

Pastor Spencer Martin
There Can Only Be One King

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Series: Messengers
Matthew 2:1-15

BIG IDEA – THERE ARE MULTIPLE WAYS TO REJECT JESUS BUT ONLY ONE WAY TO RECEIVE HIM

Where is God in the brokenness? Where is God in the grief or in the loss? That's a question many of us either *have* asked or at some point *will* ask. You heard the answer to that question from Kathryn in that video, that in the midst of the brokenness, the Lord is near. "***The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.***" You see, grief is the cost of love.

We know Christmastime is especially challenging for those who are going through different seasons of grief. The reason is because Christmastime revives memories of relationships that have been lost. Christmastime also causes people to feel. There is a massive gap between what they *think* they should feel, which is joy and happiness, and what they *actually* feel, which is sadness and grief.

We understand that many of you this Christmas are in a season of grief. The reason you're grieving is because, for you, this is a Christmas without. For some of you, this is a Christmas without a family member. It's the first Christmas without. For others, it might be *another* Christmas without.

Maybe it's another Christmas without your kids waking up in the home like they used to. Maybe it's another Christmas without a spouse, another Christmas without waking up to kids in the home. If you are in a season of brokenness, let me just encourage you. It is not a sin to be sad. You may need to be reminded that the Lord is for you and is not against you.

Some of you in this room look around at *your* life, and you feel like things are going well. You feel like things are stable. Everyone is healthy. In a couple of days, you're

going to be in your living room, and you're going to look around at your family, and everybody is happy and getting along and everyone is healthy. If that's you in a few days, I want to encourage you to thank God.

Would you celebrate this Christmas? Would you be filled with a spirit of gratitude and maybe grab your phone and send a text of encouragement or give a call to somebody you know who might be grieving? So, let's take a moment, as we start, to pray for those in our church who are grieving. Then we're going to jump into Matthew, chapter 2. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that this Christmas season, you would be near to those in our church who are brokenhearted. Father, I pray that they would be reminded of the fact that if they are in Christ, there is a day coming where every sad thing will become untrue.

Lord, thank you that even though we do grieve, we are able to grieve as those who do have hope. Lord, I pray that we would be a church full of people who offer encouragement, who are life-giving presences to those around us. Lord, would you just remind all of us that you are for us and not against us? I pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.

There are a lot of different things our culture gets wrong about the birth of Jesus. I'll give you just a few of them. You've been told that Jesus did not cry as a baby when he was born. Don't we love to sing "Away in a Manger"? "The little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes." We don't know, based off what we see in the Scripture, whether or not Jesus cried as a baby. He probably *did* cry as a baby.

A lot of us grew up in church, going to candlelight Christmas Eve services with our candles, singing, "Silent night, holy night, all is calm..." Now, I've been in the delivery room for all four of my sweet little babies, and there are a lot of different words I could use to describe that experience...*scary, stressful, exhausting*. Can we all agree that the delivery experience is especially stressful for dads? We can. Two words I would not use to describe the delivery room are *silent* and *calm*.

You've been told that Mary rode into Bethlehem on a donkey, but we actually don't know if she did or not. She might have just walked. At our house, we have a Christmas tree with an ornament of a donkey on it. A couple of weeks ago, my 4-year-old Emma grabbed the donkey and said, "Daddy, this is the donkey Mary rode into Bethlehem on with baby Jesus." I said, "Who told you that?" I said, "Give me names, because we don't know that that's the case."

You've also been told that December 25 is Jesus' birthday, but we are not told exactly when Jesus was born. Most people think he was born in the summertime, because

we're told in Luke, chapter 2, that the shepherds were out with their sheep when Jesus was born.

Today, we're going to see what actually happens at the birth of Jesus and shortly after the birth of Jesus. So, if you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those, whether you're here or in Lexington. We're going to be in Matthew, chapter 2. If you're new, welcome. We're in a series where we're looking at the message of Christmas by looking at the first messengers at Christmas, the angels.

