us last week that Matthew was writing to address a mostly Jewish audience, and therefore, some of the things that he has written into his account of the life of Jesus were meant to stimulate the Jewish mind in a way that may be a bit different than Luke.

## TRANSITION

So, with that in mind, let's set out into our passage for today,

- which will be a very familiar passage to most, if not all of you,
- even if you are brand new to church today,
- you are likely familiar with the story of the wise men.

But just for fun today, let's just wreck some falsities you may have in your head about it.

So, here we go...Matthew 2:1.

## MATTHEW 2:1-2

[1] 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, [2] 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."

## EXPLAIN: WISE MEN

So, this is where we meet the wise men or the *Magi* as they are sometimes known.

- And we know there were how many wise men?
- Yeah, three.
- We know this because the song tells us so.
- Right? We Three Kings.

Problem is: the Bible never says there are three!

- There are three gifts,
  - so that's where the song postulates there were three.
- But it's probably much more likely
- that there was an entire entourage of them...
  - to provide a safe travelling experience
  - in a very dangerous time period for travel.
- Plus, this will explain the stir they cause
  - when they arrive in Jerusalem.

Now, we also know where they are from, right? Yeah, *we three kings of orient are*.

- So, they're from the orient,
  - which isn't PC to say anymore.
- But the text simply says they are from the **east**.

Now, there are lots of guesses as to where these wise men are from.

There are four possible places they came from:

- Arabia, Babylon,
- Persia, or Egypt.

But hear me, they're all guesses!

- All we know is they are from the east,
- and they know something of the Hebrew messianic promises,
- maybe from the exile period of Daniel,
- or from other scattered Jews across the known world.

And the song calls them *kings...we three kings*.

- But our text translates it as **wise men**,
- and other translations call them Magi,
- which is where we get the word magician.

Here's what we know:

- Magi were a priestly caste of magicians and astrologers
  - who were wise in interpreting the stars.
- And this is of the upmost importance: they were gentiles!
- And not just gentiles: they were magicians...astrologers.
- The Hebrews were forbidden from these practices.

Deuteronomy 18 says this:

### **SLIDE DEUTERONOMY 18:10–12a**

[10] There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer [11] or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, [12] for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD.

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## EXPLAIN: SEEKERS

- These were pagan, gentile, magicians...
- and their practices were considered abominations to the Lord!
- And they show up in Jerusalem and say:
- “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.”

Now, have you ever heard someone say, or maybe even said yourself,

- *“I’m searching for God?”*
- *“I’m on a search for God.”*
  - Sometimes we call them seekers?
- Let me just say this...
- I like the sentiment...
- but it’s totally theologically incorrect.

In Romans 3, quoting the Psalms, Paul says:

### **SLIDE ROMANS 3:10b–11**

“None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God.”

### POINT 1

You don’t seek God first...God seeks you first! And that’s my first point: **SLIDE GOD PURSUES US FIRST.**

- It doesn't matter if you are a Calvinist,
- an Arminian,
  - or you have no idea what those two terms mean...
- all across the faithful theological spectrum
- there is agreement that GOD PURSUES US FIRST.

The wise men came and sought out Jesus...BUT ONLY AFTER a star showed up.

## **BLANK SLIDE**

Now, Matthew's predominantly Jewish audience would have been astonished at this story.

- That God made himself known
- and revealed the birth of the messianic king
- to these pagan,
- demon worshiping,
- magicians
- from the very hated enemies of God's people...
- it would have been astonishing!

## **TAKE AWAYS**

Two take-aways here: First,

- Jesus is the king of the whole world...not just the Jews...
- and for our purposes...
- not just people who look like, live like, or think like us.



Listen, this is why issues of

- justice
- and racial reconciliation
- and global missions
- and reaching unreached people groups
- and evangelism with your neighbors and friends and coworkers
- ARE GOSPEL ISSUES!

So serious is God about the ends of the earth being redeemed and ransomed that in the story of the birth of Christ, three wise men from the east head west! God is pursuing!

