

A RULER LIKE NO OTHER IS REVEALED – MATTHEW 2:1-12

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After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: “ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’” Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I was recently made aware of a short story of the science-fiction genre which was written in the 1950s. It was written by Arthur Clarke, and is entitled, *The Star*. The story takes place several thousand years in the future, when the time of space travel was quite common. This particular short story is a record of one particular space traveler, an explorer, a scientist, a Jesuit priest. He has just travelled to the Phoenix nebula, three thousand light years away, to ascertain the fate of a burned out star. This star had gone supernova thousands of years earlier, blazing brightly in the night sky, incinerating anything that was too close. Upon nearing the burned out star, they found the remnants of a solar system, similar to ours, but there was only one planet which survived the heat. They found on that planet a vault, more proof of life outside our solar system. Inside this vault were records of this civilization’s culture, seemingly more advanced than our own.

The Jesuit priest is troubled, not just by the destruction of a civilization of people, but the reason why it was destroyed. The reason for his trouble is finally revealed at the end. He calculated when this particular star went supernova, and reveals the answer to his trouble with the last line of the story, “There can be no reasonable doubt: the ancient mystery is solved at last. Yet, oh God, there were so many stars you could have used. What was the need to give these people to the fire, that the symbol of their passing might shine above Bethlehem?” This star he found was the star of Bethlehem. The star used to guide the wise-men to the Christ child.

It's a science fiction story that gets us to think for a little bit about how the star of Bethlehem came to be. A mystery many people have sought to explain, but will not find the answer to on this side of heaven. The origin of the star of Bethlehem is a mystery. And that should not bother us at all. But something to pay attention to is brought up a little bit in that short story, and that is the relationship of that Bethlehem star, wherever it may be, to the birth of Jesus. It fulfilled God's purpose, his purpose for this ruler he has sent. A RULER LIKE NO OTHER IS REVEALED by him.

1. With a power like no other
2. With a purpose like no other

(1)

It was the prophet Micah who foretold the words of where the Christ child would be born (Bethlehem in Judea). A lowly, backwoods town, seemingly incapable of anything significant. And yet it was Micah who said, **"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler."** Through the rest of the Old Testament prophecies, this would be A RULER LIKE NOT OTHER.

It was Jesus who fulfilled the words of Micah and the other Old Testament prophets about a ruler being born in Bethlehem. It is the story we know well, the story we have heard about in the past few weeks. And now in the story of the wise men, this ruler is revealed to the nations. We hear how after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem in search of the Messiah. They went to Jerusalem to inquire where they could find this king. As we heard about last week, King Herod, ruling in Jerusalem, was none too pleased when he heard about a threat to his reign, and so he did what he could to snuff it out.

He gathered the priests from the temple, the experts in the Jewish Scriptures and asked where the Christ was to be born. It were these leaders who came up with the place of his birth, which they relayed to Herod, who in turn relayed the information to the Magi, or wise men. But in Herod's scheming and planning to destroy this king whom the Magi sought, he only seemed to pay attention to the first half of the prophecy about the place of the birth, and ignore the importance of the latter half of the prophecy, he would be a ruler, this ruler would be revealed like no other.

Herod sent the Magi off with the instructions to come and find him when they found the place of the Christ child's birth. He had no intentions of worshiping the king like he feigned, but thought his plan to destroy the baby was foolproof. It may have been foolproof, but it was not God-proof. The words of Psalm 2 come to mind, **"The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One...The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them."** The Lord scoffs because this RULER TO BE LIKE NO OTHER with a power like no other.

Take a look at the power this ruler showed at his birth. Even in his humble, human state, he commanded the respect and obedience of nature. Like *The Star* short story alluded to, God allowed a supernatural event to bow to his will, allowing a star to be visible in the bright sky for the Magi to follow. It was a power that was not only seen here, but later in Jesus' life – when he walked on water and calmed a storm. The Magi said they followed *his* star, and they are absolutely accurate, this star was his, like the rest of creation. The beginning of the book of John shows why he had the power, **"He was with God in**

the beginning, through him all things were made.” He has the power to make anything in all of creation submit to him. This is A RULER LIKE NO OTHER.

