

## THE PREEXISTENT WORD, PART 1

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. —JOHN 1:1–2*

The concept of “the Word” (*logos* in the Greek) was meaningful to both Jewish and Greek readers of this gospel. Greek philosophers defined it as the abstract principle of order and reason in the universe. Even laymen understood the term as one of the universe’s most important principles, the source of wisdom.

Thus to John’s Greek audience, he presented Jesus as the embodiment of the *logos* concept, though not as an impersonal force or emanation. God, the true *logos*, became a man, Jesus Christ. This concept was something new to Greek thought.

To his Jewish readers, on the other hand, John presented Jesus as the incarnation of divine power and revelation, a continuation of the Old Testament “word of the Lord” concept (cf. Gen. 15:1; Ex. 24:3–4; 1 Sam. 3:21; Ps. 33:6; Jer. 1:2). Among other things, Jesus was the agent of creation (Col. 1:16), inspired the New Testament through the Holy Spirit whom He sent (John 14:26; 15:26), initiated the new covenant (Luke 22:20), and was the One who instructed believers (John 10:27). As God’s incarnate Word, Jesus is His final word to humanity: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2).

Although Jesus was intimately with the Father from eternity past, He willingly left that glorious privilege and “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7–8).

### ASK YOURSELF

Jesus is not all things to all people, yet He meets each of us at our individual points of need and our unique frames of reference. If you were to describe how Jesus proves His Word true in your own life, what ideas would come most quickly to mind?

## THE PREEXISTENT WORD, PART 2

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.* —JOHN 1:1–2

John restates the profound truths of verse 1 in verse 2. He underscores again the eternity of the Word—Christ existed “in the beginning” when everything else was created. And as noted in verse 1, that existence was one of intimate fellowship with God the Father.

Jesus’ deity and full equality with His Father is a truth of the Christian faith that can’t be compromised. The apostle John later warned the readers of his second letter, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching [the biblical truth of Christ’s deity; cf. vv. 7, 9], do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting” (2 John 10). Such seemingly unloving actions are justified toward heretics who deny the Lord’s deity and His gospel, because they are under God’s curse:

There are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we [Paul], or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:7–9)

We must not be confused about the deity of Christ, because the Bible teaches it clearly and unmistakably. Jesus is the eternally preexistent Word, who has always enjoyed full communion and divine life with the Father, and is Himself God.

### ASK YOURSELF

Are you ever in danger of limiting the power, rule, sovereignty and, yes, even the goodness of God? Though your belief and profession may be biblically sound and solid, does your daily interaction with life’s circumstances reveal a complete trust in God’s preeminence?

## THE WORD'S CREATIVE POWER

*All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. —JOHN 1:3*

Here John declares the weighty truth that Jesus, the eternal Word, created everything that “came into being.” This truth provides two more proofs of His deity. First, if Christ is Creator of all things, He must be uncreated, and only God is uncreated. This verse uses a different verb from “to be” in verses 1 and 2, which denotes a state of being. Here the verb (“came into being”) describes the creation of the universe, thus emphasizing the divine creative act distinct from that state of being. The verb also points to a second proof of deity—Jesus is Creator (“through Him”) and thus is God. Elsewhere in Scripture the Creator is likewise portrayed as God (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 1:25; Rev. 4:11).

With this clear verse, John strongly rejected the developing heresy of Gnosticism, which claimed that matter was evil and spirit was good, and therefore a good God could not have created the universe.

Today’s world, however, is obviously radically different from the Lord’s original good creation (Gen. 1:31). The fall not only affected humanity adversely but the whole creation as well. Because of that, Christ will eventually redeem not only believers but also the created world, as Romans 8:19–21 teaches:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

### ASK YOURSELF

The concept of God as Creator comes with many practical, daily implications since we live inside His created order at all times. How does the creation itself—even in its fallen state—continue to reflect the grandeur and careful oversight of its and your Creator?

## THE WORD'S SELF-EXISTENCE, PART 1

*In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.* —JOHN 1:4–5

God's and Christ's having life in themselves—self-existence—is a foundational truth to our faith. We can describe everything created as “becoming,” because nothing created is unchanging. But the divine, eternal, nonchanging being or life, such as the Father and the Son, is distinct from what is becoming—and is actually its source. It is what distinguishes creatures (us) from the Creator (God).