Here's the main thing we're going to see in this passage. Here's the big idea: *there are multiple ways to reject Jesus, but there's only one way to receive him*. Here's what breaks many of our hearts this time of year. Some of the people you love the most want nothing to do with Jesus. You're about to spend time with them. You're going to eat with them. You're going to take pictures with them. You're going to give presents to them and receive presents from them.

You're going to have a lot of fun together, and it's going to be great, but at the end of the day, many of them want nothing to do with Jesus, and this is very difficult. Today, we're going to see *why people reject Jesus, how to receive Jesus, and why we have reason to be filled with hope this Christmas season*. That's where we're headed. Let's look at Matthew, chapter 2, starting in verse 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..." So, a few things about the wise men. We don't know their names, and we don't know their numbers. Yes, we love to sing, "We three kings of Orient are," but first of all, we don't know their names. We don't know that they're kings. They're just wise men.

Second of all, we don't know how many of them there were. Most people think three, but there may have been way more than that. There may have been six, seven. We don't know. (Ask someone younger than you about that joke. It's a joke.) It's likely that this was a large group of wise men, because we're told that it caused a stir when they came into town. Three guys on donkeys aren't going to cause much of a stir.

So, we don't know their numbers. We don't know their names. What we *do* know is their setting and significance. Verse 1 says they came from the east. What this means is they likely traveled from hundreds of miles away from Persia, or modern-day Iran, to get to Jesus.

We're told that they come after Jesus was born, which means they were not there for the birth. Some of you have a nativity scene in your neighborhood. It's down the street from your house. If you want that to be accurate, grab that nativity scene, bring

it and put it outside of *your* house, and then it'll be correct. The wise men were not at Jesus' birth.

Now, we know their setting. We also know their significance. The wise men would have been referred to as the *magi*. They were astronomers. We know they were wealthy based off the gifts they gave. They were the cultural elites of the day. They would have been like the *New York Times* columnists. They would have been like the YouTube influencers of the day.

Now, let's go to verse 2. I want you to see what God is doing with the wise men. The wise men come to Jerusalem. Verse 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.'**" I love this. What we see here is that God is drawing people to himself.

Here's something that's so interesting. At the end of the book of Matthew, in chapter 28, the Great Commission, Jesus sends out his disciples to the nations. What's so interesting is that at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, right here in chapter 2, it starts with Jesus drawing the wise men, drawing the nations to himself. The principle here, or the big idea, is that God uses all kinds of things to draw all kinds of people to himself.

God uses all kinds of things. Think about your life. What has God used in your life over the last year to draw you to himself? What has he used in your life to get your attention? He often will use times of trouble and times of transition. For some of you, it was the transition into a new life stage. Maybe it was a transition to a new job. For others, it might be illness or injury. Maybe you or somebody you love got sick.

Maybe you had to play the waiting game for the lab result or the pathology result or the CT scan result, and God used that painful experience to draw you to himself. For some of you, God drew you to himself with broken relationships. For others, maybe it was a challenging season of loneliness. Maybe it was anxiety. Maybe it was depression. What some of you may need to hear is that your pain has a purpose.

It probably has a lot of different purposes, but one of the purposes, for sure, is that God has been using it to draw your attention to himself, to get your attention. For some of you, the way you ended up at this church is you were going through a painful season. Yes, we might not know all of the reasons you have experienced pain, but we do know that you being here is something that is *on purpose for* a purpose. It is 0 percent accident. God uses all kinds of things to draw all kinds of people.

The wise men were likely from Persia, which means they weren't Jewish. What this means is that Jesus is for the rich wise men *and* the poor shepherd. He's for the educated and the uneducated. He's for the young and the old. He's for the kid in a nice

Patagonia jacket as well as the kid who's in a hand-me-down jacket that was donated. Jesus is for the nurse who works at Baptist and the nurse who works at a hospital in India. God uses all kinds of things to draw all kinds of people to himself.

But even though he does that, some people will still reject him. Why? Well, we see the answer starting in verse 3. It's about to get really interesting. ***"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."***

A few things about King Herod. We know from historians that Herod was the king of Judea for over 30 years, and we know he was a brutal king. There are multiple historians, one of them being the Jewish historian Josephus, who tell us that Herod had murdered multiple people in his family throughout his reign.

