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# Title: The Glory of Advent

**Text: Matthew 2:1-12**

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## Introduction

Some of the best childhood games were those games that require very little expense, while at the same time necessitating a whole lot of effort. Tag is one of those games. Hide and seek. Kick the can. Kill the carrier... only that's not the politically incorrect name we gave it. Every once in a while, workers near our elementary school play ground would leave a mound of dirt that bordered the playground from the ball diamond and soccer field. Kids and mounds of dirt is an irresistible recipe for a raucous round of "king of the mountain". Also known as "king of the hill", the point of the game is to stay on top of a pile of dirt while other kids try to knock off the one on top of the mound. The one who successfully wards off all comers from dethroning him or her from the spot on the top of the pile is known as the "king of the mountain". Muscle almost always won, which is why the big kids typically won this particular game. Typically, although there were infrequent exceptions, speed and savvy weren't enough to either keep the top spot or knock the king off of his perch. If you were a little kid like me, the only chance at occupying the top spot even briefly, was to convince the king you were bored with his game, walk away, and wait for him to descend the pile of dirt. But even that time on top was short-lived.

What's interesting about the game, is that every once in a while, you'd find yourself on top of the pile of dirt with an unofficial teammate, because tandems are less easily dethroned. However, once all comers grew tired of trying to knock the two kings of their perch, the kings would turn on each other. Inherent to that game and the competitive nature of the kids involved, before it was all over, there was room at the top of the pile of dirt for only one "king of the mountain".

All grown up, the participants are stronger, the tactics are more complex, the means have multiplied, the piles of dirt are bigger, and the stakes are much, much higher. We even have a catchphrase for it popularized by the old Western films: "this town ain't big enough for the both of us". While post-modernism has attempted to make everybody a winner and creates towns big enough for multiple kings, in the real world, at the end of the day, there's only one king of the mountain.

## Recap

Which brings us to Matthew chapter 2. This is the last of our short Advent series. The Meaning of Advent, The Person of Advent, and this week, The Glory of Advent. Last week, we look at Matthew chapter one and the story of Joseph's dream, a dream in which a Joseph is told that the child being carried by Mary is the promised son of David, Israel's long expected Immanuel, a New Joshua who will save his people from their sins. He is told that Mary is pregnant via the Holy Spirit and that he is to marry Mary and in so doing adopt the child... this adoption signified in the giving of a name to the son being carried by Mary. The heir to David's throne is filling up the meaning and purposes of Old Testament shadows

and promises, carrying in himself the destiny of a people who will call him Emmanuel, the God who dwells with His people.

But this heir to David's throne is an unexpected kind of Messiah. He is a king in waiting who was born in shock, shame, stigma, and scandal. For all his friends and family know, he is an illegitimate child, conceived in an illicit union between his mother and an unknown father. But Joseph hears the proclamation of the gospel in the angel's message and responds in faith, both to the angel and to the child conceived by the Holy Spirit carried by Mary. Joseph gives him the name Jesus and brings him into David's royal line as a legitimate heir to the throne. And we pick up the story in verse 1 of chapter 2. Tonight, we're going to read this story in the same manner as we do at the Bresson household on Christmas Eve:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> " 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' " <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

This, of course, is the beginnings of a story that is very, very familiar to us. We sing "we three kings of orient are" and "star of wonder, star of night" and our nativities at Christmastime typically have three wise men. This is the familiar story of the wise men and the star and the baby Jesus that shows up in our manger scenes every Christmas, in spite of the fact that there is no manger in this story, nor are there wise men in Luke's account of the shepherds and the angels. But if we are to understand the true meaning of Advent, and truly understand the Person of Advent, we must resist the temptation to romanticize the text as it presents this Person to us. To be sure, this is about wise men, a star, and the baby Jesus. This is that story, Matthew 2. But this is a story not simply about wise men and a star.

