



Sermon Growth Guide

JANUARY 2, 2022

THE FAMILY OF GOD // "FAMILY TABLE"

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January 2, 2022

Family of God – The Family Table

Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse: Matthew 2:2 “(The Magi) 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.”

Big Idea: No matter how far away you feel, God invites you to His family table.

Foundations

This week we conclude our Advent series on ***The Family of God***.

Jesus, fully God and fully man, was born into a bloodline, but He breaks down the barrier of genetics by declaring that the true and forever Family of God is the Family of Faith. We belong to God by faith! Just like Jesus’ bloodline, the Family of Faith is comprised of the full range of human personality and circumstance. Our family tie is not through ethnicity or nationality or moral merit, but through our common thread of true faith.

The Magi in today’s sermon represent the pathway taken by those who start feeling distanced from God’s family. Maybe you didn’t grow up in church. Maybe you’ve distanced yourself from God’s family for many years. Maybe you’ve been antagonistic toward God and His people.

The Good News the Magi bring is that no person is too far from God for God to reach with His love and grace. The question is, how will you respond? Whereas King Herod was “close” to the birth of the Messiah and hated the Christ Child, the Magi were far off, but received Christ and believed in His name and became children of God (John 1:12).

Blessings as you share your lives with one another and point one another to our true and eternal family.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Matthew 2:1-12. Why do you think that Matthew includes the story of the Magi in his birth narrative? Why is the Magi’s story important?

Host a discussion contrasting the responses of King Herod and the Magi. Do these responses typify modern day responses?

Applying God’s Word

No matter how far away you feel, God invites you to His family table. What area(s) of your heart remains distanced from the total Lordship of Jesus Christ? Ask your Life Group to help you, like the Magi, bring your whole self to Christ in worship.

Witnessing God’s Word

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:12-13, “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

God delights pouring out His grace on the far off. In Christ, we are the have-been-brought-near people! How can you join God’s mission of rescue by reaching the “Magi” around you in this new year?

I love this part of the story. How cool would it be to be among the traveling Magi from the East who see a sign, a star in the sky, and know it's something special beyond telling. A sign, adventure, a journey, suspense, a sinister king in Jerusalem, and finally, Jesus. Mission success for the Magi. Today we conclude our series in ***The Family of God***, a surprise ending where cultic practices are traded for communion with the Living God who has entered our story as a baby in Bethlehem. We're in Matthew chapter 2 this morning, the first 12 verses.

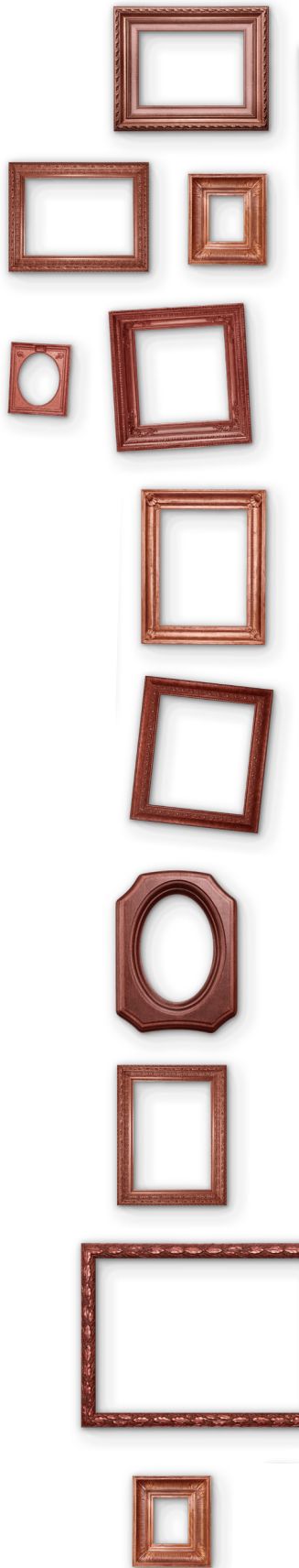
This is the Word of the Lord and we're thankful for it, amen? Amen. We Christians, we Reformed Christians, proclaim that humanity has been wrecked by the Fall. How far did we fall? A severe danger comes toward us in this passage whereby we read it through our culture lenses and presume that the Magi were basically good people. "Basically Good People," BGP. Were the Magi basically good people? Let me make this personal: are you a basically good person, a BGP, or basically a person in total need of a Savior, a person in need of the grace of God? What about the person sitting beside you? (Don't answer that!) The problem with being a BGP is that basically good people make the greatest mistake you can make in your life—you presume you're good to go, your sin is not that bad and so you don't need saving from anything—the distance, the chasm, between you and God is not too significant to cause concern.

I bring some firsthand experience to this question. When I was younger I thought I was a pretty good person; I thought I was a BGP. You can imagine my shock, visible on my face, when I read *The Heidelberg Catechism* for the first time in college. *The Heidelberg Catechism* is one of our confessional documents as an ECO church. Our confessional documents help us think rightly about what Scripture says by supporting us with centuries of Christian thought. Heidelberg Catechism Question 8: But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do good and prone to do evil? Answer: Yes, unless we are born again through the Spirit of God.