Second take away:

- if you're here, in-person or online, and you have a sense
- that you are searching for God in some way.
- You sense an emptiness or a hole in your life.
- And you are interested in figuring more out about Jesus.
- I just want to pose to you:
  - that God is pursuing you.
  - He's on the hunt for you.

For those of us here who are followers of Christ, when we look back in our lives there are all kinds of "stars" that at the time seemed coincidental...but in hindsight, they were the fingerprints of God's hot pursuit of us!

- That person coming into your life...
- that situation happening the way that it did...

And for some of you today, even you online,

- God is showing up right now,
- sending stars for you to follow,
- and he is pursuing you first.

## POINT 2

But that leads me to my second point from today's passage. If it's true that GOD PURSUES US FIRST, then it's also true that

**SLIDE WE PURSUE GOD IN RESPONSE**. So, back to our text for this morning.

## MATTHEW 2:3-9

[3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

[6] "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."

[7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] 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." [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.

## BLANK SLIDE

### EXPLAIN: OTHERS

So, it's quite obvious that the wise men pursued this star, and the birth of this king of the Jews...but what's fascinating to me is the response of the other characters in this story.

First, Herod.

- I totally understand why Herod was,
- as verse 3 just said,
- troubled when he heard the report from the wise men.
- Because Herod was the ACTUAL KING of the Jews...
- and so, his troubled-ness makes complete sense.

But then did you see what happened with the chief priests and the scribes?

- These are the religious elites in Jerusalem!
- These are the pastors and seminary professors of the time!

And their response is mind-blowing to me!

- Why didn't they start gathering their stuff and go?
- These are the chief priests and the scribes.
- They know the scriptures.
- They are the experts on the Messiah who is to come.
- They're supposed to investigate these claims!

And they didn't even have to look it up! See how quickly they answered?

- Herod's like, "*Where is he going to be born?*"
- "*Easy...the prophet says this: in Bethlehem of Judea.*"
- But they're not making a beeline to Bethlehem.
  - It's not even far!
  - Bethlehem is only about six miles from Jerusalem,
  - so, we're not talking about a long walk here!
- What happened to them?
  - How can you be trained in,
  - and know deep,
  - beautiful truths about who God is,
  - and be unmoved by them?

## APPLICATION

- You feel that?
- Anyone FEEL like they know this story...
- you know that God pursues you...
- but when push comes to shove, man,
- you're not really pursuing him.

Like you know ABOUT Jesus...but do you really KNOW him?

## ILLUSTRATION: BOOK ON DATING

I heard this illustration: It would be like me reading a book about dating Maryse...while on a date with Maryse.

- Like, reading the chapter
- about how she doesn't want me to read books on our dates...
- but not putting the book down!

Just going,

- *"Okay. Yeah. Don't read when you're on a date.*
- *Where's my highlighter?*
- *'When you're on a date with Maryse, don't read.'*
- *Yeah! That's good stuff!"*

She goes, *"Will you put that book down?"*

- *"Hey, I'm trying to learn how to date you here."*

## POINT 3

Oh church, that we would take all the more seriously our pursuit of Christ.

- **Oh, that we wouldn't be people**
- **who know the Bible**
- **and miss Jesus in the process.**

GOD PURSUES US FIRST, but WE PURSUE GOD IN RESPONSE.

And the final point I want to make is this:

**SLIDE** **OUR PURSUIT IS BY FAITH.**

Look at verses 10-12.

## MATTHEW 2:10-12

[10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] 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. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

## BLANK SLIDE

### EXPLAIN

Think with me for a minute about the amount of faith these wise men must have had to get to this child!

First, they aren't Jewish!

- They see some astronomic or astrological sign...
- remember some sort of ancient Hebrew prophecy...
- and they decide to make a move.
- **Think of the faith that would have taken!**

Then they decide to leave the East, and head West.

- Which seems easy enough...but not in the first century!
- This type of journey would have been extremely dangerous,
- extremely costly, and extremely uncomfortable.
- **Think of the faith that would have taken!**

And now, think about this: they don't even know where to go!

