

March 2. Read Matthew 1:16-18; 2:1-6; Micah 5:2-4. “Christ” was a title, not a personal name. The Greek word “christos” meant “anointed one,” the same meaning as the Hebrew word “mashiach,” or “Messiah.” Matthew said Jesus is called “the Christ”—that is, the anointed king. Israel loved the hope of God sending a ruler born in Bethlehem. The “chief priests and legal experts” knew Micah 5 when King Herod asked them. But it was the foreign magi who spoke of the infant as Israel’s ultimate king. Matthew used the Greek word “magoi” (English “magi”) to describe the visitors from the East. Picture the scene in your mind’s eye: these wise men, often honored and respected themselves, honored the young child Jesus and named him “king.” What did this say about their hopes for who Jesus was and would become? What do you hope Jesus, the king, will do in your life? The Magi didn’t say, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We have come to make a treaty with him,” or “We have come to attend one of his meetings.” Scholar William Barclay noted that the magi had “the reaction of adoring worship, the desire to lay at the feet of Jesus Christ the noblest gifts they could bring.” How will you honor Jesus’ birth through “adoring worship” for the rest of this year?

March 3. Read Psalm 72:1-6; Matthew 16:13-20. Scholars call Psalm 72 a “royal psalm,” one that almost certainly originally prayed for Israel’s earthly anointed king. But as the decades and then the centuries rolled by, it became painfully clear that no merely human king could possibly fulfill the hopes that the psalm expressed. The hope rose anew as Peter and the disciples followed Jesus. They saw him as “the Christ,” the true king who could bring justice, peace and righteousness forever. Note carefully all the qualities Psalm 72 asked God to give to the king. How thankful would you be if any of the leaders we will elect in 2020, fully lived out all those qualities? What kept Israel’s kings (and our leaders) from being able to fully live them out? What made Jesus uniquely qualified to be that ultimate, eternal king? In answer to Jesus’ question, the disciples said people identified him as “John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” That was no insult— those were great, respected names. Yet they fell short of what the disciples saw in Jesus. To what extent can you join Peter in declaring that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God”? What factors shape what you believe about Jesus?

March 4. Read Acts 17:1-4, 26:19-23. Paul, the writer of most of the New Testament, always had one great central message. He used all his learning, his extensive knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and his speaking skill to convince his hearers that Jesus was “the Christ,” God’s anointed king. His message has long outlived those seemingly more powerful, important people (like Agrippa) who scoffed at his faith in Jesus. Scholar N. T. Wright noted that Paul’s preaching from the Scriptures wasn’t just a few proof texts. “It was a matter of the entire plan of God, the whole sweep of the narrative, the story of Israel going into the dark tunnel of slavery in Egypt only to be rescued at the Passover, of David fleeing from Absalom only to be reinstated after a great victory, of Jerusalem being destroyed and the nation carried away captive to Babylon, only to be brought back and rebuilt after a tribulation everyone thought would be final ... of a story whose main themes were all about suffering and vindication, disaster and reversal, death and resurrection.” In other words, Jesus as “the Christ,” crucified and risen, embodied the essence of all of God’s saving action. In what ways has Christ brought the power of “reversal,” of hope, into your life?

March 5. Read Isaiah 9:2-7, Matthew 21:8-16. Isaiah wrote of Israel's hope that God would send a faithful heir of David's royal line to rule forever (cf. 1 Kings 9:3-5). In Israel, donkeys were for kings (e.g. 1 Kings 1:33-44) as well as common people. But Zechariah 9:9-10, which Matthew cited, distinguished a king on a donkey, who came in peace, from the war horses and chariots of a conqueror. People hailed Jesus as the "Son of David," God's promise come true at last. Some who watched Jesus no doubt hoped he would lead a drive to kill the Romans and restore Israel's power. His ride on a donkey pointed in a different direction. "When the chief priests and legal experts saw the amazing things he was doing and the children shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were angry." They didn't want a gentle king, a "Son of David," who said to love your enemies. Do you? "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." Yet even after he met Jesus, Paul would write, "Now we see a dim reflection" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In what ways has Jesus already brought light into your dark world? In what ways are you waiting for the full brilliance of God's light?

March 6. Read Acts 10:34-43, Romans 14:2-12. By New Testament times, Rome's Caesar claimed worship as "Lord" (Greek kurios). There could only be one "Lord," so to say Jesus was king and lord was risky. But even to Romans, Peter and Paul said Jesus was the true kurios, the Lord of all. With Rome's military might pitted against Jesus' seemingly naïve witnesses, the contest looked ridiculously uneven. It was—but 2,000 years of history shows that it was Caesar, not Jesus, who was overmatched. One important way Rome demanded that citizens in its empire show their allegiance was to say, formally, "Caesar is Lord." Picture the scene as Peter declared to this group of Roman soldiers, "This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!" (Verse 36) What "lords" has Jesus challenged and dethroned in your life? Jesus' lordship needs to shape the family of faith. Some Romans disagreed in critical, caustic ways. Paul told them we do not answer to one another, but to our Lord, Jesus. Scholar William Barclay wrote, "'I beseech you by the bowels of Christ,' said Cromwell to the rigid Scots of his day, 'think it possible that you may be mistaken.' We must banish both censoriousness and contempt from the Church's fellowship. We must leave the judgment of others to God, and seek only to sympathize and to understand." When do you need to remember that Jesus, not you, is Lord over some person you disagree with or dislike?

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