

## Christmas Eve 2002

Tomorrow we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Tonight I'd like for you to quietly reflect on the question our little drama posed. Now that you know He is God, what will you do?

The Christmas story gives us a picture of several different characters. All of them heard of the birth and all of them responded in some way. They heard that God was born and had to decide how they would react.

*Luke 2:8-20 (NIV) 8 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 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." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

It is God's way to go to the lowly first. They are the most receptive. Shepherds of that day were the lowest of professions. They were so distrusted that they could not testify in a court of law. Yet, God sent His angels to them first to declare the greatest announcement ever - *a Savior has been born to you*. The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were the lower cast of society, but they were the ones God reached out to. Perhaps that is because they are humble enough to recognize their need for a Savior. The Savior was born to them. If you feel like the bottom step on society's ladder, I have good news for you. You are the type of person God seeks out with the message of salvation in His Son.

And how did they respond. They immediately went to see. They spread the word. They believed the message of the angels and glorified and praised God. Looks like God picked the right people to break the news.

And not too long after, two elderly people within the religious system of that day were shown by the Spirit of God that God had come into the world. You can read about them in Luke 2:25-40. The Spirit of God revealed to them that the Messiah was coming. They hung out in the Temple all the time because they didn't want to miss Him. When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus in, they knew He was the One. Simeon uttered a prophecy about Him. Anna went around telling everyone that He was the One. They were after God with all their heart, and they found Him. They represent the people who are desperate to know truth and surrender their lives to it once they find it.

Then there were the Jewish religious leaders and Herod. The wise men came to Herod, thinking he could tell them where the new king was born. Herod the Great had already murdered a wife, three sons, and many others because he feared losing his throne. This was one of the greatest architects and at the same time one of the most paranoid men to ever lead a government.

*Matt 2:1-8 (NIV) 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi 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 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 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." 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."*

Sly as a dog, Herod was plotting to figure the child's age so that he could murder him. Herod represents people who want to be in control. They fear that Christ will take away their position and control over their lives. It is sad for them that they think so, for Jesus has come to give us a fuller and more meaningful life. He is not a threat, for He will lay down His life for Herod and for all those who would rather kill Him than serve Him. For all Herod's treachery to survive and reign, he surrendered his kingdom in death that very year. More treacherous than Herod is the lie that we can save our own lives and power.

There are the religious leaders who told the wise men where the Savior was born but too proud to follow them to the fulfillment of the prophecies. "After all, how can we follow those Gentiles to find the Messiah?" There are those who know He is God and yet cling in pride to their own religious ways.

Then there are the wise men. They probably studied the writings of the prophet Daniel in the region of ancient Babylon. Daniel had predicted the time of the Messiah's birth. They were watching and saw the sign of the star. They journeyed a great distance so that they could worship. They were Gentiles. It should have been a sign to the Jews that the prophecies were being fulfilled. God was reaching out to all men. They came to worship and present the newborn King with gifts. Matt 2:9-11 (NIV) *9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east 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.* There are those outside the church system who are looking for God. Don't be so surprised if God reveals Himself to them. He is reaching out to all men. They responded as man should. They bowed in submission and worshipped.

Shepherds, spiritual seekers, King, religious leaders, and wise men each discovered Jesus. I think there is a little of all of them in us. Like the Shepherds we are going about our business. We don't consider ourselves extra special, but this wonderful news has reached us. There is a bit of the seeking heart in us, like Simeon and Anna. We fear losing our power and authority to Jesus like King Herod did. Like the religious leaders we are often too proud to respond when someone shares what they have found. We certainly hope there is some of the wise men in us, that longs to worship and give our gifts. Our humanity shares all the expressions of these people who learned a child was born in Bethlehem.

Each of these people made a decision on how they would react to the news. How they reacted had a great deal to do with the course they had set for their lives. The humility of the shepherds enabled them to respond. The devotion of Simeon and Anna was rewarded with revelation. The fear of Herod and his greed for power controlled him. The pride of the religious leaders hindered them. The desire to see the plan of God drove the wise men on. Christmas is a good time of year to examine what is motivating us. What have we done with the revelation that God became a man for us? How will you respond? Perhaps you see your motivation for daily life reflected in one of those that you do not admire. Jesus was born to change hearts, to set captives free. Will you let Him free you tonight? All it takes is the willingness to recognize your human condition comes with king Herod and religious leader disposition. Then you know you need a heart change, and it was for that purpose Jesus was born. He longs to give you a humble heart like the shepherds, a seeking heart like Simeon and Anna, a worshipping heart like that of the wise men. Jesus was born to die in your place so you could have a new heart. Are you willing to receive the new life He offers you? Now that you know He is God, what will you do?