This passage is dripping with strife, and conflict, and suffering, even as it portrays the glory of Christmas in a most unexpected way. So there are some things to note from this text that Matthew wants his early church audience and us to see. Verse 1:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

## Of all the details, one detail: Christ's birthplace

We noted last week that Matthew does not go into details about Christ's birth. Matthew is more interested in the "why" than the "what" of Christ's birth. Matthew unpacks for us the announcement of the angel to Joseph and he gives us that announcement in light of fulfillment of the Old Testament; he simply says Mary gave birth to a son and Joseph called his name Jesus. There are a lot of details in this story that we could delve into this evening, but we will attempt to resist the temptation. Each of these details are fascinating in their own right. Herod, the violent surrogate of Rome is the acting king. There is a star leading wise men from the east. These wise men are inquiring about a male child born king of the Jews.

What's interesting here is that while we are spared many of the details, one detail is not only important to Matthew, but becomes a central point of Matthew's story line here in chapter: Jesus' birthplace is Bethlehem. We are reminded at Christmas that Bethlehem is the "city of David". And that it is. The first thing that must come to mind as we read this familiar story is that Bethlehem is tied to David. This was the home of Jesse, David's father, and Obed, Jesse's father... and Boaz and Ruth. It was just outside the town limits that hundreds of years before, Ruth had been gleaning wheat to make bread – Bethlehem literally means "House of Bread", and it would have been in this town that Ruth risks scandal herself in securing a kinsman-redeemer as an act of faith in the One true God of Israel. This town has royal blood. This is David's town, but it is not much more than that. In the best of rags to riches stories, Bethlehem is the rags part of the equation. David built his palace up the road in Jerusalem. The throne is in Jerusalem. Bethlehem is small and unassuming... simply a birthplace for an anointed king... a stepping stone to greatness... an internship for a shepherd destined for greater things somewhere else.

## Two kings

The New Joshua, was born in Bethlehem, in obscurity, in insignificance. If you are a king, this is bush-league. Not very noble... at all. This is the humble and common origins of the heir to David's throne. However (in this same verse), that throne, at least its earthly composition, is occupied by someone other than David's heir.. in fact, it is occupied by that which is not royal, but simply an appointment of the Roman senate.

This is the first of some very stark contrasts being painted in this picture. In fact this paragraph that begins chapter 2 is a series of contrasts that Matthew will continue to unpack throughout his book. In fact, to use the word "contrast" is an understatement, for what we have in these contrasts is in fact a war, a war that will escalate throughout the book of Matthew and culminate in the death of this heir to David's throne. Keep this in mind as we briefly highlight some of the contrasts in this passage.

The first is a contrast in two kings whose destinies are at stake in this story. Having heard the birth announcement from the angel about a son of David divinely conceived in Mary AND having read the genealogy of the “son of David”, the heir to the Davidic throne, one must be immediately drawn into the intrigue of the story when one hears “in the days of Herod the King” there in verse 1. Something is out of place. You can almost hear the mood music in the words “in the days of Herod the king”. In spite of the Davidic heir come to claim his throne and his kingdom for His people, there is one who is not this king currently ruling in Jerusalem. Herod, king of the mountain, is king in Jerusalem. Herod is a tyrant. Herod is a traitor to the Jews. Herod is considered a mad man. Herod is an Edomite, a descendent of Esau. Edom has been a primary antagonist of Israel, and now one sits on the throne. Herod, then, is a foreigner. He is a counterfeit on Israel’s throne. Bribery. Thuggery. Adultery. Murder. Anything to keep his power and his throne. That’s Herod. Matthew’s early church audience would recognize an impending conflict. Chapter 1 is about a king in waiting, an heir to David’s throne, the Divine Messiah announced by angels. And the first words of Chapter 2 introduce Herod, an anti-Messiah even by Rome’s standards.

## Two cities

The next thing you should note is that these wise men, probably astrologer-astronomers from the Babylon area, show up in Jerusalem and not Bethlehem. That’s contrast #2. And it would have been a bit of a jolt to Matthew’s church-audience. Keep this in mind as we work our way through this text. Even as the heir to the Davidic throne is being contrasted with Herod, there is contrast being drawn between Bethlehem, the birthplace of the Messiah-King, and Jerusalem.