Twenty years before Jesus was born, Herod had his wife and his mother-in-law killed because he was worried they were plotting against him. This goes to show that conflicts with mothers-in-law have been around a long time. Three years before Jesus was born, Herod had three of his sons killed because he was worried they were going to take his throne too early. The Roman emperor at the time, Augustus, said it would have been safer to be one of Herod's pigs than to be one of his sons.

So, Herod, as we know from historians, as we know from this text, is a very bad man. We're told in verse 3 that Herod hears that the wise men show up and they're searching for a king, and it says Herod's response to this is he is troubled, which might be one of the biggest understatements in all of Scripture. Herod was not happy that these guys were searching for a king.

Now, it's easy to pick on King Herod because he was so terrible. He did all kinds of terrible things. He had his family murdered. But here's the truth. Herod knew this. You know this. There can only be one king. The reason Herod rejected Jesus is the same reason so many people reject Jesus today, and that's this: If Jesus is the King, that means you are *not* the king. It means you're not in control.

Think about this with me. Why do the dictators of this world...Nicolas Maduro, Vladimir Putin, President Xi in China... Why are dictators so resistant to losing their power? At the deepest level, why do *you*, in the deepest parts of your heart, want to be king? It's because only the king gets to say, "No one tells me what to do." You see, that impulse is in all of our hearts.

This is why so many people have problems with authority. This is why a lot of people have ongoing resentment toward their boss. They don't want to be told what to do. It's why middle schoolers and high schoolers might have strained relationships with

their parents. They don't want to be told what to do. This might be why parents and grandparents don't want to receive feedback about their parenting, because they don't want to be told what to do.

Every August, we have a lunch to kick off the semester for our college students. We've done this multiple years in a row. I know exactly how this works. We have a lot of new college students in town. They come to our lunch because they hear about it from a friend, and they're trying to make new friends.

Do you know what I want to say to these college students every year, but I actually don't say this because it would be too intense for a first impression? I want to just look at them and say, "Guys, some of you are going to plug right in. You're going to have a great time. You're going to grow like crazy, and it's going to be awesome. But a lot of you, dozens and dozens of you, are not going to come back anytime soon.

The reason is you are not tired enough yet, because for the first time in your life, you're away from Mom and Dad, and you get to say this very simple sentence: 'No one tells me what to do.' Unfortunately, you're not going to be able to handle it. You're going to have to learn things the hard way, and we will be here for you when you get back."

That is at the root of our hearts. We don't want to be told what to do. This is what was at the root of Herod's heart. If we want to read this passage rightly... This is a little bit discouraging to think about, but I believe it's true. If we want to read about this scenario with Herod rightly, we have to understand that Herod is who you might be if you had his power and money.

About a week ago, many of you heard about the story of the Michigan football coach Sherrone Moore who was fired for allegedly having an affair with one of his young female staffers. It also came out afterward that he had relationships with other women, some models. This guy had a wife and three kids. After this happened, of course, everyone was talking about how terrible it is. "This guy is such a fool. He gave away a \$34 million contract."

Now, to be clear, what he did was terrible, awful, gross...all the things. But I hear about this story, and I think to myself, "What would *you* do if *you* were rich and famous? What might *you* do if you had access to the young women he seems to have access to?" You see, we hear about these stories, and it's really easy for us to throw rocks at the guy who's rich and famous and has a moral failure when *we're* not rich and famous.

Herod rejects Jesus because he is hostile to Jesus. He did not want to lose his authority and power. What's so challenging for the Christian is that even for those of

us who have received Christ by faith, we are still left with what Tim Keller would call *residual hostility*.

Residual hostility is the lingering desire to remain in control of your life and for everything to be about you. Theologians call this *indwelling sin*. The big problem we have is not an evil king outside of us; the problem we have is an indwelling sinful nature inside of us. We have a little King Herod in our hearts.

A couple weeks ago, my family was at a 4-year-old's birthday party. It was *PAW Patrol* themed, so there were *PAW Patrol* plates. There were pouches. There was pizza. There were crying toddlers. It was just chaos, of course. Well, we're at this party, and the party is for a little 4-year-old boy named Joe. Of course, he has his *PAW Patrol* cake with candles on it. They light the cake. We're singing "Happy Birthday."