This star seems to have done a “disappearing and reappearing” trick for the Magi. For after they left Jerusalem, the star they followed reappeared again and they were overjoyed. It led them straight to the place where the child was. By this time Joseph had found a place to call home in Bethlehem, and this was where the Magi found him. They bowed down in worship at finding whom they sought. Then they presented him with exquisite, expensive gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. This RULER LIKE NO OTHER with a power like no other, showed his power again. Before the wise men left, they were given a dream by this ruler to not return to Herod. Herod’s plan, which was foolproof was not God-proof. Through the use of a dream, this ruler thwarted the plans of a simple earthly ruler.

Now what does this show us, other than the fact that we should mess with Jesus? It shows us a lot. It shows us that this Jesus whom we love, worship and call our friend, is none other than a great ruler with some great powers. He controlled the forces of nature when he was here on this earth, and he controls the forces of the universe right now sitting at the right hand of heaven. It shows us that we have no control over our own plans we make, especially if they are in conflict with God. It shows us that God is the one who brings things to pass and we are no more than pawns on the big chess board of life. It also shows us that God uses this power to save us, not to make our life miserable.

Why else would God use these powers unfathomable to lead a group of Magi trekking across the Arabian desert to a little child? Why else would the Lord prepare his son for his trip to Egypt with expensive gifts? Why else would God thwart the wicked plans of Herod? He did it to save us when we couldn’t save ourselves. As we enter this new year, it’s a time to reflect on the past and ponder the future. It doesn’t matter if you had a good year or a bad year last year, it wasn’t because God was punishing or rewarding you, because we have God’s Word that tells us otherwise. We have God’s ruler who was revealed to all nations that tells us otherwise. We have the true Word of God which revealed the Saviors purpose like none other.

(2)

Again, we turn back to the prophecy the priests told Herod, **“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler, who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”** This RULER LIKE NO OTHER’s purpose is like no other. His purpose is to shepherd, to take care of, to watch his people Israel. This Messiah was the hope of Israel. It was the hope they held since before they became a nation. It was a promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the Messiah would save Israel. But this ruler’s mission would not just be limited in scope to just the physical nation of Israel. His purpose is to save all people.

The Jews grasped in a small way what this would be like, as they did allow foreigners to join their religion, but these foreigners were never quite as good as the Jews. With the arrival of the Magi, God showed that he not only had come for all people, but that he had drawn all people as well. And we can be thankful for that, because not many of us here today have a drop of Jewish blood in us. He came and he died for all people. He has drawn us to himself, just like he did the Magi. God’s Word leads us to the Savior, just like the star led the Magi. It is a journey that ultimately we are glad to take.

But the Magi's journey did not just stop when they reached the manger. They presented him with those expensive gifts, and they surely continued to talk about the journey they had made for the rest of their lives. So also our journey as wise men and women following Jesus does not end when we have found him. It does not end when we are confirmed, it does not end when we've read through the Bible once, twice or three times. It does not end when we think we know all there is to know about the Bible. That is only the beginning.

A new year gives us an opportunity to renew our walk with Jesus. Not just to do the same old stuff and think our relationship is OK, but to examine and know your relationship is OK. Now what exactly does that mean? It means getting into God's Word on a regular basis – whether that's through worship attendance, personal devotions, or Bible studies. It means listening to God's Word and applying it to your daily life – get help with that bad habit you've been struggling with, adjust your lifestyle to fit with God's Word. It means remembering that Jesus is a ruler who came for all people, not just for those of us sitting here this morning. It means seriously asking yourself the question, "What can I do to bring Jesus to other people? To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your church can do for you, ask what you can do for your church." In the next several weeks, in a season the church calls Epiphany (which means revealing), much of this will be revealed. You might remember Epiphany with this little math equation: New Year + Old Jesus = New You.

There are many things in the Bible that will remain mysteries for us. The mystery of the star of Bethlehem, and how exactly did the Magi know to follow the star. But the greatest mystery has been revealed. It was a mystery how exactly Jesus would come, but it has now been revealed and we believe it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us continue as the Magi did, to ponder this mystery, and share the message about A RULER LIKE NO OTHER. Amen.