

Session 6

January 9, 2022

THE RULER WHO CARES FOR HIS PEOPLE

Micah 5:2-5a; Matthew 2:1-6, 9-11

Our Christmas emphases often focus on the miracle of the incarnation (His virgin birth) and the results of His incarnation (Immanuel, God with us). Certainly, the role and of the Messiah is highlighted, particularly by the Old Testament prophets (as in Is. 9:6 ff). But in the majesty of His reign, we might overlook exactly *what kind of ruler* the Christ would be.

Perhaps what separates a good king from a great king is not his ability to *direct* his people, but his ability to *lead* them. In this week's lesson, we get some hints about the newborn King. Three characteristics are mentioned.

He would be a shepherd king (Mic. 5:2-5). Micah 5:2 is best known as the only Scripture in the Old Testament that specifically mentions the birthplace of Christ. But the verses that follow describe the Messiah. He is from eternity past (v. 2). The shadowy language of verse 3 refers to the captivity Israel would face. The idea of *abandonment* is "to give over;" not forever, but for a season in preparation for the rebirth (or *restoration*). The prophet then looks beyond the literal restoration of Israel. For this Eternal One who will come is more than a deliverer; He will be a *shepherd* for the nation. Rarely do we see the majesty of a king (v. 4) made so compassionate. The motif of the shepherd is one of the most prominent in the Scriptures. Moses, a foreshadow of Christ, was a shepherd. David, the progenitor of Christ, was a shepherd. The first to hear of Christ's birth were shepherds. Jesus referred to Himself in John 10 as the *Good Shepherd*. Strength, courage, protection, provision, guidance, care...all of those characteristics that are embodied by the shepherd apply to Christ Jesus. Added to those things are the benefits to His sheep. They would live in security, prosperity, and peace (vv. 4-5). For reflection: *For another perspective of the shepherd motif, read Isaiah 53 where Christ is likened to the sheep rather than a shepherd.*

He would be a sovereign king (Matt. 2:1-6). Few characters in the Christmas narrative are more fascinating than the wisemen. The term is *magi* (or "magicians"). These were not showmen, but scholars; well known for their mastery of math, science, philosophy, astrology, etc. History tells us such men were often religious priests, served as advisors to the kings, and were held in high regard. As foreigners from the east (likely Persia or Arabia), their knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures is as remarkable as their devotion to seek out this new "King of the Jews" (v. 2). Their quest was to find this new sovereign ruler, whose remarkable birth was signaled by the appearance of a remarkable star. For reflection: *In the past, God used things like pillars of fire and clouds to direct His people. Why do you think He used a star to guide these wisemen from the east?*

He would be sacrificial king (Matt. 2:9-11). The long journey of the magi led them not to the stable, but to a house where the young family had quickly relocated. Notice the verbs signifying the magi's actions: they *saw* the star and *were overjoyed* beyond measure (v. 10); they *entered* the house, *saw* the child, *fell* to their knees, and *worshiped* Him (v. 11). They *opened* their treasures and *presented* Him gifts (v. 11); then they *returned* to their own country (v. 12). Their celebration of the new King was a mixture of both praise and of prophecy. The *gold* was a gift

befitting the royalty of a king; but the *frankincense* and *myrrh* were perfumed ointments most commonly used to anoint a dead body. For reflection: *Do you think the gifts the magi brought were coincidental? Is it possible that these scholars knew much more about the Old Testament prophecies regarding Christ's birth—and death— than just Micah 5:2?*