

Matthew 2: 1-12 “God Is on Top of Things” 1/6-8/2018
Pastor Don Sutton - St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

Matthew 2:1-12

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.”³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.⁵ “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.”⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.⁸ 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.”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.¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.¹¹ 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.¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Introduction

Well, were you on top of things this Christmas? Or, were things on top of you? In other words, did you have things under control in the various areas of your life? Or, did things get out of control or control you?

Christmas, with its beautiful, amazing, and comforting message - “*A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord*” – also carries with it this reminder and assurance.... “**God Is on Top of Things.**” The Lord was on top of things at Christmas.

The gospel reading for today, Matthew 2:1ff, reminds and assures us that **GOD IS ON TOP OF THINGS** after Christmas too.

...Bringing the Magi from the East

On that first Christmas the angel of the Lord proclaimed good news that, as the angel said, “*will be for all the people...*” While the news would first be for the Jews, God had in mind that the good news of the Savior’s birth would also be for Gentiles. The Magi from the East showed the Lord was on top of things practicing what he proclaimed through the angel. The Magi were Gentiles – possibly Persians. Tradition has it that there were three but the Bible does not mention their number. Tradition names them – Balthazar, Caspar and Melchior – but the Bible does not mention their names. The Bible does tell us that these Magi knew about the Messiah. Possibly they had read the Old Testament prophecies of the Savior proclaimed in their area centuries before by Old Testament prophets like Daniel or Ezekiel. Or maybe it was the witness of lay people like many of you. The fact is God saw to it that these men knew about the coming Savior.

Then God saw to it that the Magi knew when the Savior had come. God provided the “*star*” that the magi could see in the east. People have questioned whether there is a natural explanation for the star, or whether this mysterious star was simply a miracle defying scientific explanation. While the question may be a matter of curiosity for us, answering it is not a matter of necessity for God. The fact is God somehow provided the Magi with what appeared to be a Star. Then God gave the Magi the insight to connect the star with the Savior. God was on top of things.

When things seem to be on top of you and appear to be so impossible, remember the capabilities of God as evidenced by in the case of the Magi and the Star. God “*is able to do immeasurably more than we can all ask for*

or imagine... (Eph3:20),” Paul the Apostle wrote. God can change your circumstances when he decides that’s the best thing to do. Or God can change you. Or he can change how you see things. But when things seem on top of you, remember and trust that the Lord’s still on top of things.

Fulfilling Promises

The Lord shows that he is on top of things in terms of keeping his promises. I already mentioned the “all people” and the Magi. There is also the Bethlehem factor. When the magi got to Jerusalem they began to ask around, *“Where is the one who is to be born king of the Jews. We have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.”* King Herod heard about this. He was concerned. He wanted to know about this new king who might be a threat to his rule. Herod inquired of the religious leaders where the Christ was to be born. They told him, *“In Bethlehem in Judea ... 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.’”*

Bethlehem – what an unlikely place for the Son of God to enter the world by birth! It was a little town in the hill country of Judea. But several hundred years before the Savior was born, God moved the prophet Micah to foretell the site of the Savior’s birth. Then God saw that the Savior’s birth would be as foretold – in Judea, in Bethlehem. Centuries later God saw to it that the emperor authorized a census that required Joseph and Mary to end up in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus ... just as the prophet Micah foretold. When it came to his promises – making and keeping them – the Lord’s on top of things. He is faithful.

Let your sinful nature remember that. When God says *“... whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (Jn3:18).”* Let your sinful nature remember God’s faithfulness when God warns Christians in respect to sin, *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (10:26,27).”*

But let the spirit within you whom the Holy Spirit created remember and trust the Lord’s faithfulness when he says, *“If anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”* The baby whom the Magi came to see and worship, is he who kept God’s law for you and carried your sins to the cross of Calvary. God was on top of things when it came to keeping his word. He still is today. Remember that in respect to your sin and your Savior. But also remember that in respect to his promises to bless and keep you. *“I am with you always...Do not be afraid, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”* The Lord is on top of things.

...Giving the Magi the Will to Worship

We also see this fact in the Magi worshipping the Baby Jesus. Matthew records, *“...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 worshipped him. Then they opened their treasurers and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.”* It’s amazing that these men could worship Jesus as their savior. They were from the East. They came from a culture that was probably steeped in pagan beliefs and practices. They were Magi. To some extent or another they were exposed to ungodly magic arts practiced in the area from which they came. Yet, there they were in Bethlehem, a hick hill-town, a long way from home, in the home of unknown common folk – the Joseph family. The Magi were there filled with joy. They worshipped the baby. And in their worship they gave precious substances. How could this be?

The Lord was on top of things making this all possible. The Lord sent the Savior. The Lord somehow provided the word through which the Holy Spirit would work. He enabled them to know about the Savior. The Lord worked faith in their souls. He put joy and peace in their hearts. The Lord guided them to Bethlehem. The Lord gave them opportunity, reason and resources with which to worship.

The Lord has worked similar miracles in your hearts and lives. The Savior of the Magi is your Savior. The same baby, who lived and died for them, lived and died for you. The same forgiveness God proclaimed for them, God proclaimed for you. The same word God gave to them, God gave to you. The same life God gave to them, he gave to you. The same source of joy, peace and hope, he gives to you.

While timing does not afford you and me the opportunity to go to Bethlehem and be led by a Star, repeatedly our Lord comes to us through his word and Sacrament. Repeatedly he gives the opportunity to worship him. Faithfully God gives us the resources by which we can worship, not only faith in our hearts but spiritual gifts or abilities with which to serve him, time in which to serve him, and resources such as money and other materials things with which we can show our love and thanks to God for the gift of a Savior. Use those gifts. Use that time. Use those materials things. Worship the Lord. When you do know that the Lord will continue to provide for you. God promises, *"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion..."* After all, the Lord's on top of things.

...Protecting His People

You can be sure of this too when it comes to protecting you. This is obvious when it comes to the account of the Magi. You see, like the fabled Grinch who tried to steal Christmas from the folks of Whoville, Satan and Herod were trying to steal Christmas. They sought to kill the Savior and probably the Magi too. While Herod was the King over the Jews in Palestine he was not a Jewish king. So he was insecure. He feared that Jesus might be an earthly king who would restore Israel to her greatness in the days of King David. So he lied. Herod was lying when he told the Magi to let him know where the Christchild was so he too could worship him. Herod wanted to waste him.

But God was on top of things. He looked out for the Magi. He warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. And God sent an angel to Joseph telling him to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Then after Herod had died, the Lord, through an angel directed Joseph to return to Israel. But as there was still danger because of Herod's son, Archelaus was reigning in Judea, God warned Joseph in a dream to go to Galilee.

The Lord is on top of things when it comes to protecting his people. Certainly we don't want to tempt the Lord by doing needless things that are dangerous. We want to be careful in our driving, our work, our recreation, and in our travel. But on the other hand, we can be confident that the Lord answers our prayer, *"Deliver us from evil."* Trust that the Lord is on top of things when it comes to your getting on an airplane, your being caught in a storm, your sending your children out the door to negotiate the big, bad world in which we live. The devil and evil are out in the world. So we want to take care that we don't needlessly expose ourselves to them. But be confident, the Lord's on top of things. Amen. (DRS)