

MATTHEW 2:1-18 12-24-12
A TALE OF TWO RESPONSES

Matthew 2:**1-18**

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "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. 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him. 9 After hearing 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way. 13 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. 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 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." 16 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. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 "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."*

This passage is a tale of two responses. It's always fascinating to see how two different persons look at and respond to the same event. When people ponder what has happened in our political scene over the last few months some see, "Victory, Progress, Justice." Others see, "Defeat, Ruin, Injustice." The contrasts in viewpoints and statements have been startling haven't they? Just so in this story surrounding the birth of Jesus. We find here two contrasting responses to the birth of the Son of God.

Herod was the Roman appointed king of Judea in the days of Caesar Augustus. He is one of history's most infamous characters - noted for his cruelty and pride. His reaction to learning of

Christmas is found in verse 3. In verse 2 the Magi come asking this question 2-3 *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. 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.* Herod then called his scholars in to find out where the long-awaited Redeemer King of Israel, the Messiah, was to be born. Verse 6 is a quote from the prophet Micah who 500 years prior had said the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem. So Herod told the wise men 8 *And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.* What a fine fella this Herod was. Told the magi right where to go and wanted a full report later so he too could come and worship. If you believe that you didn't listen when I read the Scriptures. The magi never told Herod about Jesus and a good thing it was because when Herod despaired of learning who this particular child was - he had every boy two and under in Bethlehem slaughtered. Did Herod want to worship this special Babe? No, he wanted him dead.

You say, well this is a strange response to Christmas. I've heard of Mr. Scrooge but this is a little much. Why would anybody want to kill the precious little harmless Jesus? Why would anyone want to kill One who comes into the world to spread love and joy? The answer is simple. Herod understood who Jesus was. He understood who Jesus was. He knew better than most Americans who the babe in a manger was. He understood that Jesus was a King. He had heard the rumors about the shepherds near Bethlehem who saw angels and a special child reputed to be the Messianic King. Now he finds these foreign magi, scientists, astronomers drawn to Jerusalem in search of a what? A teacher? A rabbi? A healer? A Savior? What did the Magi say? 2a *Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?* Who was Herod? King of the Jews.

You see, it was not the coming of a Savior that disturbed Herod. It was the coming of a king and that is precisely what Jesus was to be. In Luke's gospel the angel appears to Mary and says Luke 1:31-33 *Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.* He is a King. Herod understood it and that is why he hated Jesus. That is why he sought in vain to kill Jesus. This is his reaction to Christmas and I dare say it has been the reaction of the majority of men ever since. Christ escaped death here and He did it again later in life but finally his enemies put him to death. He was hated by the many then and He is hated by them now. "Aw, come on, who hates Jesus? I don't know anybody who hates Jesus?" Well, people

don't hate the Babe lying in a manger and they don't hate the martyr hanging on the cross. But Jesus is more than that. He is the King sitting on a throne. And the mass of men follow in the steps of Herod and to King Jesus they say a resounding, "NO." Jesus as King is a threat and He must be eliminated, and Herod went to gross and disgusting extremes to see that He was. Why? Because He understood who Jesus was.

But in the muddle of the semi-Biblical preaching prevalent today it is quite possible not to understand who Jesus is. So many people hear preaching about someone who died to take away sins, someone who gives eternal life away for free and they think, "Hey, that's a good deal, sign me up." But since they don't hear anything about Him demanding control of your life, about His being a King, they don't see him as a threat. A gentle, loving Savior anyone can accept but the mass of men cry, "We will not have a Lord. We will not have a Master. We will not have a King." It was the message of King Jesus that troubled Herod. It was the message of King Jesus that stirred up the first century. In Acts 17 Paul and Silas had been preaching Jesus to the people in Thessalonica. The response is in Acts 17:4-7 *And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. 5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. 6 When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; 7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.* What was the message that stirred up this city? The same one that stirred up Jerusalem in Matthew 2, Jesus is King.

Now, honestly, unbelievers won't get upset over us preaching about Jesus loving everyone. But when we say, "Christ is King over what we you eat and drink. Christ is King over the education of our children, over what we believe and what we teach." When we start imposing the Kingly rule of Jesus over a person's sexual conduct, over his language, over his worship habits, over his body, over his mind, over his wallet, then you will see how people react to Christ. They will hate Him no less than did Herod. They are as the kings and rulers of the earth in Psalm two where it says Psalm 2:2,3 *The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!* They want nothing of a new king. But unlike Herod, men today don't need to kill him. They

can just ignore him, forget about Him, block His lordship from their minds. Why? They will have no King. Some are too proud; some are too cowardly. They love ease. They say, “Don’t bring that religion in here, it just causes conflict. One believes this, another believes that. We’ll just have trouble in the family if we get religion into it.” And that’s right. There can only be one King and He opposes all opponents to that crown. Trouble, yes, may arise but if you will ignore the truth to avoid trouble you’re a fool. Because one great day every eye shall see King Jesus in His glory, every knee will bow before Him. Herod will stand to be judged by the King he hated, and you will be judged by Him too. If you ignore His kingship now you will regret it later.

