

DCF:

He came home from work and called a family meeting. “I’ve just received a promotion at work and we’ll be moving to another state.” Good news or bad news? Well, for the dad it was both. He would be getting a substantial raise, but would have to work more hours in the week. The mom would have to leave her circle of friends and the town she had grown up in. The kids would have to change schools and lose all the friends they grew up with. Bad news?

As they thought about it some more, they started to see the good side of this news. Dad could retire a few years earlier than planned, based on his new salary. Mom could start a new career. The kids could make new friends, and the outdoor activities in their new town were much, much better than the one they had lived in all their lives.

Good news or bad news? It all depends on your outlook, your goals in life. Today we reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ, and ask ourselves this question: is it “**GOOD NEWS OR BAD NEWS?**” Is that a silly question? Well, as we look into God’s Word today, we’ll see that some want to hide this wonderful news, and others want to declare it publicly. Let’s go to the Gospel of Matthew.

Part One: Some want to hide it

Today we meet up with some rather mysterious men. Wise men. Who were they? Well, they came from the east, so perhaps they were astrologers from Babylon. Maybe they were historians or court officials. We don’t really know. All we know is that these men saw the star that announced the birth of Jesus. They knew some of the Old Testament prophecies, but not all of them. They knew this star announced the birth of the one who would rule over Israel, but not exactly where he would be born. But this new king was someone very, very special. What other king ever had a star announcing his birth?

So, wanting to honor this new king, they traveled a great distance from home to the capital city of Jerusalem. Surely the people in Jerusalem would be celebrating the birth of their extra special, unique king, right? But there didn’t seem to be any recognition of this amazing fact. So, they asked “***Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.***” Such a momentous event, and yet they had to go and ask.

Hadn’t the religious leaders in Jerusalem seen the star? Hadn’t they been steeped in the Old Testament prophecies for years? Surely, you would think, they would know. And they did! But why hadn’t they told anyone? Why hadn’t they told Herod?

Probably because they knew him far too well. “***When King Herod hear this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.***” King Herod was a ruthless, paranoid ruler who did everything he could to hold on to his power. He wasn’t a Jew. He was an Idumean, an outsider who had gained the throne with powerplays, assassinations and deals with the Roman government. He had killed family members and close associates on his way to the throne. He wasn’t going to let anything or anyone take that throne from him, and even the least hint that he was not the legitimate ruler of Israel was a threat to be eliminated. So, he faked his concern to the magi, planning to slaughter this so-called king of the Jews once he found out where he was. The people of Jerusalem were terrified of what Herod might do. And rightly so, as future events would prove. He would slaughter every male child under the age of 2 when the magi didn’t come back. Herod wanted to hide the fact that the king of the Jews, the Savior of the world, had come.

Christmas is the time when the world hears once again that a Savior has been born to us, Christ the Lord. It’s safe to assume that everyone in America knows the story of Jesus’ birth. We’ve got books about it, manger scenes on display, church services broadcast on TV and the internet, movies and sound bites declaring the news of Jesus’ birth. Why don’t we as a nation talk about Jesus after Christmas is done?

Could it be that like Herod, Jesus’ birth interferes with their own goals and desires? They don’t want to spend time in the Word. They’d rather spend time reading or watching something else. They don’t want to spend time living for Christ and His kingdom. They’d rather spend time living for themselves, grabbing as much as they can in life. They don’t want to strive to craft a stronger faith. They’d rather strive to improve their

job skills, their hobby skills or their health.

You know, we're not immune to this temptation, are we? We're tempted to hide the fact of Jesus at times. We don't talk to the person we're sitting next to on the plane because we want to relax. We don't volunteer at church because we'd rather do other things. We don't give much to support the spread of the Gospel because we want to save as much as we can for retirement, or for our kids college fund. Oh, we all have our so-called "good reasons" for keeping quiet about our Savior's birth.

But notice what the magi did.

Part Two: Some want to declare it

Now, we're not even sure if the wise men were believers. Oh, it mentions that they worshiped Jesus when they visited Him in Bethlehem. But that word "worship" could simply mean they honored Him as an earthly king. They came bearing gifts that were traditionally given to a ruler. You know them. Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These men wanted to publicly honor the newborn king, and so they declared it by giving of their time. They traveled for months on camels or donkeys, eating road food and sleeping in strange places. They gave of their wealth, bringing some truly expensive gifts. All that time, all that energy and all that wealth for just a few hours at the feet of a baby. It boggles the mind, doesn't it?

Ever wonder what they did when they got back home? After investing all that time and energy, I think their "trip of a lifetime" would be on their lips often. I can almost imagine them telling their families and friends about the star that guided them to Jesus. I can almost imagine them talking about Mary and Joseph, their visit to Herod's court and the dream that warned them about Herod. And maybe they dug into the Old Testament a bit deeper, gleaned further information about the promised Savior. Did they end up as believers? I guess we'll find out in heaven, won't we?

What will we do with this news that a Savior has been born? Will we keep quiet, or will we want to tell others about it? I've got a high school classmate who retired this year. He's been planning his trip of a lifetime for a few years now, and he's starting in two weeks. His plan is to bike across the United States. He'll pick up his bike in San Diego and plans on arriving in St. Augustine Florida in mid-May. Is he keeping quiet about something that truly excites him? Oh, no. He'll be blogging about it as he travels. He'll be taking photos and videos. And I'm sure he'll be talking about this trip for the rest of his life. The highlight of his life.

Is Jesus' birth the highlight of our lives? Will we let others know of our joy as we live? You don't have to be obnoxious about it. You can quietly declare how important Jesus is in your life by how you live. Reading the Word. Worshiping regularly. Supporting the mission of Jesus with your offerings. We also declare the fact that we honor Jesus by telling others we're praying for them. We honor Jesus when we support our neighbors in their struggles, offering our shoulders for their burdens and a passage or two that has helped us in our life. We show how important our Savior is by bringing our children to Sunday School and catechism class, knowing that the news we hear is the most important thing in our lives.

Jesus is our Savior. He has washed away every sin with His innocent death. He has fulfilled God's demand of perfection for us, and freely given us His perfect life. He has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to create a faith that believes this. He has promised us eternal life with all the joys of heaven. He has bought us back from sin and death and made us His own. Now, we are full-fledged members of God's family, with a place guaranteed to us in paradise.

He continues to walk with us and talk to us. He continues to guide us and strengthen us. He continues to comfort us when we are ravaged by sin. He will always love us.

And we want to keep this secret? No! This is news that is the highlight of our lives. We want others to know that Christmas is not just a celebration that ends when the year flips over. Christmas is a life-changing event, a life-giving event. We have a Savior - he is Christ the Lord!

And that's good news!

AMEN