

Christmas – Threatened, Indifferent or Worshipper

When you or I hear the word ‘Christmas’ or think about Christmas time what comes to mind? On what do we focus our attention? Is it family reunion, friends, presents, food, or Christ and all He means to us? Or a combination of these, with varying emphasis on the different things mentioned here?

For many who don’t want anything to do with the Christ of Christmas it’s just a ‘happy holiday’ with food and festivities, and for some it’s just an occasion to get together to eat, drink, exchange gifts and be merry – oh yes, and possibly to follow tradition and attend a Christmas service to sing a few carols, hoping that the service does not go on for too long or the turkey will be spoilt.

But for true worshippers, Christmas is the time when our full attention is directed towards thinking about and celebrating the greatest gift of all time – Christ – the gift of the One who brings Life. While there’s nothing wrong with family reunions, food and exchanging gifts at this time, the foremost priority for true worshippers is to point all the people and activities towards the worship of Christ.

In the passage of scripture we are about to read from Matthew 2:1-16 concerning the event of the birth of the Christ Child, in response to the fact of who He is and His birth, we will find three different types of people – the threatened, the indifferent and the true worshippers. As we read, let’s look out for these different types, and after reading we will see what we can learn concerning each of them and how this relates to us today.

Matt 2:1-16 ... *“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘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.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For from you will come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’*

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 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.’ After hearing the king, they went on their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over the place where the Child was to be found. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And after being warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

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 stay there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him.’ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of

Herod; this happened so that what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent men and killed all the boys who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi."

So we see that the three different types of people are:

1. **The threatened** – represented by Herod the king and “all Jerusalem with him” (v. 3). The very conspicuous wise men from a distant country have arrived in Jerusalem and have been asking around for where they may find the new born King of the Jews. The people of the city are tentative and fearful about this matter as they don't want to ruffle the feathers of the Romans who would not want to hear that the Jews had someone who may challenge the sovereignty of the Roman Emperor or disturb the current status quo. So off they go and tell King Herod about these foreigners and their mission.

Caesar Augustus was the Roman emperor and in charge of all things in the Roman Empire, but he did permit Herod to be king over Judea in a subservient way. Even though he was only token king over Judea Herod enjoyed being the local “boss” and did not like the idea of someone else dethroning him – this “King of the Jews” he heard about. So he quietly calls for the scribes and chief priests who confirm that the birth of such a King is mentioned in the scriptures. That's what ‘troubled’ him, and something he would make sure didn't happen. So he calls in the wise men to find out the timing and other details of the child's birth so that he can make plans to get rid of this child.

How familiar does this sound! The radical rabid left wing who will do everything to shut Christ and Christianity down. They have removed manger scenes from Christmas displays, and even refuse to refer to the occasion as Christmas and instead call it a ‘happy holiday’. They stand for everything the Bible, God's Word, declares is evil. They are ‘killing’ our children with their evil indoctrination. They are trying to turn lies into truths. They love their darkness and hate the Light. They also have a huge band of gutless followers who will bow to them and their radical rabid policies just to keep the peace and be ‘politically correct’.

2. **The Indifferent** – represented by the chief priests and scribes (v.4). The religious mob. Even though they knew the scriptures in their heads they displayed no desire or action showing any interest in finding and worshipping the promised King. They simply went away to continue “business as usual”.

Again, how familiar this sounds! The modern day religious mob. People who have read the word of God, they know the truth, attended Sunday services, listened to preaching and prophecy but after they walk out of the service it's all put aside and their minds are flooded with the things of the world. They busy themselves all day with everything and anything but Christ, with the exception of the quickly snatched daily devotion and attendance of a service on Sundays. Hearers of the Word but not doers of the Word. They know *about* Christ but do not intimately know Him. Self-righteous, good people, but not what God calls true worshippers. Their priorities in life show who they really are.

3. **The true worshippers** – represented by the magi (v.1, 2). A group of wise men from the East, Gentiles, specialising in astrology, medicine, natural science and possibly who had access to and had read the scriptures too. The fact that God warned them in dreams meant it was possible their journey was a result of both their diligent research and a revelation from God concerning the birth of the “King of the Jews”. These were a group of men who had really ‘seen’ and appropriated the truth and as a result had given up all to make a distant journey in order to worship the Christ Child. Their priority was to find Him and worship him.

Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were very valuable and showed the depth of their ‘worth ship’ of the King. They also, providentially, provided a means by which Joseph and Mary and their child could live in Egypt for the years it would take before Herod died.

Another group who believed and acted were the shepherds of Luke 2:8-20. The angel appeared to them and told them of the birth of the Christ child and immediately they left their sheep and went to worship Him. Nothing was more important to them than to find and worship the Christ child.

These groups certainly provide us with examples to follow if we want to be considered to be true worshippers.

‘You cannot see faith, but you can see the footprints of the faithful’ (Dennis Anderson)

Now, we started off with questions concerning Christmas and the significance of this celebration. So let us follow this line of thought by examining a few more scriptures, and see where our hearts and priorities lie.

Matt 1:18-25 ... *“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, since he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had thought this over, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: “Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he named Him Jesus.*

Isa 9:6 ... *“For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Has this truth sunk in? Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, placed His seed in a human virgin and she gave birth to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God put on flesh. He became man to identify fully with us and to redeem us from sin and shame and to give us His life. He was born of a virgin as a babe, grew to manhood, revealed to us what man containing the divine nature looked and behaved

like, and then He went to the cross in our place to save us from sin and in rising from the dead gave us eternal life.

Just consider the immensity of this! God becomes a man. Holy conception. A virgin made pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Has this really sunk in? Do we believe, I mean really believe this mighty act of a loving God?

John 3:16 ... *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life."*

1 John 5:11-12 ... *"And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."*

Consider Isaiah's words

Isa 53:1 ... ***"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"***

Throughout His Word and by revelation of the Holy Spirit God has given us the prophecies and truth concerning His plans for us, to be redeemed, to live by His life and for His glory, but what have we done with all of this? Have we truly believed, and has this transformed us into worshippers?

Eternal God steps into 'finite time', born of a virgin as a baby who grows to manhood, to take our place on the cross to redeem us and give us life. Has this grabbed our attention?

Virgin birth! Think of it. Humanly impossible, but a supernatural reality, an undisputable fact of history.

God becoming man! Think of it. God the Son taking off His omnipresence, His omnipotence, His omniscience and lowering Himself to be made into a man. The Creator putting aside His incommunicable attributes and becoming part of His creation.

God as man dying on the cross in our place to pay the price for our sin! Think of it. What mercy, what grace!

God as man not only dying in our place on the cruel cross, but also rising from the dead to give us life and victory over sin! Think on it. And He calls us joint heirs.

Does this not stimulate in us absolute awe for such a loving, gracious and merciful heavenly Father? Does this cause us to fall on our knees in worship and thanksgiving? Does He, the Christ of Christmas, have and hold our attention? Is He the top priority in every aspect of our lives? Think on it.

Does He the Christ of Christmas cause us, like the wise men of old, to forsake our agenda and take up His no matter the cost to us?

... ***"Who has believed our report?"*** Is the reality of Christmas and what it truly stands for simply something we just mentally acknowledge and then let our thoughts be filled with the temporal, or is it something we ***believe*** deep within our hearts, something that has our full attention, that transforms us and compels us to worship Christ?

I trust we are not like the ‘threatened’ ones denying Christ, or the ‘indifferent’ religious mob going about business as usual ...*“conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power”* (2 Tim 3:4-5).

I trust we are those who truly believe and stand continually in absolute awe and admiration of Him and are true worshippers of our Lord Jesus Christ. I trust that’s what ‘Christmas’ means to us. I trust it’s a time when we are driven from deep within by a love and gratitude so strong that we have no thought but to give God the worship due to Him for His indescribable Gift, Christ Jesus our Lord.

May I remind you once more of the words of Dennis Anderson:

‘You cannot see faith, but you can see the footprints of the faithful’

We end with these words:

Eph 1:3-4 ... ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”***

Jude 24-25 ... *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.”*