

Christmas Theme

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[0 : 0 0] I want us this morning to look back at Matthew chapter 2, not any specific verse but kind of generally the whole run of the story in Matthew chapter 2, well known to us. It will be read in many different places, in many different churches around about this time of year, Christmas time as we think of the birth of Jesus. I wonder sometimes if we focus only on certain parts of the story of the birth of Jesus, because with a mixture of people, I think all of us are a mixture of people, maybe like myself, you too are a mixture of both, maybe I should be wrong in saying this, that anyone else could be a mixture of both sentiment and cynicism, surely not, but certainly I find that mixture in myself this week on returning back from doing a service at the Torr nursing home, took a bus into town and then decided to get off and walk along Princess Street, amazing thing to do these days, to walk along Princess Street without all these extra road works and things, fantastic, and then walked along, got dark and came to the German market, which is tremendous, there's lovely smells coming from that and then the skating rink and everything was very jolly and Christmasy and I actually had to admit some feelings of sentiment there and this was great and there was even a brass band playing and it was really quite Christmas, Cardish and lovely, but I also battled with that cynicism about Christmas time and some of the kind of maybe the naivety that is reflected in the presentation of Jesus at this time of the year and I do wonder sometimes if we've been guilty and no one really is responsible I guess, but if we're guilty of regularising people only thinking about Jesus once a year, because we make such a big deal of Christmas that it kind of regularises in people's minds that this is the legitimate time to think of Jesus and I'll give him a little bit of extra thought just now and then I can tuck him away in a drawer for the rest of the year because he has no relevance, he's that nice innocent child in the manger and we don't really need to take him beyond that and that's my dopping my hat to religion and to Christianity and whether in a sense we've legitimised that a little bit in the way that we are willing and open to speak about Jesus at this time of year which is absolutely right of course, but maybe much more reticent for the rest of the year because it seems unseasonal or it seems inappropriate so to do.

I wonder if sometimes the real Jesus is hidden from our lives and the challenge that he brings from our hearts and I just want to speak about the newborn Christ here in two ways, one as Christ who is worthy of worship and also the one who constitutes a threat.

Jesus who is worthy of worship clearly comes across in our understanding of this passage even if you go back to verse 20 of chapter 1 we have the amazing announcement of his conception and the conception of Jesus being from the Holy Spirit as the angel spoke to Mary and angelic involvement, a heavenly involvement in the birth of this child born to a virgin, an amazing reality and a significant theological truth as well as miraculous truth for us to consider, God coming in the flesh breaking into the cycle of sinful humanity in order to be a redeemer and our Lord.

And then we move on if we can go to Luke's Gospel to the beginning of Luke where we have the amazing announcement of Jesus to the shepherds on the hillside and how it's you can almost just imagine, it's hard to imagine but you can almost imagine heaven being peeled back, the skies being peeled back in this great hallelujah chorus bursting out from heaven at the announcement of Jesus' birth and this declaration of him being worthy of worship from this infantile stage that the whole of heaven is involved in this birth in a quite unique and unusual way that we have angelic involvement, we have angels of the Lord coming, we have a heavenly host bursting through the skies to announce the coming of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 18] worthy of worship, the Son of God and of course in this chapter we also have just peppered in the chapter these declarations that the Christ who is to come of which we were singing also in prophetic anticipation in Psalm 2 is the one who is expected, he's not just Jesus the Son but he's the expected one, we have at least three different prophetic references in this chapter to the coming of the Messiah, to the coming of Jesus we are told that the amazingly disinterested chief priests and teachers of the law when they're answering Herod say well yeah the Bible does speak about the Messiah coming and he'll come to Bethlehem in Judah and they quote there from Micah chapter 5 so there seems strange as I throw away thought how disinterested these chief priests and religious leaders were in finding out about this Messiah who had been prophesied, they seem entirely indifferent, there's no record of them actually going to find out if that was the case, strange.

And of course also the reference to Jesus being the one who would come and be brought up from Egypt in verse 15 a prophecy from Hosea and of course the mournful prophecy of Judah Rachel weeping for her children from Jeremiah 31 speaking of the great holocaust of what King Herod the Great did to maintain his own position as king and as ruler.