There was a point when the universe did not exist (Gen. 1:1), but never a point when God did not exist (cf. Ex. 3:14). Acts 17:28 says, “In Him we live and move and exist.” We can do nothing apart from Him, but He has always lived and moved and been.

This verse is one of the purest descriptions of deity—and to say Jesus is “the life” is the purest statement about His deity and His role in creation. As Creator He is the source of everything and of everyone who has life. Furthermore, John's gospel often uses the form of the word “life” that denotes spiritual or eternal life (1:12; 3:15–16; 6:37, 39–40, 44, 47; 20:31). Christ came into the world to impart spiritual life to sinners who “were dead in [their] trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1; cf. John 6:33; 10:10).

## ASK YOURSELF

Of all the things we forget to be grateful for and most often take for granted is the simple gift of life. May you stop at frequent moments of the day simply to give glory to God for the gift of breath, of sight, of hearing, of life itself . . . and the privilege of enjoying it with Him.

## THE WORD'S SELF-EXISTENCE, PART 2

*In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.* —JOHN 1:4–5

John's statement "the life was the Light" says that life and light are essentially the same. It basically has the same construction as "the Word was God" (v. 1)—divine life and light share the same essential properties.

The divine life is true and holy. "Light" is that truth and holiness displayed against the darkness of lies and sin. In John 8:12 Jesus declares, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (cf. Ps. 36:9).

This Light is no less than the manifest life of God shining in His Son: "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4; cf. v. 6). "The Light" is simply the Father's divine light revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Satan's kingdom is the "domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13), but Christ is the source of life (John 14:6) and the Light that "shines in the darkness" of a lost world (cf. 12:35–36). Despite the devil's intense assaults on the Light, "the darkness did not comprehend it." The word translated "comprehend" is better rendered "overcome." A very small candle can dispel darkness from a room; the Lord Jesus, the glorious Light of saving truth, will destroy the satanic realm of spiritual darkness. In fact, since Jesus' earthly ministry, "the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining" (1 John 2:8).

### ASK YOURSELF

What effect does Jesus' being "the Light" have on your life? How does He brighten the path you walk? What does His light expose, both in the world and in yourself, refining your approach and strengthening your confidence as you journey through each day?

## THE WORD'S SELF-EXISTENCE, PART 3

*In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.* — JOHN 1:4–5

Because they understand so well the final judgment awaiting them, Satan and his forces have tried desperately throughout redemptive history to destroy the self-existent Word of life and light, the Lord Jesus. First they attempted to destroy the nation of Israel, from which Messiah would arise. They also targeted the royal line from which Christ would descend (2 Kings 11:1–2).

Shortly after Jesus' birth, Satan prompted Herod's vicious but futile attempt to murder Him (Matt. 2:16). Prior to the start of Jesus' ministry, the evil one tried in vain to turn Him aside from His mission (Matt. 4:1–11). Later he worked through Peter in an effort to accomplish the same objective (Matt. 16:21–23). Likewise, Satan's children, those who refuse to believe the truth, are eternally lost because they reject the Word of Light and life:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them [through Jesus Christ]. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but . . . their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:18–21)

Anyone who rejects the deity of the Logos, Jesus Christ, will be lost: "For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

### ASK YOURSELF

In what ways do you continue to see the enemy at work, combating and contradicting Jesus, His gospel, and His people? We know he cannot ultimately succeed, but what can we do as Christ's followers to stand against the onslaught of Satan's attacks and accusations?

## GOD'S GRACE ON MARY

*Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.* —MATT. 1:16

When God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son, He showered much grace upon her. And although a descendant of King David's family, she was a humble, obscure young woman, just as much a sinner as all other human beings ever born. She was likely a superior person morally and spiritually than her contemporaries, but she was not sinless. Mary demonstrated her faithfulness and obedience to God by her humble and submissive response to the angel Gabriel's announcement (Luke 1:38).