Verse 3:

When Herod the King heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod already has killed his favorite wife (he later “regretted” doing so) and the two sons to whom he was going to give his kingdom (with Rome’s blessing) because he felt threatened. When this story in Matthew 2 occurs, he is weeks, maybe even days away from killing another son, the remaining heir-apparent. Herod is the unquestioned king of his mountain, and he will stop at nothing to make sure it stays that way. There is no “king of the Jews” except Herod. All rivals have been and will be executed because the town is not big enough for anybody but Herod. For this particular king, known for his ruthless power and drunk with Rome’s glory, no words out of the mouth of the wise men could have been more destabilizing to Herod or more dangerous to the life of the heir to the Davidic throne.

## Two peoples

But notice it’s not simply Herod who is troubled. The seat of Herod’s power is troubled. He’s not the only one whose power and influence and nobility are threatened. Before the book of Matthew has ended, it will be very apparent, that the religious leaders, the ruling class of the temple are none too happy that someone who doesn’t toe their line has authority from God. These chief priests

and scribes were expecting an overthrow of Rome and a restoration of Jerusalem's former glory, of which they themselves would be the prime movers and shakers.

And here are Gentiles schooling Jerusalem on the birth of their king, thanks to a sign in the heavens given to Gentiles instead of Jews. This isn't simply embarrassing. This is destabilizing. Again, this is shocking. This doesn't happen on their watch. They are the favored ones. They are the chosen ones. Israel was not expecting their Messiah to be ushered onto the world's stage in this manner.

The chief priests and scribes who are troubled are contrasted with the wise men, who are not troubled, but in fact have come not only with a proclamation of the gospel, but with hearts that are bent on worshipping the true heir to the throne. Regardless of the nature of their profession (on this there is very little agreement; most scholarship suggests these are astrologers, but after that there is not much agreement on what constituted their astrology, much less where they came from), Matthew portrays the wise men as those who have aligned their allegiance to the Davidic heir and are acting as the true Israel in faith. These wise men get it and they do so to the indictment of their Jerusalem hosts.

Herod is troubled. Jerusalem is troubled. They are in concert together in their opposition to a perceived threat to their power and glory. Except for these Gentiles and a scandal-ridden family, all of the world is united against this New Joshua-Emmanuel. Once again, the small, insignificant David, in Bethlehem no less, bears witness against the Goliath in Jerusalem.

Herod has his own "Magi", the chief priests and the scribes who, like Herod, are bent on self-preservation. Herod inquires of his "magi" about where the Christ would be born. Notice that title. The wise men want to know where "the king of the Jews" has been born. Herod inquires about the birthplace of "the Christ, the Messiah." Funny, the Wise Men weren't asking about "the Messiah." Or were they? The question in and of itself would have piqued Herod's interest, as concerned as he was about protecting his status. Add to this the thought of a star, and Herod betrays a fundamental understanding of the nature of the Messiah. This "king of the Jews" is none other than the expected Messiah. Let's hunt him down anyway. The seed of the serpent is on the hunt again against the seed of the woman.

Verse 5: They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

Even as this Davidic heir who has been born in obscurity is filling up the meaning and intentions of the Old Testament's shadows, events, and prophecies, this child is embodying more of what was said in the Old Testament than even the chief priests and the scribes are willing to admit. I'm guessing this is a summary of what they told Herod. But it's what isn't quoted here that is telling. Micah 5:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Bethlehem is “too little” to be among the clans, to be among the leaders. Small, insignificant, even notorious Bethlehem. Bethlehem wasn’t simply the city of David. It was also a city with a sordid, R-rated past. Look it up sometime in your study. Violence, death, and infamy are in Bethlehem’s past. This is not the kind of glory one would expect for one “whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” That kind of glory is in Jerusalem, in Herod’s magnificent palace. This is not the kind of glory befitting a future prince. It is in notorious Bethlehem, the cradle of David, where the One who will save his people from their sins will make his entry into the world. In fact, this Emmanuel, God with Us, takes up residence among the very kind of people he came to save from their sins.

But it gets better in Micah 5:

This ruler in Israel whose coming forth is from of old, shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And he shall be their peace.

