

Matthew 2 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

THE KING APPEARING AND THE KING ASSAILED

Matthew 2:1-2. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

The King is born, and now he must be acknowledged. At the same moment he will be assailed. His birth was in the days of another king, of Edomite stock, who had usurped the throne of David. The world's kingdom is opposed to that of our Lord: where Jesus is born there is sure to be a Herod in power. It is a marvelous thing that Magi from afar should know that a great king was born, and should come from so great a distance to do him homage; for the world's wise men are not often found bowing at the feet of Jesus. When wise men seek our King they are wise indeed. These were devout men, to whom the stars spoke of God. An unusual luminary was understood by them to indicate the birth of the Coming Man for whom many in all lands were looking. Stars might guide us if we were willing to be led. Lord Jesus, make everything speak to me concerning thee, and may I be truly led till I find thee!

The wise men were not content with having "seen his star", they must see himself; and, seeing, they must adore. These were not in doubt as to his Godhead: they said, "We are come to worship him." Lord, I pray thee, make all the wise men to worship thee!

Matthew 2:3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod is expressly called "Herod the king": in that capacity he is the enemy of our King. They are in a sad state to whom the Savior is a trouble.

Some, like Herod, are troubled because they fear that they shall lose position and honor if true religion makes progress, and many have an undefined dread that the presence of Jesus will deprive them of pleasure, or call them to make unwilling sacrifices. O thou who art the King of heaven, thou cost not trouble me: thou art my joy!

See the influence of one man: Herod's trouble infects "all Jerusalem." Well it might; for this cruel prince delighted in shedding blood, and the darkness of his brow meant death to many. Unhappy Jerusalem, to be troubled by the birth of the Savior! Unhappy people, to whom true godliness is a weariness!

Matthew 2:4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

When the earth-king dabbles in theology, it bodes no good to truth Herod among priests and scribes in Herod still. Some men may, become well instructed in their Bibles, and yet be all the worse for what they have discovered. Like Herod, they make ill use of what they learn; or like these scribes, they may know much about the Lord Jesus, and yet have no heart towards him.

Matthew 2:5, 6. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

They were right in their conclusion, though somewhat cloudy in their quotation. Jesus was to be born in the city of David, in Bethlehem, which is, being interpreted, "the house of bread." Though the city was but a little one, his birth therein made it famous: Jesus ennobles all that he touches.

These scribes knew where to find the text about the Savior's birth, and they could put their finger upon the spot in the map where he

should be born; and yet they knew not the King, neither cared to seek him out. May it never be my case, to be a master of Scriptural geography, prophecy, and theology, and yet to miss HIM of whom the Scripture speaks!

With joy would we note the name of Governor, here given to Jesus. We are of the spiritual Israel if he rules us. Oh, that the day may soon come when the literal Israel shall behold the government laid upon his shoulder!

Matthew 2:7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

We delight in anxious inquirers; but here was one of a very evil sort. Many pry into holy things, that they may ridicule or otherwise oppose them.

What an evil diligence is this! When very private inquiries are made, we may suspect that something is wrong; and yet it is not always so. However, truth fears not the light. Whether men inquire privily or not, we are ready to give them information about our Lord, and about everything which concerns him.

Matthew 2:8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

Artful wretch! Murder was in his heart, but pious pretenses were on his tongue. May none of us be Herodians in hypocrisy! To promise to worship and to intend to destroy, is a piece of trickery very usual in our own days.

Mark, that the wise men never promised to return to Herod: they probably guessed that all this eager zeal was not quite so pure as it seemed to be, and their silence did not mean consent. We must not believe everybody who makes loud professions, nor do all that they ask of us, lest we aid them in some evil design.

Matthew 2:9, 10. When they had heard the king they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Yes, "they departed", and were wise to get out of Herod's vile company.

They made no compact with him; they heard his false professions, and they went their way. The star appeared when the tyrant disappeared.

The star was probably a meteor, or moving light, which having shone long enough in the western heavens to guide them to Judea, then ceased to be visible; but shone forth again as they quitted Jerusalem. We must not always expect to have visible signs to cheer us, but we are very glad of them when the Lord grants them to us. We seek not the star of inward feelings, or outward signs, but Jesus himself; yet have we great joy when heavenly they comfort shines into our souls. Lord, show me a token for good: this will make me glad. Show me thyself, and I will rejoice with exceeding great joy.

See how the stars above as well as men below pay their obeisances to the New-born King!! My soul, be not slow to adore thy Savior! The star moved "till it came and stood over where the young child was": so will my heart never rest till it finds out the Lord.

Matthew 2:11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Those who look for Jesus will see him: those who truly see him will worship him: those who worship him will consecrate their substance to him. The gold and spices were presented, not to Mary, but "unto him."

The wise men kept their caskets closed till they saw Jesus, and then they opened their treasures. Let us keep our love and our holy

service for our Lord's eye, and never wish to expose them to the world's gaze. The wise men's gifts were royal, with a touch of the priestly in them — "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. " These choice offerings especially the gold, would help Joseph and Mary to provide for the Royal Child, who was so soon to be exiled. God brought providers from the far East to supply the needs of his Son. "Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere."

Before the babe starts for Egypt, Oriental sages must pay his charges.

Lord, thou shalt have my worship, and my gifts; for thou art the sole Monarch of my soul: and I will aid thy missionary cause, that when thou goest into Africa with thy gospel, my gifts may go with thee.

Matthew 2:12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Probably, they half suspected Herod already; and the Lord by a dream led their thoughts further in the same direction. Wise men need to be "warned of God "; when they are so, they alter their minds at once. Though they had planned to return by one route, they took another: they did not linger, but "departed into their own country another way. " Oh, that I may never be disobedient to a hint from the throne! "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel."