So we have these amazing declarations and prophetic messages being fulfilled in this newborn child who is worthy of worship and of course taking us to the Magi themselves who came from the east who were readers of heavenly signs what that means we're not quite sure were they astronomers or were they astrologers we don't know terribly much but it seems to be that they were godly people and that they also were looking for this divine child to come they were spoken to directly by God or at least by his angels and when they were led to the Christ they worshiped him they worshiped this newborn in the manger and that's a challenge for us today as we come to worship and as we gather together in worship of the Lord God and we worship in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we can worship

Jesus Christ as he walks on the water as he weeps over the city of Jerusalem as he cries on the cross it is finished as he is resurrected in his amazing glory and power and ascended to the right hand of the Father but we can also worship him as a newborn in a manger because he is worthy he's worthy today of our worship this is God incarnate God in the flesh the all-knowing all sovereign all powerful God newborn in a manger an incredible truth and he has continues to be worthy of our worship even as the newborn child worthy of our worship and so today we come together and as Christians our lives are to reflect worshipfully the

Lord God it's good for us just to reflect on him and reflect on our lives and also on our corporate worship today we come together as St. Columbas we come together as a people who know and love each other we come together in worship does our does our worship and do our lives reflect his worthiness he is worthy of us falling on our knees of just being spread eagled on the floor in worth while worship he is glorious and he is worthy and that is something that we must recognize in our own hearts and lives as we submit to him we submit to his Lordship and his worth it's no one else that's worth it there's no one else that we can worship today and we look to worshiping him and knowing the glory of who he is Wednesday night we looked at a prayer for our own church Thessalonians 1 about the gospel in our lives and the gospel in our church and the gospel as we proclaim it that it would go not just in word only and this is always kind of a preacher's massive issue but I hope for all of us to that our lives and our sharing of the gospel wouldn't be in word only but as

[10:59] Paul recognized it in the life of the Thessalonians that it would be in power in the Holy Spirit and in deep conviction does our worship reflect that today power the Holy Spirit and deep conviction we believe in the one that we worship we are assured of him we recognize his worth ship and we come together with joy and with anticipation and with energy did I say energy on a Sunday morning we come with energy to worship this living Savior energized by his power prayed for his strength and enjoying the prospect of worshiping him on his resurrection morning because of who he is he is worthy of our worship the newborn but also this newborn and this is maybe for us a little bit more unpalatable he comes with a threat this newborn child comes with a threat and we see that fundamentally in Herod's response Herod the great response to Jesus Christ newborn baby with an absolute threat to this big strong muscular powerful all powerful king Jesus comes as a threat he comes as a threat because

Herod recognizes him as the Messiah where was the Christ to be born he asked he wasn't ignorant of these things and he knew about the Messiah he knew the Messiah was the one who would come and take away the sins of his people and he didn't really want that to happen because he was a tyrant and he was a self obsessed adulterating sinner he was one who enjoyed absolute and complete freedom to live exactly as he wanted and satisfying his own lusts and desires with the power crazy kind of life that he had and he didn't want the thought of a Messiah coming who might challenge him at both a national and personal level nor did he want the king of the Jews to be born because he was the king it was a position a threat to his position to his power to his autonomy to his sovereignty over himself and over the world that he managed and it led to such terrible and irrational and evil rejection of the Christ and the lies that went with that and also of course the brutality of his solution to the Messiah problem to wipe out all the male children two years and under this desperate act of cruel brutality in order to secure his own position 1996 I was driving in the car and listening to Parliament and finding it hard to drive and not weep because it was the morning of the the dumpling massacres and Reverend Ian Paisley stood up in Parliament and read these words a voice is heard in Rama Rachel weeping for her children and it was so powerful and so emotional and so real I've never been able to forget that moment as you do when you remember these kind of moments and he reflected the horror and the terror of what happened there that day we reflect on the horror also and the terror of what happened that day we recognize that we see it and we know it and behind Herod behind

His own rejection we do see a spiritual backdrop an ongoing pattern of satanic opposition to the coming of the Redeemer to the coming of Jesus Christ where Satan has sought to silence this whole genealogical line to words the Messiah coming through Abel's murder through the circumstances of Moses birth very similar to the circumstances of Jesus if you remember to the Egyptian power to the Kenanites to Esther's deliverance of the people to Absalom to the captivity all with an underpinning spiritual attack against the seed of the woman who was to come and be the saviour of God's people not denying in any sense the responsibility of all those who were involved for Herod Jesus was both a national and a personal threat of immense proportions newborn child Jesus is he still a threat that's what I wonder is he still a threat he remains the Messiah he's the Redeemer the angels speak of good news of great joy for all the people he saves us he saves us from our separation from God and from the self destruction that we find ourselves in he offers us life eternal he speaks of being the only way he promises to change our hearts he says you must be born again or born from above or born afresh that's his own message that's his own truth to us he says I am the way and the truth and the life nobody comes to the Father except through me he remains this Messiah and just as I said can I just ask preach here for eight and a half years maybe taking things for granted terribly much so but do you know today if you're not a Christian do you know how to become a Christian do you know how to become a Christian do you know what Jesus requires of you do you know it's not just coming any old way in any old time with all your own best efforts your good works whatever it might be do you know the steps you need to take if you're not a Christian today do you know he wants you to believe in him with all your heart that he is the only Savior do you know that he requires you to ask him to give you faith and to give you forgiveness to turn you around you ask him do you know he offers you the gift of salvation he asked for that and he asked for his Holy Spirit in your heart to change your heart do you know that do you know that these are the steps that you must take if you're not a Christian today and have you done that then believe it and live it Jesus says just a little bit later on in Matthew's