If you have been reading along in Matthew, those words “dwell secure” should jump off the page. There’s the “Emmanuel” noted by Isaiah, and embodied in this “son” born of the Holy Spirit and adopted by Joseph. He will not simply rule Israel, but he will be a shepherd. Again, we have the contrast with Herod. This one who rules will not rule by means of ruthless and brute force. This king in waiting born in notorious Bethlehem is not marked by violence, but of peace. His shepherding of his flock is through suffering and a cross. This is not the kind of king these chief priests and scribes are looking for, in their design to have Rome overthrown.

And then there’s the end of Micah 5, which I’m sure never reached the ears of Herod. This child isn’t simply coming to shepherd his people. This majesty and glory marked by humiliation and all things upside down is not simply signifying shepherding of his people, but judgment of his enemies, enemies now occupying the places of higher power in Jerusalem.

In that day declares the LORD (which is Micah’s understanding of the day of the LORD, but is here being applied to Christ’s birth), I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots...in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

If we understand the context of Micah correctly those nations including disobedient and unbelieving Israel. Be afraid, Herod, chief priests, and scribes. Be very afraid. That day for you has arrived in this “king of the Jews” born in notorious Bethlehem. The fact that the heir to the Davidic throne was born in the city of David is a divine slight on proud and arrogant Jerusalem. The divine pronouncement, a sign in a movable star, has been given not to Jerusalem, but to Gentiles hundreds of miles outside of the land. This is more than snub. This is divine rejection. Israel has

been indicted. In fact, judgment on Israel has begun with the birth of the New Joshua.

## Two responses

And Jerusalem's unbelief, manifested in the attitudes and actions of both Herod and the religious establishment, is on full display. That unbelief is a stark contrast to the faith on display in the actions of the wise men.

Having been told by his own unbelieving and power starved "magi" that the Messiah was to be born in unremarkable Bethlehem, Herod summons the Gentile "magi" to find out when the star appears, and he sends them off to Bethlehem, with a request that they get back to him once they have found the "son" so that Herod can worship the child. Funny thing about this point in the story. Even when I was a kid, you hear Herod say that, and even a third grader is thinking, this is a setup. Herod is up to no good. Those suspicions are confirmed later when the angel who seemingly has been present throughout this entire story warns the wise men to not go back to Herod. Verse 9,

Behold the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts: gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

There's a lot of speculation as to whether or not the wise men knew what they were doing or whether their worship is simply a gesture of good will toward a child-king from a bunch of pagans or whether this is done with full cognizance that this is the Creator of the Universe enfleshed as the Messiah, the Promised One of the Old Testament. How much did they know about "the king of the Jews?" Too much of that conversation revolves around what one believes to be true about the nature of "magi" from the east and what historical research tells us. There's quite a bit of textual evidence that indicates they are motivated by faith, and it is a faith, a fundamental belief found in Gentiles that is being used to show how much unbelief was prevalent in Jerusalem. They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy to see the star. This isn't simply a happy experience. That star resonated with their souls and produced within them a joy grounded in faith. They worshiped the child. Between the word for worship and the posture of falling down or kneeling before Jesus, there are 12 other recorded instances in Matthew in which that is occurring in regard to Jesus. Jesus was worshipped. People knelt before him. This shows that Christ was the heir to the Davidic throne. People approached Christ and knelt before Christ and worshipped Christ because he was the king who had come bringing in a new kind of kingdom. This is the kind of worship that was true of the wise men.

And then there are the gifts. These gifts are those befitting a king. Again, between the actions of the wise men, the description of the actions and interpretation by Matthew, and the storyline of chapter 1, the birth of a "son of David", one cannot miss that this child is the heir to the Davidic throne, and those who embrace that

idea are transformed by that idea and conform their actions to that idea. These are men acting on faith in a promise which has been manifest in a star. These wise men had all the posture and the attitude and the demeanor and the "buy in" completely lacking in Jerusalem. The wise men, the Gentiles, are acting and believing in a way that should have been true of Israel and wasn't.