Mary herself, in her song of praise called the Magnificat, acknowledged her need of a Savior: "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondsman" (Luke 1:46–48). These words refute any ideas of her being co-redemptrix and co-mediator with Jesus. Such beliefs are not scriptural and were never contained in early church doctrine. The Catholic Church embraced such false concepts several centuries later by accommodating pagan myths from the Babylonian mystery religions.

According to Scripture, Mary never did dispense grace but only received it from the Lord. "Favored one" (Luke 1:28) literally means "one endowed with grace." Just as every other sinner, Mary needed God's grace and salvation. That's why she "rejoiced in God [her] Savior" (Luke 1:47). Mary realized what an unequalled privilege she enjoyed being a sinful woman chosen by the Lord to give birth to the Messiah, Jesus.

### ASK YOURSELF

Are you encouraged by realizing that even the most revered figures in biblical history were just as much in need of God's grace and mercy as you are? Humility is the shared property of all who possess an appropriate view of themselves and of their incredible debt to God.

## GOD'S GRACE ON TWO MEN

*The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,  
the Son of David, the son of Abraham. —MATT. 1:1*

Although they were sinful men, David and Abraham, by God's grace, both were ancestors of Jesus Christ.

David sinned against Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. He was also a poor father who failed to discipline his children. One of those (Absalom) even tried to wrest the throne from David by armed rebellion.

Abraham on two different occasions (Gen. 12:11–19; 20:1–18) told pagan kings that his wife Sarah was his sister. This brought shame on Sarah, himself, and God, the One he claimed to trust and serve. In spite of these sins, God made Abraham the father of Israel, the chosen people from whom Christ would arise. The Lord appointed David head of the kingly line from whom Messiah was promised.

Furthermore, God's grace extended to specific descendants of these two men. Abraham's son Isaac was the son of promise and a type of Christ, willingly offered up to God (Gen. 22:1–13). Isaac's son Jacob (later renamed Israel) and his sons were leaders of the people of Israel. God's grace was always with them, even when they needed discipline or rebuke.

David's son and royal successor, Solomon, was peaceful and wiser than most men but also foolish and sinful in many ways. His hundreds of wives, mostly pagan, turned his and the people's hearts away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:1–8). The kingdom of Israel soon became divided, but the royal line remained and God eventually fulfilled His promise to David, God's grace prevailing in the person of Messiah Jesus.

### ASK YOURSELF

All the way back, we see humanity's inconsistency and God's faithfulness, intertwining into the merciful, purposeful outworking of His plan for the ages. Far from being an excuse to slack off, how does this realization infuse you with new zeal to trust, obey, and follow?

## GOD'S GRACE IN THE HISTORY OF THREE ERAS

*So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations. —MATT. 1:17*

Matthew's summary of Jesus' genealogy shows us God's grace working in three eras of Israel's history. First was the period of the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, and the judges. During that time God's people found an identity, served as slaves, wandered after their deliverance, received divine law and covenant, and conquered the Promised Land.

The second era was one when Israel became a monarchy similar to her neighboring nations. But the Israelites soon discovered that sinful kings more often led them away from God instead of toward obedience and peace. There was much decline and apostasy, followed by defeat, exile, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Kings David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah were notable exceptions to the pattern of ungodliness.

The third period, concluding with the time of Christ, was one of captivity, frustration, and the marking of time. It was a period generally cloaked in spiritual and cultural darkness and marked by many inconsequential years. Most of the men of this period are unknown and unnamed apart from the genealogy. Essentially it was Israel's Dark Ages.

Christ's genealogy contains elements of pathos and glory, listing persons of disgrace and heroism, obscurity and renown. The Messiah's nation rose, fell, stagnated, and eventually rejected and crucified the One the Father sent to His people. In spite of it all, God's grace was at work during all three periods through His Son and the promise of His Son.

### ASK YOURSELF

What spiritual markers and descriptions could be given to the age in which we currently live? Even in spite of our failings and the evidence of much falling away, what are some of the singular examples of faithfulness you see in the world at large, as well as close to home?

