

Joy is a small word that has a lot packed into it. Try to define what joy means with just a few words. Probably a tough task! Words that could be easily associated with joy are - happiness, elation, positivity. All wonderful things - so what is it exactly that brings us joy? If you were told to give an answer to that question what would you say? One possible answer you might say is, "When everything comes together, that gives me joy." Think about when you prepare for a family gathering. You plan days or weeks in advance, you communicate with relatives, and then the day finally comes! If that quality family time comes to fruition and there are relatively few mishaps then it's a success! Everything came together in the end. There's a joyful feeling that comes knowing that everything fell into place. Was that the case for you this Christmas?

Maybe not, but now you've been looking at 2019 as a fresh start, a new beginning and you're aiming to really have everything come together. For you, it's a perfect storm of a working out, eating healthy (or healthier), and being more grateful each day. If that plan were to come together that would be a recipe for joy. From what we find in Matthew chapter 2, everything seems to be coming together. The child that the prophets foretold has been born just as they said. The Magi are astounded upon arrival when they come into the house where the baby Jesus is staying. Those wise men were overcome with joy! Today we will be finding joy in Jesus just as the wise men did many years ago.

The first part of that joy, not to be overlooked, is that Jesus was born! Can't say enough how wonderful that news is. An angel gave more details about Jesus' birth by coming to Joseph, the man who was engaged to Mary, and told him that this child, Jesus, would be called "Immanuel" which means "God with us" and that Jesus would be the one to save people from their sins! People back then certainly wanted to go and see this amazing child when they heard this good news, and we see that today, just as our eyes light up when we hear about everything that Jesus has done for us, taking away our sins and giving us life in heaven there are many others who share in that same joy! You also will find some who shrug off such wonderful news and show more hostility than joy from hearing the exact same good news. So it was back then, when Jesus was a newborn baby. Not everyone found joy in the news that Jesus was born and some even wished him harm.

Enter King Herod. He's the king of the Jews at the time. A rough and rugged fellow, prone to violence. A group of visitors come to see him and they have a very important question to bring before him, "**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."** The question catches King Herod's attention immediately. We're given his reaction, "**When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.**"

Another king, one born as king of the Jews? How could this be? The Magi, these wise men, had come from a far off land and they had heard about this child so he trusted their report was valid. To King Herod, this news about Jesus' birth undermined his kingdom, his authority, his influence. So he "**called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.**" King Herod brings in plenty of high priests and scribes, the people who would have experience in matters of divine revelation. The best in the business are on the case and they really know

their Scriptures. This crew found the answer that King Herod was looking for, **"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:⁶ "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 shepherd my people Israel."**

Not only did they know where to look, they knew that the prophets were pointing towards Jesus, the Savior! If you're feeling a bit jealous more than joyful right now I get it. Imagine having such a great handle on Scripture and locating things in God's Word... and have aspirations to be like these scholars! Make it your goal to be in the Bible often so that when you run into the questions "What's the significance of Jesus dying on the cross?" "What does God say about marriage?" "Does God really have control over the world?" you know where to look and can point them to God's answer.

When Herod hears the answer as to where the child was born he springs into action, **"Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared."** As Herod begins to see how everything has come together he establishes a plan. His plan involves his visitors, the Magi, whom he can continue to use to find out more information about this child who was born as a king. **"He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."** Sounds great on the surface, if you didn't know any better this would seem like a totally harmless mission put together by King Herod. And that's how it came across to the Magi. They wanted to worship Jesus, the newborn king. King Herod said that he too wanted to go and worship. Only one of those statements was true, the first one from the Magi. The second one veiled an ulterior motive. King Herod didn't want to worship, he didn't even want the news he heard about Jesus to be true! Because if it was true then his kingdom would be overtaken and overshadowed! That's what he assumed because he didn't recognize that Jesus' kingdom was a heavenly one, not an earthly one.

It's easy to step into those shoes - we don't like to be overshadowed either. And I'm not talking about your child or grandchild who's suddenly taller than you now... I mean that we don't like to hear the truth about our position. The more we hear about God and who he is the more our sorry position as sinners through and through is revealed. We don't look so great when compared to the holiness and glory of our God. Being knocked down off of our pedestal hurts and sometimes we take it out on others. Just think about the aversion we have to putting someone else ahead of ourselves - we don't like when someone else gets credit for a job well done and our efforts aren't acknowledged so we decide not to share in their happiness. It's not enjoyable to us when our brother or sister gets to play video games while we have to help out mom and dad with a chore. A selfish, self-serving attitude often prevails in our hearts in the place of joy that comes with hearing God's good news.

Just as God redirects us to see Jesus again when we sin, so God redirected the Magi. Look to verse 9, **"After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was."** Before the Magi got to King Herod they received guidance from God. God used a spectacular shining star to show them where they should go. God had this star appear again to lead them to the Christ-child. The Magi were being pointed to the child who came to earth to deliver them from sin, to the child who brings forgiveness and

heals their hearts, to the child who would show them love beyond any love they had experienced by dying in their place. They were being led to the child that they could trust and put their hope in as the fulfillment of the prophets' message. Jesus would be a ruler and a shepherd! Jesus would reign over all things and care for his people! Jesus would keep them safe in his arms!

So is it any surprise to hear verse 10?? **"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."** The phrasing of the original language is so striking in how it describes the joy that the Magi felt when they saw the star. There's a total of four words devoted to describing this joy - something like "they rejoiced a very great joy!" "They rejoiced a very great joy!" If that sounds kind of silly when you hear it, that's alright - just trying to capture the sense of the joy that they felt the day they saw Jesus is tough. Rest assured, they were thrilled. Overjoyed. Beside themselves. Having the opportunity to see their salvation blew them away with excitement and pure joy!!

The Magi then walk into the house where the baby was with his mother Mary to finish out the final steps of their journey. **"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, frankincense and myrrh."** As an expression of their joy the Magi gave gifts to Jesus and worshipped him. Think for a moment about the offerings that are given here at church. What's the reason behind giving offerings? Isn't it what we find right here with the Magi? An expression of joy for what God has done. God encourages such thinking and being motivated by joy. God truly loves a cheerful giver. Offerings are one way to show thankfulness to God for providing us the life of Jesus.

God continues to provide for the Magi as they head back home, **"having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."** God supplies them with a dream to tell them to avoid returning to Herod. King Herod would not be able to carry out the evil acts he had planned and he would not receive any more information from those wise men. God still had control of the situation and he gave his Word for guidance. So the Magi take an alternate route to their home country with joy in their hearts having seen their Savior, Jesus.

As you go back to your own homes today reflect on the wonder of the birth of Jesus. Keep finding joy in Jesus who was sent for you. Find joy in reading through the message of the prophets which tells you God's amazing plan to send a Savior who frees people from the grip of sin and death. See how the prophets told of this Savior again and again bringing the good news that we still cherish. Find joy in gathering together with one another for Bible study. Encourage one another here at church and in your homes. Find joy thinking about the Magi who were led to the baby Jesus and rejoiced without restraint when they saw their Savior! You too can sing for joy with the hymns and songs of praise played here in worship which tell you about the wonders of Jesus. Let your very great joy be seen. You know about Jesus who died so that you will live with God in heaven forever! Amen.