What our passage proclaims so clearly today, indeed what Scripture proclaims so boldly throughout its pages, is twofold: 1) human sin is a really big deal and, therefore, humanity is in more need of a Savior than you can possibly imagine. You are far more crushed by your sin than you know and

you are far more helpless than you care to admit. And 2) God's grace is more real and powerful than you can possibly imagine and is available to you today through the life and work of Jesus Christ. You are eternally loved by a fully loving God who is your Father and who is all powerful and able to save you from the very thing which most severely condemns you, your sin. "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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'" (Matthew 2:1-2). Our text introduces us to three key figures in verse one: Herod, the Magi, and Jesus. King Herod demonstrates our great need. The Magi role model before us a right response to the grace of God. Jesus, "the Baby," Christ, is Emmanuel, the with-us God who fulfills every requirement of the law, lives a perfect life, and saves us by offering Himself as a sin offering. Herod, the Magi, Jesus—let's use this sequence to help us understand what the text proclaims and how it will shape the rest of our lives.

First, Herod. "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 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. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, '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 shepherd my people Israel.' Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 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'" (Matthew 2:3-8). King Herod was just informed that a new king has been born right under his nose, on his watch. Matthew says that this news "disturbed" King Herod. Your history book tells you Caesar Augustus wrote that you'd be better off being Herod's pig than Herod's son. Herod killed three of his sons in order to stay in power. No wonder "the whole city was disturbed" when the Magi said another king had been born. What is Herod going to do this time to maintain his power? Two weeks ago, Tim preached on Herod's genocide in the region of Bethlehem. Mad Herod. Degenerate Herod. When you regret the Lordship of the true King, you hurt those around you. Our recent history, the 20th century, was the bloodiest century in



human history. The total number of deaths caused by or associated with its wars has been estimated at 187 million, the equivalent of more than 10 percent of the world's population in 1913 (*The Guardian*). What foolishness the Secular puts out there that humanity is "advancing." Rubbish. We're as bad as we've ever been! And here's the rub, we're all of us Herods at our pre-regenerate root level. We're all Herods at the root level and if you don't understand that you're missing a central component of the gospel. What Matthew is saying through biography Paul says through systematics: As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:10-11).

In King Herod, we see just how at odds the human heart is against the Living God, we see our deepest need on full display. In King Herod we are reminded that, no matter your acceptance or rejection, every human is confronted by the Living God, whether through the created order or through the very words of Scripture, everyone is confronted by God. Herod is confronted by God in the news of the Magi and Herod hates the Good News with all his being and tries to arrange for the Magi to give up the GPS coordinates of the Baby so Herod can deal with this child himself.

Next, the Magi: "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. 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 worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route" (Matthew 2:9-12). In the Magi, we see God's loving grace extending to the outsiders and we see the outsiders responding in faith to go and worship the newborn king. Faith, the element you exercise that places you at the **Family Table** in the Family of God. The Magi were outermost outsiders. The Magi were outsiders by race, geography, and profession—not Jewish, not living in Israel, and their day job, very likely their study of the cosmos, was bookended by superstition and their predictions perpetuated divination. The prophets mocked the Magi: "All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward,

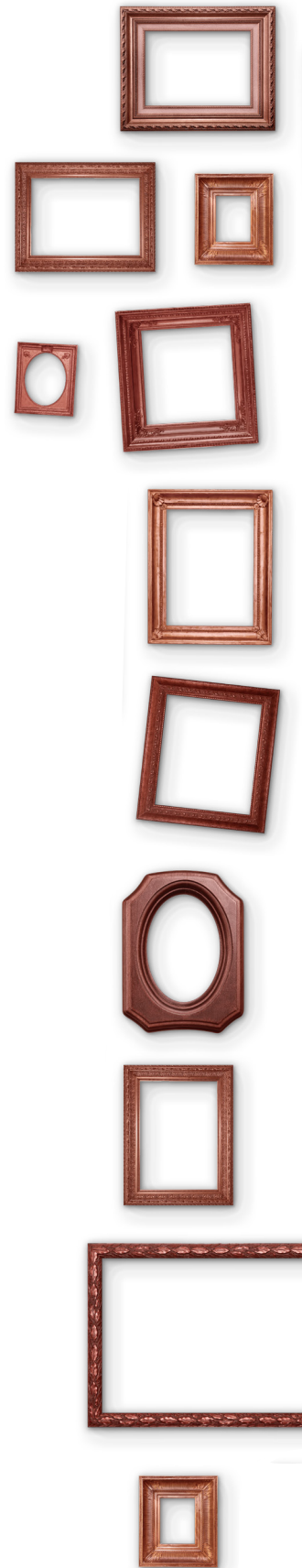
those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you" (Isaiah 47:13).

Here's a question for you: does God view you most by your failure to love Him or does God view you most by His desire to graft you into His family? God loves the Magi of the world. God rescues the Magi of the world. "I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" (Hosea 2:23).

And: "... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13).