Gospel ask and you will receive seek and you will find knock and the door will be open to you when you come to him and when you come to him he doesn't turn anybody away you might not feel any different you might not look any different there might not be a spiritual electricity just going through your body but believe you're saved tell somebody confess it speak to me speak to anyone in the congregation don't be a secret disciple live for Christ that's the gospel message but I wonder if that message remains a threat you know for Herod it was he was afraid of his authority and his freedom and his independence being usurped is that what we challenge what are we struggling with that concept as Christians we continue I think at one level or another to struggle with that reality I want to be in charge I don't need any faith in my life I can't trust in the Bible don't tell me how to live my life I'm free I'm independent that's what you think well I'll do anything to maintain that independence I'll even go to church I'll even look like a Christian but I'll do it in order to remain free of his lordship in my heart because I like my own sovereignty and I like the dubious freedom of my own independence can I just challenge you and myself when we think like that to remind ourselves today that Christ lived he was a newborn child he died and he rose again as God for you and for me and your belief in that or otherwise doesn't change it sometimes I think truth we think is only truth as long as we believe it as if truth is entirely subjective and it's only truth if we believe it he lived he died he rose again to be the Savior period and if you remain independent from him it's an illusory independence it's a deceitful independence because God says you remain enslaved to rebellion against him and ultimately to death that you're powerless to change your own heart powerless to be able to love God the way he intends for us it's an irrational position and it leaves far too many unanswered questions about why we are here the nature of the world in which we live the justice the injustice the good and the evil your own hearts and the declaration of God's word it's too easy it's too thoughtless but lastly can I remind you and challenge you and challenge myself with the thought that no one no one will ever love you more than the Lord Jesus Christ Christ who has laid down his life for his people he's provided for each and every one of us spiritually practically

that you're here today lavished love on you lavished health on you lavished family on you lavished breath on you lavished wealth on you but above all he's lavished grace towards you if you will accept it it's vital that we see Christ as more than a threat it's easy to keep him at arm's length it's easy to keep him as a newborn babe in a manger that can be put away in a cupboard at the end of this period of the year it's easy even to keep him distanced as a political leader or redeemer but we see him also as the one who is a loving threat to our dangerous spiritual condition and who offers us to be a fantastic saviour and I hope that for us and in our lives and in our prayers and in our witness we will see the gospel not just in words only but we will see it in power in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction so that we can live him and serve him and love him and give ourselves to him 100% because he is worthy and because it's a gift from him and because there's no other way to live what a great thought to think about as we come to the end of yet another year I know there's another Sunday yet but as we come towards the end of another year let's bow our heads in prayer Heavenly Father we rejoice in the message of Jesus

[24 : 58] Christ we rejoice that not one syllable is meaningless in what is presented to us we rejoice in the clarity of your word in its declaration of Jesus Christ as the main and only true focus of revelation that Jesus prophesied, Jesus born, Jesus living, Jesus dead, Jesus resurrected, Jesus ascended, Jesus sovereign that these are the truths on which we breathe spiritually with that we live spiritually to share and we ask that in these days however wherever the gospel is preached that the threat of Jesus to our sinful independence will be real but will be overcome by the amazing love and healing that he brings and hope and a future and Lord God remind us and remind people here and remind our friends that it's not even about our feelings about Christ or our feelings of need for Christ but that the Christ is and the Christ is worthy and the Christ only can give us life remind us of that remind us of these things today and bless us and continue with us in worship we look forward to celebrating the Lord's Supper this evening we rejoice in the hope and the perspective that it brings to us we ask for intimacy this evening for spiritual power for encouragement that we would be uplifted that we would be reminded of heaven and we ask these things because you are worthy.

Amen.