## GOD'S GRACE SEEN IN OUTCASTS TAMAR AND RAHAB

*Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. . . .  
Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab. —MATT. 1:3a, 5a*

The first outcast through whom Christ would descend and in whom God manifested His grace was Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar. Because of their evilness, God had killed Tamar's husband, Er, and allowed his next oldest brother, Onan, to commit suicide. As a result, Judah promised her that his third son, Shelah, would become her husband when he came of age and would produce children for her in place of the deceased Er (Gen. 38:6–11). When Judah didn't keep that promise, Tamar posed as a prostitute, had intercourse with Judah, and bore twin sons, Perez and Zerah (vv. 13–30). Despite such sinful activities, God graciously allowed Judah, Tamar, and Perez to join the messianic line.

A second Gentile woman outcast in the genealogy is Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho. In order to save the lives of the two spies Joshua had sent to the city, Rahab lied to messengers of Jericho's king (Josh. 2:1–21). Because she feared God and was kind toward His people, He spared Rahab and her family when He destroyed Jericho (Josh. 6:22–25). Beyond that, divine grace brought Rahab into the messianic genealogy as wife of Salmon and mother of Boaz, David's great-grandfather. Thus it is documented that God used undeserving sinners in His plan to give all sinners His Son, the Savior.

### ASK YOURSELF

Are there individuals in your family, workplace, or community whom you've basically given up on? Could it be that God still has plans to capture their hearts and use them for His glory? How might they see this kind of hope in your eyes as a result of your dealings with them?

## GOD'S GRACE SEEN IN OUTCASTS RUTH AND BATHSHEBA

*Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth . . . David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. —MATT. 1:5b, 6b*

Like Tamar and Rahab, the third outcast, Ruth, was a Gentile (a Moabite). After her husband (an Israelite named Mahlon) died, she went to Israel with her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:22). Ruth was a godly, devoted woman who had accepted by faith the Lord as her own God (v. 16). Mahlon had married Ruth in violation of the Mosaic law (Deut. 7:3; cf. Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:23), and many believe his early death, and that of his brother, were God's judgment on their disobedience. Though she was a Gentile Moabite who had no right to marry an Israelite, God's grace made Ruth one of His people and later, through Boaz, brought her into the royal line as grandmother of King David.

The fourth outcast is Bathsheba, with whom David committed adultery (2 Sam. 11:2–5). He then sent her husband, Uriah, to the front lines to be killed and took her to be his own wife. The son of the adultery died in infancy, but the next son, Solomon, succeeded to David's throne and continued the messianic line. God's grace was again abundant as Bathsheba became an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' genealogy is far more than merely a list of ancient names that identifies His forbears. It is a wonderful testimony to the Father's grace and the Son's ministry—the Son who is the friend of sinners, who “did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:13).

### ASK YOURSELF

Have you felt as though your sins of the past or your sinful struggles of the present have shipwrecked your spiritual future? To remain in sin is to give up on God (and yourself) too easily. To believe that you have no choice is to fall for one of Satan's favorite deceptions.

## CONFRONTING THE VIRGIN BIRTH

*Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”*—MATT. 1:19–20

Although they were only betrothed at this time, Mary and Joseph were considered husband and wife according to Jewish custom. Because he was a righteous man, Joseph felt he faced two difficult dilemmas in this situation. First, his high moral standards would not allow him to proceed with his marriage to Mary because of her pregnancy. Second, his strong love for Mary would not allow him to shame her publicly, much less to demand her death, as provided by the law (Deut. 22:23–24).

Joseph’s concern was not for his own shame but for Mary’s. Therefore, “not wanting to disgrace her” by public exposure to her alleged sin, he “planned to send her away secretly.” The word translated “send away” was the common term for divorce—Joseph planned to divorce Mary secretly so that at least for a while she would be protected.

In the midst of these considerations, an angel from heaven instructed Joseph on what to do: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” These words emphasize the supernatural character of events and give ultimate testimony to the truth of the virgin birth. Furthermore, to underscore the divine encouragement and verify Jesus’ royal lineage, the angel called Joseph “son of David.” The Lord’s rightful place in the Davidic line came through Joseph, even though He was just Joseph’s legal son and actually God’s Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### ASK YOURSELF

Integrity is usually one of several options available to you in tough, complex situations. If you find yourself rarely choosing the highest road in circumstances like these, to what would you attribute your reluctance—not knowing what to do, or just not wanting to do it?