Matthew 2:13. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

Angels were busy in those days, for they had special charge of their Royal Master. Joseph's high office, as guardian of the young child and his mother, involved him in care, and made him an exile from his country. We cannot expect to serve the Lord, and yet have an easy time of it. We must cheerfully journey across a desert if we have a charge to keep for our God; and we must tarry in banishment, if need be, and never venture to come back till the Lord sends us our passports. Our orders are, "Be thou there until I bring thee word. " The Lord's servants must wait for the Lord's word before they make a move, whether it be to go abroad or to come home. Waiting is hard work, especially waiting in Egypt; but it is safe to tarry till we have our marching orders.

Matthew 2:14, 15. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Night journeys, both actual and spiritual, may fall to the lot of those who carry Jesus with them. Even the Son of God, who is preeminent above all others, must depart into Egypt like the rest of the family, and must only come out of it when he is called. Let us not wonder if we, also, have to go down to Egypt, and go in a hurry, and go by night, and are allowed to stay there for many a day. We, too, shall be called out in due time by him whose call is effectual. The angel who leads us into Egypt will bring us word to come forth from it; for all our times are in the Lord's hands. Let us never forget that the chosen may have to go into Egypt, but they must be brought out of it, for the rule is of universal bearing, "Out of Egypt have I called my son. " How the prophecies mark out our Lord's way from the beginning! The King of Israel comes out of Egypt, even as Moses did, who in his day was King in Jeshurun.

Matthew 2:16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

Herod, with all his craftiness, misses his mark. He considers that he is made a fool of, though the wise men had no such intention. Proud men are quick to imaging insults. He is furious: he must kill this newborn King lest he claim his crown; and therefore he orders the death of every two-year-old child in Bethlehem, taking good margin, that none might escape through error in the age. What mattered it to him if a few babes were needlessly slain? He must make sure that the little King is made an end of; and he imagines that a speedy and indiscriminate slaughter of all who have reached their second year will put him beyond all fear of this

reputed rival. Men will do anything to be rid of Jesus. They care not how many children, or men, or women, are destroyed, so that they can but resist his kingdom, and crush his holy cause in its infancy. Yet vain is their rage: the holy child is beyond their jurisdiction and their sword.

Matthew 2:17, 18. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, sayings, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Our Prince steps along a pathway paved with prophecies. Yet see what trouble attends his early days! The weeping prophet foretells the wailing over the innocents. He is the innocent cause of the death of many innocents. Men say that religion has been the cause of cruelty and bloodshed: honesty should compel them to admit, that not religion, but opposition to religion, has done this. What! blame Jesus because Herod sought to murder him, and therefore made so many mothers weep over their dead babes! What three drops of gall are these — “lamentation, and weeping and great mourning ”! The triple mixture is all too common.

Our Rachels still weep; but holy women who know the Lord Jesus, do not now say concerning their little ones that “they are not. ” They know that their children are, and the, know where they are, and they expect to meet them again in glory. Surely, if these women had but known, they might have been comforted by the fact, that though their little ones were slain, The Children’s Friend had escaped and still lived to be the Savior of all who die before committing actual transgression.

Matthew 2:19, 20. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise , and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life.

Angels again! Yes, and they are busy still around “the beloved of the Lord.” Joseph still watches over his honored charge, even as Joseph of old watched over Israel in Egypt. See the order in which the family is arranged, — “the young child and his mother .” The Lord is placed first: it is not here, as at Rome, “the Virgin and child.” The angel loathed to mention Herod’s name, but said, “They are dead. ” Such a wretch did not deserve to be named by a holy angel. Herod had gone to his own place, and now the Lord brings back his banished ones to their own place. Instead of making Jesus to die, the tyrant is dead himself. Sword in hand, he missed the young child; but without a sword, that child’s Father struck home to his heart. It is a relief to the world when some men die: it was certainly so in the case of Herod. Those who keep our King out of his own are not likely to live long. My soul, ponder the lessons of history concerning the King’s adversaries!

Matthew 2:21, 22. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the part of Galilee.

Joseph obeyed without question. “He arose ”: that is to say, as soon as he was awake he set about doing as he was bidden. At once he made the journey and came into the land of Israel; so should we hasten to obey. He had his fears about Judea; yet he did not follow his fears, but only went as his guide from heaven directed him. This Joseph was a dreamer like his namesake of old; and he was also a practical man, and turned his dreams to wise account. He “came into the land of Israel”, but he was allowed to go into that part of it which was under a gentler sway than that of Archeaus, who was no improvement upon his father. Galilee, a despised country, a land where Gentiles mixed with the Jews, a dark and ignorant part, was to be the land of our Lord’s early days. He was of the common people, and he was educated in a rustic region, in “the parse of Galilee”, among a plain folk, who had none of the fine manners of the towns. Blessed King, the days of thy minority were not spent at court, but among the common multitude, whom still thou cost delight to bless! I pray thee, turn aside into the parts of this Galilee, and abide with me.

Matthew 2:23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Our Lord was called “Netzar”,THE BRANCH. Probably this is the prophecy referred to; for “Nazareth “signifies sprouts or shoots.

Possibly some unrecorded prophecy, often repeated by the prophets, and known to all the people, is here alluded to. Certainly he has long been called a "Nazarene", both by Jews and violent unbelievers. Spitting on the ground in disgust, many a time has his fierce adversary hissed out the name "Nazarene", as if it were the climax of contempt. Yet, O Nazarene, thou hast triumphed!

Jesus of Nazareth", the greatest name among men. O Lord, my King, as thou art dishonored by thy foes, so shalt thou be adored among thy friends, with all their heart and all their soul. While others call thee "Nazarene", we call thee Jesus — Jehovah, King of kings, and Lord of lords.