But there's one other important text that bears witness to the wise men acting through faith in a divine child. The actions of these wise men are in line with the way Gentiles would be brought into the New Covenant through a light in Israel. The backdrop for this passage this evening is Isaiah 60. In fact, these events being described by Matthew are bringing about the fulfillment of Isaiah 60. These wise men are not acting on a whim. They haven't come hundreds of miles to honor the next Jewish king. They are not acting out some ancient middle eastern journey because of some astral phenomenon. They risk financial hardship. In the Roman political scene, they risk their very lives for this child. And they do so because Isaiah says in the New Covenant, even Gentiles will enjoy the wonders of salvation through redemption brought about by a coming Messiah.

And that day is here. Let's read some portions of Isaiah 60. Let's see if you hear Matthew 2.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Thus the star the wise men saw is bearing witness to the light that has been born to Mary and Joseph. Who knew that scandal, and shame, and insignificance would be so glorious? This humiliation of the heir to the Davidic throne is drape in glory, the glory of saving a people from their sins. Verse 5:

The wealth of nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you. The young camels of Midian and Ephah. all those from Sheba shall come.. they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.

They will bring gold and frankincense and with them will be the proclamation of the gospel. Do you understand why Herod is troubled? Do you understand why this king of the Jews is a threat to the chief priests and the scribes? Those bearing witness to a child who has been born king of the Jews come with the gospel on their lips. This journey from the east is an act of faith by Gentiles who have embraced the gospel message of the Old Testament, confirmed in the sign of a star.



Verse 14:

The sons of those who afflicted you... think the Gentile enemies of Israel... shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet. they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel... where as you have been forsake and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever.

Oh how the tables have turned in Matthew 2. It is not the Gentiles who despise the Holy One of Israel. It is Israel itself. In fact, it is the Gentiles who honor the Holy One of Israel as king. And the town of Bethlehem has been transformed into the dwelling place of God instead of Jerusalem as they would have expected. It is through notorious Bethlehem that God will make Israel his dwelling place again. Such a dwelling place has been proclaimed by Gentile wise men who understood the significance of the sign, a star that led them from outside of the Promised Land to the Promised Land in Bethlehem.

Arise, shine for your light has come. That light has come. It is in a Bethlehem cradle. That brings us to the star. This star bears witness to the light that is in Bethlehem with Mary. The wise men have been following the star because there is a greater light that has dawned in Israel, a light that cannot be seen by Herod nor by the chief priests and scribes because they are blind in their darkness.

But this star mimics its creator in a much more glorious way. There is an intimacy between this light that the wise men have been following and the Light in the Bethlehem cradle. That light in the cradle all along has been like a magnet for the light in the heavens. Look at the language of Matthew 2: verse 2.... we saw "his" star when it rose. It is identified with the child by identity and there is movement... you get the sense that the star has something to do with them being in Jerusalem. And indeed that's the case. When they are done talking to Herod, verse 9... the star they had seen "when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star (that is, when they saw that the star had come to rest over the child, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.)

Rewind to Numbers. Not Numbers 24:17, although that is certainly in this story: a star shall rise out of Jacob and a scepter... a king shall rise out of Israel. Notice the language of the star rising and the mention of a king. Certainly this star in Matthew 2 has risen to lead these Gentiles to a king that will rise in Israel... this is more bad news for Herod.

More important Numbers chapter 9. Verse 17... speaking of the tabernacle and a cloud... whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped... as long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. This cloud which was also a pillar of fire at night led the people of Israel through the desert and when it was time for the people to stop the pillar of fire would rest over the tabernacle. This fire-cloud was the shekinah glory... it was God's presence, dwelling among his people in the tabernacle. When the visible presence of God moved, the people moved closer to the promised land. The glory and the

majesty of God enthroned in the tabernacle, leading his people through the desert to the promised land... accomplished through the movable glory cloud.

A few hundred years after being led into the Promised Land by the glory cloud, the shekinah glory came to rest over Solomon's Temple. But because of the disobedience of the people that glory cloud took flight, God removed his presence from his people. No glory-cloud, no presence. No dwelling. No glory-cloud, no glory. When the temple was rebuilt, the former glory did not return. The glory cloud did not take up residence in the temple. Israel was as dark as the night.

