

THE COMING OF CHRIST

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Matthew 2:1-4,7-8,11-12,16 ***“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 in the east and have come to worship him.’ 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 Christ (Messiah) was to be born...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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.’...On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him...And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route...When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.”***

Christmas is an event that has changed human history. God’s Son was born as a human. The Christ of our faith was born as Jesus of Nazareth. Then, as now, people react differently to this news. On Christmas Eve, we considered the reactions of Joseph, Mary, the Innkeeper, and the First Visitors. In the presence of the Christ-child, they had reactions that mirrored our own.

Joseph was afraid. His world was turned upside down. One minute he is engaged with dreams of the future. The next minute, an angel in his dream, is telling him that his virgin fiancée is pregnant... and that the baby is to be the Messiah! Being “righteous”, Joseph wants to do right by God, right by Mary, and right by his family. The angel told him not to be afraid, because Joseph was afraid!

Mary was feeling uncomfortable. Socially uncomfortable, as all the accusing eyes were aimed at her unmarried belly. Physically uncomfortable, as she traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, seventy miles by some form of animal when she was obviously pregnant. Giving birth in a barn. Uncomfortable might be an understatement for how Mary was feeling.

The Innkeeper was occupied. He/she was not evil, just too busy and too full. Occupied.

The First Visitors in Matthew were the Magi...in Luke, they were the shepherds. They all worshiped...they were all were awestruck. The shepherds took their amazement out to the streets, told the story of being with Jesus and other people were amazed as well. Awestruck.

The Incarnation of God in the baby Jesus leaves people: afraid (not knowing what was to come), uncomfortable (aware of guilt and shame), occupied (with all the things that need to be done), or awestruck (knowing Jesus is the very Son of God). But there are at least two other responses: indifference and anger.

Herod was angry. Actually Herod was ***“disturbed”*** and ***“furious”***. And Herod took it out on everybody! Herod murdered those in his own family to control his throne. Herod was not a God fearing person...or godly in any way. He knew his subjects well enough to know that the Messiah was expected, but he did not know the Scriptures. And when the Magi did not return so he could eliminate Jesus...Herod lashed out like a madman with a disturbing fury.

I want you to briefly see three things: 1) God’s plans are not thwarted by madmen; 2) the slaughter of the children was Herod’s fault...it reminds us of why Christ came; and 3) all humans, no matter how powerful, will die...(v.19) ***“Herod died”***. Herod’s reign came to an end.

Herod never came into the presence of Jesus. Some people never do. Just last weekend, I read some articles and letters to the editor written by some angry people. Angry that a Christmas tree would be in our school. Angry that a Nativity scene was on the White House lawn. Angry when people say “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays”. And it struck me that these angry people have never been in the presence of Jesus...never knowing that the Incarnation is like no other occasion...so they get hung up on trees and consumerism and actual birthdates and how pagan rituals were “Christianized” in what has become Christmas. They get so worked up over Christmas that they don’t see Christ...or maybe since they don’t see Christ they don’t understand Christmas.

Indifference was the other feeling. Look at the crowd...with the Shepherds the crowd is “excited” and with Herod they are “disturbed”. They are fickle. Their excitement does not take them to the manger – and their “disturbed” feeling does not bring them to action. The crowd never comes to the Christ child...the heavenly host does...but not the crowd. We will see this same wishy-washiness during Holy Week when the same crowd will shout “Hosanna!” and “Crucify him!”

The crowds today, for the most part, do not get Christmas because they do not get Christ. Our community is full of people who heard the good news when they were children in Sunday school or heard the good news at a crusade or heard the good news from someone who was excited about Jesus...but that exciting news has faded into their memory. And our community is full of people who view baby Jesus on par with Frosty the Snowman or the menorah and get disturbed at whoever may try to tell them otherwise. Crowds are fickle (that’s why you don’t run with them). They are fickle because they are indifferent. John 1:4-5 says ***“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”***

Friends, I want you to understand that the world Jesus was born into was a hurting, broken world where horrible things can and do happen. But even in the midst of the worst of this world...like genocide...God’s light shines forth...God’s hope and help comes to those who will receive Christ. Let Christ Jesus shine into whatever darkens your heart or makes you angry at God...

Friends, I also want you to understand that it makes all the difference what you believe about Christ. That Jesus of Nazareth, a real person born into this real world, is the Christ of our faith...God’s own Son come to get through to us about God, come to deal with all that separates us from a relationship with the Almighty, come that we might live now and forevermore. Let Christ Jesus make that difference in your life that frees you from indifference to God and to others.