

Shepherds, Wise Men, And Herods

Luke 2; Matthew 2 NIV

It is a time of great rejoicing in the palace, for a prince has just been born. Near the throne there is a lively discussion going on as the king's advisers are making their suggestions concerning the best way to announce the wonderful news. They have suggested some elaborate ways to publicize and celebrate this great event.

All but one have expressed their opinions, and the king turned to him and asked, "How about you? Do you have any ideas? What do you suggest?" "Well," he said, "I think that we should send a messenger out at night into the fields to tell some shepherds about it and let them spread the news."

Do you think the king would have liked that idea? And yet, that was God's way of announcing Jesus' birth. God's ways are certainly not our ways, are they?

Listen to this part of the Christmas story: **And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.** ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you:

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (Luke 2:8-15)

When we hear about shepherds coming to the manger and seeing Jesus, it gives us hope and peace. If shepherds are important to God, then we are important, too. God loves the common people.

Now let's look at another part of the Christmas story:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east^[b] and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ^[c] was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'^[d]"

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east^[e] went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of

incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (Matthew 2:1-12)

The story of the wise men represents the rich, learned, and educated coming to worship Jesus. The message of the shepherds and the wise men is that all are valuable to God.

Most of the scenes of the Christmas story are of love, joy, and worship. Then there is Herod.

Herod's scenes in the Christmas are full of darkness, hatred, and death. 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...**(Matthew 2:16)

Scenes like that do not belong in a story of love, joy, and worship. But that is what happened.

Why do people react like Herod? Why are some people filled with love and happiness, while others are filled with darkness and despair?

What can we learn from the shepherds, the wise men, and Herod?

One thing we can learn is to always be ready for a message from God. The shepherds and the wise men were ready for a message, Herod was not.

Bethlehem was not far from Jerusalem. Some of the sheep raised near Jerusalem would be used as sacrifices in the Temple.

The families who would come a great distance to sacrifice would purchase a lamb rather than bring one on the long journey.

The shepherds were very familiar with lambs being taken to the Temple for sacrifice. Who better to receive the message that the Lamb had been born that would take away the sin of the world?

Unlike the shepherds who were not great theologians, the Magi had studied the prophecies of Israel and were ready for a message. They were waiting and hoping, and when they saw this unique star, they were ready to make the journey to worship this new King.

But, Herod was not ready. Why didn't Herod see the star? It was surely bright enough. Why didn't Herod hear the angels? They were surely loud enough. Was the star just for the Magi and the angels just for the shepherds? Maybe.

Or could it be that Herod didn't see and hear because he didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear. He wasn't ready for a message from God. Herod was like a selfish child who would not share toys with anyone.

Not only were the shepherds and Magi ready to receive a message from God,

they were ready to respond to that message.

The shepherds said, "Let's go see this thing that has happened." They didn't sit around the campfire and debate the possibilities.

And the Magi: all the preparation and supplies and time away from home. What did the neighbor's think?

"Where ya going?"

"We are going to follow that star."

"What will you find when you get there?"

"A King."

"What's his name?"

"We don't know. We are going to follow that star, find the king, and worship him."

Sounds a little bit like building a big boat in your back yard, filling it with animals, and waiting for a big rain, doesn't it?

The shepherds and Magi received the message and responded to the message, but Herod wanted no part of a new king only to destroy him. He would not humble himself to anyone.

The shepherds and the Magi were ready for a message, responded to the

message, and were willing to participate in the cost of the message.

Who took care of the sheep when the shepherds went to see what had just happened? These were not rich men. They couldn't afford to lose their flocks to thieves or wolves. Did they take turns going? Did they draw straws to see who would go and who would stay? Or did they leave the sheep trusting that they would be protected by the one who sent the message? That would take faith, wouldn't it?

Although the Magi appear to be wealthy men, this trip cost them something. It cost them time away from home; maybe they were business men, either closing their business while they were away, or trusting someone to care for it.

This trip would be long and dangerous, but they were willing to share in the cost.

Not Herod. He clings to all that is his; his throne, his gold and silver, power and prestige. He was afraid he was going to lose it all.

Every year we preach the same message: God came to earth as a baby.

He surrendered His glory and His power. He became a baby. He walked among us. He breathed our dust. He let us persecute Him and spit on Him and drive nails into His hands and His feet. That's surrender.

Have we heard the message so often that it has grown old?

No matter what you think of Christmas with all its bells and whistles, every year we are reminded of the Christmas that divides. Every year, a line is drawn.

There are people who are like shepherds and wise men coming to Jesus to worship Him. And there are people like Herod who stand hard and cold, resisting all that God is trying to do in their lives.

God wants to take all the Herods and make them into shepherds and wise men. But that can only happen when they are willing for it to happen. When they are prepared to receive His message, respond to his message, and participate in the cost, whatever that cost might be.