And what does my 2-1/2-year-old son do? Well, of course, he runs over to the cake as fast as he can and starts to try to blow it out. The problem is he's 2-1/2, so he can't really blow yet, so he's basically just spitting on this cake. So, I run up and grab him, and I'm like, "Shepherd, hey, whose party is this?" He says, "Joe's party." I'm like, "That's right, buddy. Does that mean it's your party?" "No, it's not."

You see, we do the exact same thing. Part of our sinful nature is we want to make everything about us. We want to keep all the authority to ourselves. This is why Christians sometimes struggle to give sacrificially. This is why we may not want to actually pray about moving overseas as a missionary or moving somewhere with a church plant.

This is why we might be hesitant to be open-handed about foster care or adoption. It's because we want to be in control. We are hesitant to bring on unnecessary suffering into our lives. But part of what it means to recognize Jesus as King is to accept and acknowledge he has absolute authority. Absolute authority. Now, we need to keep going. We're going to see how the religious leaders reject Jesus.

King Herod asked them, "Where's the king going to be born?" Verse 5: ***"They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet...'"*** Now they're going to quote Micah 5:2, which is a prophecy that was written about 700 years before Jesus was born. Verse 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."***

What happens here is so interesting. The religious leaders know the Scriptures so well that when the wise men come to them, they know exactly where Jesus can be found. They say he can be found in Bethlehem. But what's so interesting is that after they tell the religious leaders where to find Jesus, they do nothing. *Nothing*. Think

about this. The Savior of the world is five miles away from them, but they do not go to visit Jesus.

C.S. Lewis famously said that Christianity, if it's true, is of infinite importance. Christianity, if it is false, is of no importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important. To the religious leaders, Jesus was moderately important. How important is Jesus to *you*? The religious leaders rejected Jesus because they were indifferent.

Now, I don't think the average person in Winston-Salem or Lexington or in Davie County rejects Jesus out of hostility like Herod does. Some do, sure, but not most. The average person who rejects Jesus does so out of indifference. They just don't care. They're apathetic about the things of God. Some of them may care in theory, but they don't care in practice. They have knowledge about Jesus in their heads, but it hasn't started to affect how they live their lives.

This could be the person who grew up in church. He knows the songs. He has a general understanding of what the Bible says about certain things, but the Bible has not actually begun to change the way he lives. This passage is meant to serve as a warning to us that it is a dangerous game to know what God's Word says and to do nothing about it. Indifference toward Jesus is a way to reject Jesus.

One more thing I want to point out before we move on is something that's very easy to overlook in this passage if you don't pay close attention, and that's this: *only the Scriptures will guide you to Jesus*. Why do I say that? Well, remember that the star is what guided the wise men to Jerusalem, which is the general area where Jesus was. It took the Scriptures... It took quoting the prophecy to tell them specifically where Jesus was, which means only the Scriptures are going to guide you to Jesus.

The reason this is such an important question is because so many of you right now, this past year, this coming year... The question you've been asking all the time is "How do I know if God is guiding me? How do I know where God is guiding me?" You're wondering, "What is God's will for my life? Should I stay at home? Should I go work part time? Should I work full time? Should I ask this girl out or not? Should I move closer to my grandkids or not?"

Well, there are a lot of different ways God can guide you. I'm just going to give you four ways. The first is what we see in this passage. God guides you through the Scriptures. This is the primary way God guides you. He guides you with the inerrant, completely truthful, written-down Word of God. What happens is that when you read through the Scriptures, over time, you're going to grow in your understanding of the nature and character of God.

The way the Scriptures guide you is not so much by telling you exactly what to do *here* and *there*. The Scriptures guide you by forming you into the kind of person who is going to act in such a way that it is consistent with what we know about the nature and character of God. But you cannot know the will of God any more than you know the Word of God. So, what if 2026 is the year you study the Scriptures more deeply than you ever have?