All is dark until a star rises in the east shattering the darkness, a star whose brilliance is uncharacteristic and whose movement is divine. The star rises because the shekinah glory is returning to Israel. God again is going to dwell among his people. The shekinah glory returns because there is an Emmanuel in a cradle in Bethlehem. Emmanuel has come to save his people from their sin. The coming of the New Joshua to dwell among his people is accompanied by a movable shekinah glory fire... this one lights up the heavens for Gentiles to see. And this movable shekinah fire, leads Gentiles through the desert to their promised land and comes to rest over the Tabernacle of God, the Emmanuel who has put on flesh in order to save his people from their sins and dwell among them forever.

The very shekinah glory of God that proclaims the presence of Emmanuel, God with Us, speaks to a light that has dawned in Israel through which all people groups will be made citizens of the Great King. Shekinah glory accompanies the One who is the Holy One of Israel, speaking to the radiance of the Incarnation. Shekinah glory transforms a notorious city, known for its pain and suffering, because in the infamy, in the humiliation, there is glory that even the treachery of Herod and the hypocritical wickedness of the religious leaders cannot dim. Bethlehem is transformed by the arrival of God's dwelling presence with his people, Emmanuel and his shekinah glory. All this proclaimed in a star that rose in Jacob, a star that proclaims the arrival of a king in Israel.

## Our response

What is our response? The wise men came asking: where is he born king of the Jews? They are asking that question on behalf of seekers everywhere, Gentiles and Jews alike who understand their need for a Savior... who understand they need a New Joshua to save them from their sins. While the murderous Jewish leaders point the wise men to Bethlehem where they find a child that they worship, Matthew the author points us to another sign. This is a sign found years later... hanging above Emmanuel, hanging above the New Joshua who is saving people from their sins. This sign found in Matthew 27 says, "This is Jesus... this is Joshua. The King of the Jews... below that sign hangs the New Joshua in all of his humiliation glory... nearby are the chief priests and scribes... another generation, but just as drunken with power and prestige... they are mocking the Holy One of Israel, Emmanuel... "He saved others, he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him."

What they didn't realize was at that very moment, this King was securing for himself a kingdom, and saving for himself a people who will be and are his kingdom citizens.

Those chief priests and scribes are unbelieving, unaware that it will be in only a few short days, that this same "King of the Jews", will stand on top of the mountain, and declares to His people, "All authority has been given to me." The kingdom has been given to the rightful heir to David's throne. And now, that heir has ascended to heaven where he has taken his rightful place on that throne, the recipient of a kingdom, a kingdom into which he has place His people.

The ascended Jesus rules and reigns in glory, a glory declared at that first Advent by a star leading Gentiles to worship the heir to David's throne. The glory of the advent declared in that star is the glory of the Incarnation, God become man in humiliation. The glory of advent is found in the royal heir to David's throne born in scandal and shame. The glory of advent is the birth of Israel's hope, The Messiah, surrounded by insignificance and the mundane. The glory of advent is Salvation that has come to the Gentiles.

Our faith must be that of the Gentiles who responded to the proclamation of the Messiah's birth in faith. May our faith be expressed in our worship. May it be evident in our sacrifice of praise. May it be proclaimed in our gospel message of what the heir to David's throne has done on our behalf. Let us bow before and believe in the Anointed One who has saved his people from their sins.

When we are tempted this holiday season to find our glory, our happiness, our joy, our satisfaction in earthly kings whose rule is only temporal and cannot satisfy, we must remind ourselves that we are citizens of another kingdom. It is so easy to pursue the prestige. It is so easy to pursue control of all sorts of mountains, big and small, pretty and shiny and glamorous. It is very easy to succumb to ambition. It is very easy to chase the acceptance of our own city. It is very easy to waste a lot of time on building our own kingdoms.

Let us renounce and shy away from the baubles of Jerusalem, and embrace the pain and the suffering and less-than-glamorous Bethlehem, where resides Our Emmanuel in all of his Shekinah glory.