God delights in grafting the Magi into His family. And God delights in grafting you into His family. I want to highlight something for you. Have you noted the rich connection between creation, Scripture and worship in Matthew 2? God uses general revelation, creation, to grab the attention of the Magi. The Star leads the Magi to Jerusalem, not Bethlehem—did you catch that? Why did God make the Magi go through Jerusalem? Why the layover in the City of Peace? Why not a direct, non-stop flight (which are much preferable and much less stressful)? How fast, after the Magi ask Herod where the Child is that they hear, perhaps for the very first time in their lives, the Holy Scripture: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2).

God leads the Magi from their cultic worship to the Living Word of God and right here they have a choice. Do they laugh and turn away? What's your next move? All your life your senses have pointed you in one direction. But then God pours out His grace on your life and you have the most important decision of your eternity to make: will you believe or will you turn away? All of the Magi's expert knowledge of the heavens now must be abandoned for faithful obedience in God's Word. General revelation gets the Magi to Jerusalem, but only God's Word, hear the prophet Micah, will get the Magi to Jesus. And when they find the baby,



they fall down in worship. I have friends who don't come to church in the winter because they "worship" in nature on the ski slopes. My heart breaks. We need the Word, friends. God leads the Magi to Jerusalem so they can hear the Scriptures. Star, Micah, Baby. General Revelation, Special Revelation, Faith. Nature, Scripture, Worship. The order should stay the same for our entire lives.

We've been looking at pathways into **The Family of God**. The Magi's message in this regard is abundantly clear: God calls you while you're far off. There's nothing in God's created order that God cannot use to call you to Jerusalem, to the Word. And when God's grace touches you, you move from Word to Worship, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. God used the Magi's very idol to bring them to the Word and the Word to the Child, Jesus. Wherever you are, God is calling you to believe, to come to Bethlehem, to worship the Child.

Third, Scripture gives us "The Child," Christ, as the great solution, the great cure, the great "that-which-you-need-more-than-anything." If the Magi display the mercy of God and if Herod displays the judgment of God, well, that's nice, but it's just another copy-and-paste verse of the song that has been on repeat throughout the Old Testament. Mercy and Judgment, that's the Old Testament for thousands of years. Mercy, Judgement, Prophetic word that the Messiah will come. But here is not the Magi (mercy) or Herod (judgment), but The Child.

The Child, this is something new. This is the Messiah, the One foretold by the prophets throughout the generations who breaks the bad news cycle of judgment and No Way and makes a Way, the Way. The Child, Jesus, does for the Magi *and for Herod*, does for all of humanity, what no one else could do. Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets. Jesus lives totally righteously before the Father. The Good News of the gospel is that Jesus never wanted to be the only righteous human, so He fixed His love on the cross. The babe born to die, to give His life as a sin offering, that through His death you may have life forevermore by trusting in Him. By faith you enter **The Family of God**. The Magi and Herod demonstrate the need. Jesus provides the solution; Jesus is the solution, our provision, our *bread*. Bread. When he's a grown man Jesus will declare that He is the "bread of life." Fitting, then, that "Bethlehem," in Hebrew, means, "House of Bread." From Bethlehem comes Life-Bread.

Today we receive the Sacrament of Communion, we receive the bread and the cup, the body and the blood of the Way Maker. Imagine what it will be like to come to this Table unfettered from the sin of this world. Some of you have never owned just how severe your sin is. Others have been stunningly honest and open with your success at rebelling against God, but you've been unwilling or unable to receive God's gift of forgiveness. Imagine what it will be like to fully confess all your sin and be fully forgiven forevermore. That's the promise of God when you come in faith to Jesus. If you haven't given your life to Jesus before and something in you is crying out for you to do just that, then please come forward during Communion and, before receiving Communion, ask for help and we'll pray with you and we'll start a journey of faith with you. If that's you, make today the most important day of your life. Don't miss this chance to go to Bethlehem, to meet Jesus, to worship Him.

Come to the Table today as modern-day Magi. See the star, hear the Word, seek out the Child, and worship. Walk each day looking for the Star, listening for the Word, seeking the Face of God, and entering into worship, which includes the giving away of yourself for the Kingdom of God.

A final word: I didn't talk specifically about the gold, frankincense and myrrh. Let me land here, a part of being drawn into worship is being drawn into a life of generosity. The culmination of the Magi's journey was the giving of gifts to the One they now worship. To worship God is to freely offer yourself to God as you ascribe worth and honor to Him. Perhaps worship really isn't worship at all unless it's generous. Let the gold, frankincense and myrrh of your life and of your heart pour forth before the Christ Child, the Creator of the Universe who is now a fragile babe in Bethlehem.

Let's pray: Thank you, Lord Christ, for teaching us anew that your grace leads us to a life of sacrificial worship. Help us now as we approach your Table, to come as modern-day Magi. Help us to see the Star. Help us to crave and hear your Word. Help us to journey to Bethlehem again and again, seeking your face. May this new year be a year where we worship like never before. Help us to give ourselves away for you and for your Kingdom. Amen.