- They show up in Jerusalem!
  - Probably because it was where they expected
  - a king of the Jews to be born, right?
- The capital.
- Where the temple was!
- Certainly, this was where they expected a king to be found.
- So, they just show up and are like,
- *"We're here to worship the new king...so, where's he at?"*
- **Think of the faith that would have taken!**

They get their answer... *"He's to be born in Bethlehem."*

- *"Ok. We'll head there."*
  - No questions.
  - No concerns.
- Just, *"Ok."*
- And remember: the Bible even says
- that Bethlehem is a ghetto little town!
  - *"Nah, he's not born here is the capital!*
  - *He'll be born out in the sticks!"*
- **Think of the faith that would have taken!**

So, they walk the 6 miles-or-so to Bethlehem, and they find the house,

- Now, most scholars think Jesus is likely
- 1-2 years old at this point.
  - So, throw out all those wise men in your nativity scenes...
    - or at least move them into another room!
  - They should've done their research.
- But they come and they find a poor family,
- in a sketchy town,
- with a toddler.
  - And what do they do?
- We just read it. **They fell down and worshipped him.**

Now listen, I don't know if you've been around 2-year-olds...

- but I've never been around one
  - who makes me want to worship them.
- They make me want to do other things to them...
- But worship doesn't tend to be one of them.

And yet, these wise men fall on their faces before a toddler.

**Think of the faith that would have taken!**

And then they give him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- You ever wonder if they just stopped and thought,
- "Are these gifts appropriate for a toddler?"



- “Um...hey Ted...you still thinking we give the gold to this kid?
  - What’s your wife gonna think when you tell her
  - you gave all the frankincense to a baby?”

And if you’re an essential oils person you’re like,

- “Myrrh? Of course!
- Because if they put that on the bottom of that baby's feet,
  - he’ll be a genius.
- You just take a little bit of that,
  - rub it on the temples,
  - and that kid can fly!
- That explains Jesus’ miracles!
- It’s the myrrh.”

Think of the faith that would have taken!

## PURSUE BY FAITH

All of their pursuit is by faith...and so is ours.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says this:

**SLIDE** [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

## BLANK SLIDE

Present in the story of Jesus’ birth is the very essence of the Gospel.

We come by faith alone.

- By faith, the wise men believe a foreign prophecy.
- By faith they risk their lives and walk across the ancient world.
- By faith, they stop in Jerusalem.
- By faith, they worship a 2-year-old.
- They pursue him by faith alone.

## CONCLUSION

See how much better this story is than *We Three Kings of Orient Are* makes it out to be?

- God pursuing us,
- even those who would seem to be the farthest away from him,
- and in response we pursue him by faith!

So, listen, where are you today?

- Are you seeking him?
- Do you sense some stars...
  - in your life...
  - leading you in his direction?
- Maybe this Advent season is the time you'll realize
  - for the first time
  - that God is in hot pursuit of you!
- And you'll respond by giving your life to him!
- You'll accept him as Lord and Savior.
- All you have to say to him is, "*Jesus, I give you my life.*"

Maybe you find yourself in a place more like the high priests and scribes,

- where this book...
- these scriptures...
- have become more commonplace to you,
- and thus you are in danger of missing Jesus.

This story is a call back to worship Jesus.

- Not to become indifferent to him!
- But to fall again on your face
  - and worship him as the lamb of God
  - come to take away the sins of the world.

And we all are called to pursue him in faith.

- It isn't the gifts that the wise men bring
- that earns them favor with God.
  - It's their faith to pursue.
  - That's the gift.

You have no gift to bring...pa rum pump um pum.

- No matter who you are
- or what you've done,
- by grace through faith
- you can be saved.
- It is a gift.

This second week of Advent remember the Gospel.

- Maybe believing for the first time...
- of for the hundredth time.
- Lean heavy into Him this season,
- and pursue your pursuer!

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

## RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – [fathomchurch.org/give](http://fathomchurch.org/give)
- PRAYER - [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer)
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

## RESOURCES USED:

- Carson, D.A. Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary.
- Chandler, Matt. *The Promise For All Peoples.*
- Osborne, Grant R. Matthew: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.
- Osborne, Larry. *Do You See What I See?*