The absolute crown rights of Jesus Christ are a threat to every other king. You, like Herod, are a king are you not? In your own tiny domain. In the book of Judges it says repeatedly that there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Who was king? Everybody ruled his own little life, followed his own law. Is that what you do? Christ says, “I am King.” How will you respond to His claim? Like Herod or like the wise men? Matthew tells us also about how they responded to the coming of the King. They responded in a completely different way than did Herod, but for the same reason. They understood who Jesus was. They did three things:

First of all, they sought Him. They searched for Him. It says in verse one that these men came from the east, obviously from some distance, in search of the newborn king. These men were magi, men noted for their expertise in astrology and medicines. In their own cultures, no doubt, considered *wise men*. Where people got the idea that they were kings I’ll never know. But it is a good possibility that they were Medes who had learned of the great Jewish books in Babylon. And now they had come to search for the long awaited Jewish king foretold by the prophets centuries before. Their search was prompted by a strange star and confirmed by their studies in Daniel. The time for the Jewish King had come. And these men had left everything to search for Him. They sought Him diligently, with great effort. They came from afar, they investigated, they studied in order to find Jesus. And I think we should learn from this. The Lord says, “Seek me with all your heart.” This may take work and effort. It did for the magi who knew little of Jesus. But today, in what we think of as a culture of intellectual integrity you can hardly talk a secular scholar into just reading the gospels. I’ve spoken to people who want to argue religion with me and tell me about how they’ve thought things through and they poo-poo Jesus, but when I ask if they have ever read the Bible, they say, “Uh, well, no.” So, I challenge them just to read the gospel of Luke and they won’t do it. Here this book has sold more than 10 times more copies than any other book ever

written. It is hailed by many to be the word of God. It forms the basis of western civilization and intelligent people who consider themselves open minded won't even bother to read it. And they have the nerve to call Christians unscientific and close-minded.

You know what is even more troublesome is that some Christians who call Jesus Lord and King and Savior and Master - you don't even seek Him yourself. You don't study to learn of Christ. You make not effort to learn what He was like or what He taught. You don't go out of your way to draw near unto Him. What a rebuke these magi are to the lazy agnostic and the lazy Christian! These men studied and took great pains to find the King. And what they did they obviously did promptly. When they saw His star - they came. They didn't piddle around or wait till next year. This was too important, so they came immediately. Why did they do what they did? They understood who Jesus was and that He was and is a very special King. They sought Him and wise men still seek Him.

They searched and found, and when they did they rejoiced and 11 *After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.* This is a far cry from what Herod wanted to do. They worshipped Christ Jesus. Why? Because they understood who He was. They knew He was worthy of worship. And how I pray that God would give us in this place such worshippers who take the time to kneel before the King in adoring worship. Too many of us are like the priests and the scribes mentioned in verse 4. These men knew the Scriptures. They knew the place was Bethlehem - but they did not worship. They had knowledge about Christ but no heart for Christ. They read but did not worship. Some of you are like them and I say it to your shame. Wise men still worship Him.

And notice they worshipped Christ not Mary. If there was ever a time to worship Mary this was it. But to do so would be idolatry. In fact, if you think about it, if the baby Jesus was just a baby, just a man, even if he was just a man destined to be king - the worship of the magi would have been idolatry. The Scriptures say, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." But the magi, whose worship receives the commendation of God knew this - why then did they worship Jesus? Because they understood who He was - the King of Kings, even God Himself in the flesh. Wise men still worship Him.

After they worshipped it says 11b *opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.* They gave him gifts. It says they opened up their treasures. Have you

done that? Have you opened your treasures to the Lord? What are your treasures? Your money? Your time? Your family? Have you opened up and given them to Christ or are you holding them, grasping them with a clinched fist. Open up and let go. Follow the magi. They brought out their best for the King. Do you know why? Because they understood who He is, that He is a worthy King.

You see what both Herod and the magi understood is that Jesus is a King. That's why His birth caused such a stir. The trouble started as soon as He was born and it hasn't stopped. Lying in His manger Jesus had all Jerusalem in a tizzy and when He lay in a tomb the same thing occurred. The rulers of this age tried to kill Him as a babe and when He finally died they put a military guard over his tomb to make sure He stayed that way. But He didn't. Do you know why? Because He is King. Do you understand that? He doesn't come asking you to take Him as Savior or Friend. He comes demanding your allegiance. But Christ is not the same to all men. At least He gets different responses. In II Corinthians 2 Paul describes the message of Christ as a sweet aroma to those who believe. But to those who are perishing it is an aroma of death. But there are really three categories among those who react to Christ's birth. The reaction of the Herods, the reaction of the magi, and the reaction of those who don't understand who He is. The world's majority may be in the third group. But you aren't. For you the third is no longer an option. You must choose the way of Herod and hate Christmas or you may choose the way of the wise men - seek Him, worship Him, give Him your all. - Prayer-