Maybe your first step is to pick a Bible reading plan. The best plan to pick is the one you're most likely to do. Maybe it's small pieces. Great. The best plan is the one you're going to do. Some of you might need to pick a time in your calendar for your quiet time. Pastor John Piper says if you must choose between breakfast and Bible, choose Bible, then grab an energy bar, and then plan better, because God guides us primarily through the Scriptures.

Now, the next three ways God guides you you have to hold lightly. The second way he guides you is through your circumstances. God can provide guidance to you based on your circumstances. This is usually what people are referring to when they say they have an open door for something. The apostle Paul talks about an open door for effective ministry.

The third way God can guide you is through the church. One of the reasons we say all the time here, "If you're in town, would you be in church?" is because God uses the preaching of the Word to guide you. He uses the singing and the reading and the praying of the Word to guide you. God also uses connections and relationships you have formed in the life of the church to guide you. Maybe it's your DNA Group. Maybe it's your Community Group leader.

Some people in our church do an amazing job of this. Just this past week, I heard about a girl in our church who has been offered a great job. It's a great job in a different city. So, what she did was she set up two separate meetings with two different leaders she trusts, and she's asking them to speak into this decision.

What unfortunately happens is that, oftentimes, we will hear that people have made massive decisions, moving cities, changes in career plans, and they haven't asked anybody in their Community Group what they think. They're totally on an island, and this is just not helpful. God guides us through the church.

The fourth way God can guide you is through your spirit. What this looks like is it's when you become uniquely burdened by certain things. Some of you might be burdened by global lostness. Some of you are burdened for the prisoner or homelessness or kids in the foster system. A burning desire or a godly ambition can be how God is guiding you in a particular direction. Now, let's keep going. We're going to pick back up in verse 7.

"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.'"

What Herod is doing here is he's pretending worship and intending murder. He wants to know where the baby is so he can have the baby killed. 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."***

What happens here is that after being told Jesus is in Bethlehem, the star confirms the exact house. Verse 10:

"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."

So, we saw that Herod and the religious leaders *reject* Jesus. Now we get a picture of what it looks like to *receive* Jesus. The wise men receive Jesus by faith. They do three things that will be true in the life of anyone who truly receives Jesus. The first is they were joyful. You saw in the verse. It says, ***"...they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."*** That is a very dramatic way to describe this.

Matthew uses four different words here to describe how joyful they are. The source of their joy was not that Jesus had given anything to them; the source of their joy was simply that they had gotten to meet Jesus. You see, here's the interesting thing about joy. Joy is rooted in the blesser. Happiness is rooted in blessings. That is why you can be joyful and sad at the exact same time. The opposite of joy is not sadness; the opposite of joy is hopelessness. The wise men are joyful.

The second thing we see is that they fell down and worshiped. We see here a beautiful picture of submission. When the wise men meet Jesus, they don't walk up to Jesus, stand over top of him, and look down at him. No. They fall down on their faces in a posture of submission.

Something we say here often is that here at Two Cities, we do not position ourselves above the Bible, pick and choose the parts we like, and just go with those things. That's not what we do. What we do is we approach the Scriptures humbly in a posture of submission, and we say, "Lord, you reveal to us what is good and right and true."

The third thing they bring is gifts. The principle here is that receiving Jesus will lead to generosity. You've heard it said before that you can give without loving, but you

cannot love without giving. This is one of the reasons my wife Olivia and I have decided...we've just decided this...that every year, the biggest gift we give during Christmastime is going to be to the kingdom of God, by far.

Yes, we have other things we want to give toward. Yes, we have presents we want to buy. But every year, we have chosen that the biggest gift is going to be to the kingdom of God. Why? Because it only makes sense that if we are celebrating Jesus' birthday, our greatest gift will be to him.

By the way, something that's interesting to think about... We know from the New Testament that Mary and Joseph were very poor. That makes you ask this question: How could they afford to raise Jesus? It may have been that they used the money from the gifts to raise Jesus. The wise men had been blessed, and they used that blessing to bless others. They gave the gifts.

Speaking of the gifts, every pastor and every commentator loves to talk about the significance of these gifts. They love to explain all of the little details, and they *are* interesting, so we'll talk about them.