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH PREDICTED

*Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”*

—MATT. 1:22–23

Here Matthew, under the Spirit’s inspiration, clearly identifies the birth of Christ as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Thus the prophetic text of Isaiah (7:14) must be interpreted as predicting Jesus’ virgin birth.

The prophet used the Hebrew word *alma* in Isaiah 7:14. The word can mean “virgin,” which is how the Jewish translators of the Greek Old Testament rendered it in 7:14 (by the Greek *parthenos*)—several centuries prior to the birth of Christ. The “sign” Isaiah referred to was specifically for King Ahaz, who feared that Syria and Israel might destroy Judah’s royal line. Isaiah assured Ahaz that God would protect that line and the future Messiah—through the birth of a son and the death of the kings. The future birth of a far greater Son, the virgin birth of God incarnate, would ensure the covenant with His people. Matthew did not simply give *alma* a Christian “twist.” He used it with the same understanding that all his Jewish readers would have had for it.

But Matthew’s teaching of the virgin birth of Jesus does not rest solely on the usage of *alma*. The case is made unquestionably clear by his previous statements that Jesus’ conception was by and of “the Holy Spirit” (1:18, 20). And Matthew reinforced the case by reminding us that the Son would also be known as Immanuel (“God with us”), which was an honored and descriptive title more than a proper name. In His virgin birth and incarnation, the Lord Jesus was in the most literal sense “God with us.”

### ASK YOURSELF

We admittedly serve a God who is invisible to our human eyes. Thus, like Moses, we must live as though “seeing Him who is unseen” (Heb. 11:27). But in what ways does God reveal to you that He is “with us”?

How does He help you counteract your doubts?

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH CONSUMMATED

*And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. —MATT. 1:24–25*

That “Joseph awoke from his sleep” confirms that God had spoken to him in a dream. Such extraordinary communication occurred on other occasions (cf. Gen. 20:3; Job 33:14–16; 1 Kings 3:5).

We don’t know much about Joseph’s reaction to God’s words except that right away he obeyed. He must have had feelings of amazement, relief, and gratitude that he could marry Mary with honor. He undoubtedly also would have been pleased that he could care for the Son of God while He grew up. Joseph’s obedience demonstrates his godliness and proves the trustworthy, faithful kind of man he was and the reason God chose him as earthly father for His Son.

Joseph took the baby Jesus to the temple for dedication (Luke 2:22–33), to Egypt with His mother to flee Herod (Matt. 2:13–23), and to Jerusalem when He was twelve (Luke 2:42–52). Beyond those events, Scripture says virtually nothing about Joseph.

Joseph likely took Mary as his wife shortly after the angel’s message to him, and he was faithful to keep Mary a virgin “until she gave birth to [her] Son.” And, as a final obedience to the dream’s instruction, Joseph called that Son Jesus, which indicated He was to be the Savior of His people (v. 21).

An unbeliever reportedly asked a believer, “If I told you that child over there had no human father, would you believe me?” The Christian answered, “Yes, if he lived as Christ lived.” One of the best proofs of our Lord’s supernatural birth and deity was His earthly life.

### ASK YOURSELF

You probably haven’t received a dream lately with specific instructions from God on how to handle a certain situation. (You may wish you had!) But how well are you following the instructions already given to you in His Word? Are you in the habit of doing what He says?

## MAGI FROM THE EAST

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” —MATT. 2:1–2*

This is one of the most myth-shrouded yet well-known accounts in all of Scripture. The only sure facts we know about these magi, or wise men, are the ones in Matthew 2:1–12. We don’t even know their number, names, mode of transportation, or specific country from which they traveled. Most would have assumed they came “from the east” since people knew the magi constituted the priestly-political class of the Parthians, who lived east of Palestine.

The Bible also does not tell us how God revealed to the magi about Messiah, only that He gave them the sign of “His star in the east.” As with the identity of the men, little is known about the star’s nature. Some claim it was Jupiter, the largest of the planets. Others say it was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. But since the Bible simply mentions the star, we can’t be dogmatic about its characteristics—it might have been the same divine glory that shone around the shepherds when the angels announced Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:9).