They give three gifts. The first is gold. The gift of gold would emphasize Jesus' royalty. Gold is something you would bring to a king. The second gift is frankincense. This would have been associated with priests, with worship. This gift would have emphasized Jesus' divinity, that Jesus is our Great High Priest. The third gift is the gift of myrrh. This gift emphasizes Jesus' humanity.

Of the three gifts, myrrh is by far the most interesting one. It's a little bit of an unusual gift. It had a lot of different uses back in that time period. I'll just give you two. One of the uses is it was a pain reliever. You can actually look in the book of Mark. When Jesus was crucified, you see that he is offered myrrh, but he refuses to take it. It was used as a pain reliever.

It also was used back then as embalming fluid for the dead, which is pretty weird. They show up to this baby, and one of their gifts is embalming fluid. Strange. I'm guessing some of you did not receive embalming fluid at your Community Group gift exchange. None of you have bought that for anybody you love. Right? But the reason myrrh was given is because these gifts were not just fit for a king; they were foreshadowing a savior. We'll come back to this.

For now, let's go to verse 12. ***"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."*** Here we see that the wise men defied Herod. He told the wise men, "Report back to me where the child is," but we see they go a different way. The principle here is that once you meet Jesus, it's going to change everything about you. Your allegiance will change.

Verse 13: ***"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'"*** So, the angel, the messenger and minister here, comes to Joseph and tells him he needs to flee in order to protect his family. I can't read this without wondering what you might need to flee in 2026 to protect your family.

What's really interesting is that in the Bible, both the Old Testament and New Testament, when we are given a picture of fleeing or when we are told to flee, it's almost always something sexual in nature. Joseph, in Genesis 39, flees Potiphar's wife. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, "Flee from sexual immorality." Paul also tells us elsewhere that we need to flee youthful passions.

Here's the problem with trying to manage sin. Sometimes, when you have the opportunity to sin, instead of fleeing it, you'll try to just fight it. The problem with this is once you are in the moment and have the opportunity to give yourself over to particular sins, what you often will tell yourself is "I know this is wrong, but I don't care." This is why we are told to flee certain things and not just fight them.

For some of you men, what you might need to do this next year is to flee from some destructive habits that are putting your family in danger. Maybe it's a sports betting app on your phone. Maybe it's looking forward to your next drink just a little bit more than you should. Maybe it's saying yes to every possible work travel opportunity you have. You may need to flee these things because they're putting your family in danger.

Some of you might need to flee social media in the new year. It makes you anxious. It sends you spiraling in ways you hate. It causes you to gossip about other things you see online with other people. Some of you might need to flee a relationship you have with somebody in the workplace. Maybe you are too friendly with a coworker. I'm not saying you need to quit your job, but you need to figure out, "Instead of fighting this temptation, how do I flee it?"

The word from the angel to Joseph was to flee from danger in order to protect his family. What might that be for you? Let's look at the last few verses here, now that I have everybody in the Christmas spirit. Verse 14: ***"And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"***

What happens here at the end of this passage is that Joseph takes his family, and they flee to Egypt. The chapter actually ends very dark, because King Herod has every son in the city of Bethlehem age 2 and under killed. But we're told at the end of this

chapter that not long after Joseph and his family flee to Egypt, King Herod dies. Joseph moves Mary and Jesus back to Israel. They settle in Nazareth.

The big idea at the end of this chapter is because the brutal, evil king has died, that means death and darkness don't get the last word. Yes, you might have grief; yes, you might experience loss, but you have reason to be filled with hope this Christmas. Why? Because the new king, King Jesus, was born.

King Jesus was born so that 33 years later he might hang on a cross. You see, the reason the gift of myrrh was so significant is because it was foreshadowing the reason Jesus came in the first place, which was to live a perfect life, to die in the place of sinners, and then rise from the dead.

Jesus and Herod are the exact opposite. Herod was using his power and authority to kill his enemies. Herod was thinking about himself. Herod was insecure. In the life and ministry of Jesus, we see the exact opposite of those things. Jesus voluntarily relinquished his power. Instead of thinking about himself, he was thinking about others.

What does it look like for you in the new year to not respond to Jesus with hostility, to not respond with indifference, but to respond to him rightly by faith? In spite of the fact that we have treated Jesus poorly, that we have been indifferent, that we have been hostile, he has made a way for us to receive him by faith. This is why we sing this time of year, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King."

Christmas is as good of a time as ever to ask this question: Have you ever received Jesus? Who is the lord of your life? Is it you or is it Jesus? Are you responding to Jesus in the way the wise men do...with joy, with submission, with a worshipful spirit, with generosity?

Years ago, I heard Pastor J.D. Greear tell a story about a different king. This was a king who lived about AD 1100, and he was the king of a Viking kingdom. This guy was known as the fairest king who has ever lived. Everybody loved him. He was full of compassion. He was a great leader. But the king was told one day that someone had been stealing money from the town treasury.

So, he went to the town and said, "All right, guys. You guys know I'm a loving king. I want to meet your needs, so if you have needs, just tell them to me, and I will do my best to meet them, but you cannot steal from the treasury because it will undermine the entire kingdom." Well, the king says that to the town, but for the next week, the stealing continues to happen.

So, the king comes back out to the town and says, "All right, guys. I don't want to do this, but I'm going to give a penalty. We're going to give 10 lashes to whoever is found to be stealing from the treasury." Another week passes. The stealing continues. He comes back out. "Twenty lashes for whoever is stealing." The stealing continues. He comes back out and says, "Forty lashes. I don't want to do this, but 40 lashes for whoever is found to be stealing," which was basically a death sentence at that point.

Well, just two days after he comes out with that penalty, they catch the person who has been stealing in the act, and it's the king's mother. At this point, the king is left with a dilemma. He doesn't know what to do, because on one side of things, he's the fairest king who has ever lived. He's full of love and compassion. If it were anyone else, they would get the penalty, but he also loves his mother so much. He's so gracious that he can't stand the thought of his mother getting the punishment.

So, he tells the town, "All right, guys. Here's what's going to happen. I'm going to take a couple of days and think about this, and then I'll let you know my decision." Well, the king comes back a few days later and says, "I've given this a lot of thought, and we have to give her the penalty. The law is the law. Justice is justice. It's only fair that she gets the penalty."

So, the guards take his mother to the post. They take the shirt off her back. They tie her to the post. The guard gets his whip out and rears back to whip the mother, and the king says, "Stop." The king in that moment takes off his robe, lays it beside his mom, wraps his arms around her, and says, "Now hit her." The guard says, "But, sir, we can't hit her without hitting you." He says, "Exactly. You need to give her the penalty."

You see, this is the gospel. This is why King Jesus came: to live a perfect life, to take the penalty you owe so that you don't have to. Have you received Jesus by faith? There are multiple ways to reject Jesus; there's only one way to receive him. Let's pray together.

With your heads bowed, I just want to give you a moment to respond. I know some of you feel like you are very far from Jesus. It's things you've done in your past. It's things that have been done to you, and you feel far. Well, the good news for you today is that you do not have to travel hundreds of miles, like the wise men did, to receive Jesus. The distance between you and Jesus is much shorter. It is repentance and faith.

If you've never received Jesus, you can do it just by saying words like these to God. Put it in your own words. "Lord Jesus, I am a bad king. I'm unable to save myself. Lord, I'm asking you to take the throne of my life. Would you tell me what to do? Lord, I commit now to following you and walking with you." If you've prayed that

prayer, would you tell someone you came with? Would you tell a prayer team member after the service?

Others of you are in Christ, but you think about your joy, and it's not there. You think about your generosity, and it's not there. Would you ask Jesus to revive in your heart the things that are pleasing to him? Would you ask that the Lord give you a spirit of joy that you've never had in the coming year, that you would be full of worship, that you would be full of generosity?

Lord, I thank you for the fact that you have revealed yourself to us through your Word. Thank you for how you guide us. Thank you for how you use all kinds of things to draw us to yourself. Lord, I pray that in the new year we would trust you in a new way. I pray that in the new year we will be filled with hope, joy, peace with you, and peace with one another. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.