Because they had to ask about where Jesus was born, it’s clear the magi did not actually *follow* the star. Only after they heard of the prophesied birthplace of Christ (2:5–6) did the star reappear and guide them to the precise place where Jesus was.

That the magi came to worship Christ shows they were genuine seekers after God. With limited spiritual light, they recognized God’s light when it shone on them and they found Him in the person of His Son.

## ASK YOURSELF

You may not think of yourself as a very wise person, but the Bible teaches us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). If that’s where it starts, what could you do with that piece of information to make some wise choices and decisions today?

## THE MAGI'S ADORATION, PART 1

*After hearing [Herod] the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. —MATT. 2:9–11a*

The unique star's reappearance to the magi gave them unprecedented joy and enthusiasm. Matthew is almost at a loss for words, saying that "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Such superlatives indicate the magi's extremely strong interest and exhilaration in this event. And such reactions were justified, because God somehow used the special star to lead them directly to Jesus and His family.

Joseph had apparently taken his family from the stable to a house, where they lived until the Lord instructed them on their next move. It was at this house that the pilgrims finally found the object of their search—"the Child with Mary His mother." By God's grace they were allowed to see His promised Son in person. They experienced firsthand Charles Wesley's great lyrics, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity."

Matthew carefully points out that the magi "fell to the ground and worshiped Him"—only Jesus and not His mother or father. They were more discerning than Cornelius, who wanted to worship Peter (Acts 10:25), or the Lystrans, who attempted to worship Paul and Barnabas (14:11–13). They likely were respectful of Mary and Joseph, but they reserved their true adoration for the Christ Child, because as God, only He was worthy of worship.

### ASK YOURSELF

When was the last time you "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" or "fell to the ground and worshiped Him"? What keeps you from sensing this kind of awe on a regular basis? And what could help to keep you in a state of mind and spirit that is routinely amazed at who Jesus is?

## THE MAGI'S ADORATION, PART 2

*Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. —MATT. 2:11b*

Proper divine worship is always, and must be, the only basis for proper giving, proper learning, and proper service. The magi's giving was not so much an extension of their worship as an element of it, given as an expression of their adoring and grateful hearts. Any giving, even though generous, that is done apart from a worshipful relationship to God is empty giving.

Throughout history people have considered gold the most valuable of metals, the universal symbol of value and wealth. The Israelites used it extensively in the construction of the temple (1 Kings 6–7, 9; 2 Chron. 2–4). And here we see Matthew implicitly presenting Jesus as not only King of the Jews but as King of kings and appropriately receiving a royal gift of gold.

Frankincense was a fragrant and expensive incense used only on very special occasions. The Jews used it for tabernacle and temple grain offerings (Lev. 2:2, 15–16), in certain royal processions (Song of Sol. 3:6–7), and sometimes at weddings. The church father Origen believed frankincense was the incense of deity, which suggests just how important and special people viewed it.

Myrrh was a slightly less expensive perfume than frankincense but still highly prized. According to many commentators, myrrh was the gift for mortals and emphasizes here Jesus' humanity. As a mixture with other spices, it was later used in the burial preparation of Jesus' body (John 19:39).

Thus these three items were the magi's gifts to Christ: gold for royalty, frankincense for deity, and myrrh for humanity.

### ASK YOURSELF

Rather than looking at our regular disciplines of prayer, worship, and Bible study—or even our acts of service and obedience—as duties and obligations, how might our attitudes change if we saw those as gifts to God? What gifts could you give to Him today, tomorrow?

## OUT OF EGYPT—FULFILLING A TYPE

*Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.” So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod.*

*This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” —MATT. 2:13–15*

In spite of her spiritual unfaithfulness and lawlessness, God has always promised to restore Israel. Through the prophet Hosea, God reminded Israel of His undying love for her: “When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son” (Hos. 11:1). Here Matthew applies the last part of that verse to Christ. Though Hosea did not knowingly predict Messiah’s exile in Egypt, Matthew indicates that Israel’s earlier call from Egypt pictures Jesus’ return from that country. As God had once called His people out of Egypt to be His chosen nation, He now would call His greater Son from there to be Israel’s Messiah.

This is a type, a nonverbal prediction from the Old Testament that illustrates something about Christ without specifically describing it. However, we can’t credibly label a person or event a genuine Old Testament type except as Scripture itself informs us of it. Therefore, because Matthew makes the association here, Israel’s exodus from Egypt is a type of Jesus’ return from Egypt as a young child.

In a more profound sense, Christ exited Egypt with Israel under Moses. The Lord descended from Abraham and the royal line of David. Had the Israelites died in Egypt or the wilderness, Messiah Himself could not have come out of Egypt or even been born.

### ASK YOURSELF

The uniting threads of God’s bigger picture are comforting to read and ponder. They soothe our inborn need for security and protection, surrounding us with the sure embrace of His eternal plans and purposes.

How does this assurance speak to your life specifically right now?

## TRAGEDY IN BETHLEHEM

*Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.” —MATT. 2:16–18*

Matthew provides a sobering synopsis of Herod’s slaughter of the innocents to portray the rejection of Christ by the Jewish leaders and their representatives. The chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees must have heard something about Jesus’ birth, but they had no true interest in finding Him or worshiping Him. Herod had only a hypocritical concern for the Child. In reality, Herod’s sadistic brutality against the male infants around Jerusalem reflected his own and the Jewish leaders’ unrelenting rejection of Jesus. Those little ones were the first casualties in the re-intensified spiritual warfare between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven.

“Rachel weeping for her children” represents the grieving of all Jewish mothers over Israel’s distress during the days of Jeremiah (see Jer. 31). In this gospel we see it as a type and prefigurement of the Bethlehem mothers crying over the massacre of their sons by Herod. While Christ was still an infant, Rachel had cause to weep again, even as Jesus Himself would later weep over Jerusalem because the Jews largely rejected Him and would therefore face many afflictions (Luke 19:41–44). Before the day when God will save the Jews and cleanse their sins (Rom. 11:26–27), continued disobedience and tragedy will dog them.

### ASK YOURSELF

We never wish for days of sorrow, but they come nonetheless—grievous realities of our fallen world. What have you learned from times of anguish and despair? How has God met you in the midst of them and pulled you through? Who could use your comfort, even today?

## JESUS THE NAZARENE

*He [Joseph] left for the regions of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: “He [Jesus] shall be called a Nazarene.”* —MATT. 2:22b–23

The prophecy that Jesus would be a Nazarene—not specifically recorded in the Old Testament—is said by Matthew to be fulfilled when Joseph and Mary took Him to Nazareth. Whoever the prophets were who had made the Nazarene prediction, this was probably common knowledge among Matthew’s original Jewish readers. For us it is enough that we believe the apostle’s Spirit-inspired words on this matter.

Nazareth, a town located fifty-five miles north of Jerusalem on an elevated Galilean basin, contained a populace mainly noted for its crude and violent ways. *Nazarene* had long been a term of derision, describing anyone plain and rugged. That’s why Nathanael asked Philip, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Nathanael would not have been one to malign his neighbors (v. 47), but he was stunned that the Christ could actually come from a place like Nazareth.

Early Jewish opponents of Christianity spoke disparagingly of Paul as “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Church father Jerome reported that other Jews cursed Christians as Nazarenes and prayed that they be removed from the Book of Life (cf. Ps. 69:28). Thus “Jesus the Nazarene” became a title of reproach, fulfilling the prophecies that Messiah would be “despised and forsaken of men” (Isa. 53:3; cf. 49:7; Pss. 22:6–8; 69:20–21). The Gospels also affirm this fact (Matt. 12:24; Luke 23:4; John 9:22, 29).

It was thus in much-maligned Nazareth that the royal Son of God lived for thirty years.

### ASK YOURSELF

What does it mean to you that God would choose for His Son to be associated with people from the “wrong side of the tracks,” those who were looked down upon and disrespected? How does this change your attitude and approach toward those who live today in derision or invisibility?