

REACTIONS TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS

First off, I want to thank those of you who attended our special Christmas service on Wednesday evening. The kids did a great job, we had a number of guests, and quite a few people have watched it on Facebook, too!

Second, I want to thank you for actually listening when I preach! None of you have taken it upon yourself to remove the 3 kings from the manger scene of a certain church in town so I commend you!

On a more serious note, we've spent the last three Sundays looking at the wise men's visit of the young Christ as found in Mt 2. We've looked at **who** they were...and **when** they probably visited Christ...and **how** they sought Christ. Last week we moved from some of the **unknowns**—like **how many** there were and **where** they were from—to the **one truth we cannot miss**: that **the wise men sought Jesus so they could worship Him!**

What did their worship of Christ **look like**?

It was **about Christ**—not them!

It was **God-focused**—not “gushy feeling” focused!

And it was about what they could **give to God**—not what they could **get from God!**

And although we don't know exactly **what** the wise men understood about Christ and **why** they worshipped Him, we do know why God **wants us to worship Him**.

First, because He is God!

Mt 1:23 “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall **call His name Emmanuel**, which being interpreted is, **God with us.**”

Second, because He died for us!

Mt 1:21 “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt **call His name Jesus**: for He shall save his people from their sins.” How does Jesus save people from the **penalty of their sins!**

By **paying our penalty for us!** He was the Lamb of God—**the slain Lamb**—which taketh away the sins of the world! And because of what Jesus did for us, God desires that He be worshipped.

Please turn once again to Matthew 2 and follow along as again read verses 1-11. This morning—instead of just focusing on the wise men—I want us to consider the **reactions of those** that heard that Jesus was born.

Why should we look at how people **2000 plus years** ago reacted to Jesus' birth? Because people haven't changed—and the same reactions are taking place today! More importantly than that, though, is for us to consider how **you and I as individuals** have reacted to the news of Jesus' birth.

So what were the reactions of those who had heard that Jesus was born? We have 3 here in this passage—4 if you count the seekers and worshippers as being separate. We're going to look at the first two together.

1. Seekers vs the Neglecters

The **seekers**, of course, were the **wise men**. Notice the end of verse 1 “...there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”

But what about the “**neglecters**”? Who are they? Although they are not quite as obvious as the seekers, you may remember that we talked about them a few weeks ago. Notice vs 4-5. The neglecters, then, were the **chief priests and scribes**. They had the truth—but did not value the truth! They knew where Christ would be born—but didn't care to go seek Him or worship Him!

First let's consider... A. The similarities between seekers and neglecters

What did the seekers and neglecters have **in common**?

i. Both had heard of Jesus' birth

How did the **wise men know** of Jesus' birth? Not overly important because God chose not to tell us. But they **did know** and came from the east to find Him so they could worship Him. What about the scribes? If they **hadn't heard** before this—which is doubtful—they certainly heard it **from the wise men** when they came looking for Him!

ii. Both had a knowledge of God

It is important to realize that God puts within every one of us an awareness that **He exists!** Theologians call it a “God-consciousness.” Does the Bible teach that? Yes, it does! We'll come back to Mt 2 in a little bit but take your Bibles and turn to Romans 1.

--vs 19 “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.”

--“Manifest” here means “evident, known, plainly recognized”

--“Shewed it unto them” is similar: “to be plainly recognized and thoroughly understood”

In other words, there are things about God that are **plain to us**—they are understood by us—because God has made them **plain to us!**

--vs 20 expands on that thought. “For the invisible things of Him”—God and His attributes—

--“from the creation of the world”—**since** the creation of the world

--“are clearly seen”—are obvious

--“being understood by the things that are made”—**from** the things that are made

--“even His eternal power and Godhead”—His power and divine nature

--“so that they are without excuse.”

One translation reads like this: “For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (NIV).

Both the seekers and neglecters, then, had heard of Christ—and had within them a knowledge of God!

Next, let's consider.... B. The differences between seekers and neglecters

The first is quite obvious: **i. Their response to the knowledge of God**

What **did they do** with the knowledge they had?

The **seekers** sought Christ so they could worship Him—the **neglecters** did not! In fact, we see the attitude of **the neglecters** here in Romans 1.

--In vs 19, God plainly reveals to mankind certain things about Himself. In vs 20, we see that two of those things are His power and His divine nature which we see from what He has created. The result? Man is without excuse!

--Now vs 21. “Because that, when they **knew God**, they glorified Him not as God”

They **had a knowledge** of God—seen in verses 19 and 20—but they did not **acknowledge** God as God; they did not **glorify** Him—they did not **worship** Him—as they should have.

--Now vs 28 “And even as they did not like to **retain God in their knowledge...**”

From this passage, then, we see that God creates within us a knowledge of Himself—and that people **react differently** to that inborn knowledge.

--There are some that **seek to understand more** about what God hath placed within them—like the wise men. --But there are also those that **neglect—and reject**—that knowledge, like the scribes!

Back to Mt 2. There is one **other difference** I would like to point out between the seekers and the neglecters, and it is this:

ii. Their response to Word of God

Just as the wise men and scribes responded differently to the **God-consciousness** within them, they also responded differently to the **Word of God**. Let's consider first the response of the **chief priests and scribes**.

--In vs 4, Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes together to find out where Christ would be born.

--In vs 5, they give Herod the answer: “In Bethlehem of Judaea.” How did they know that? Because they had already been there to visit Him, right? No—because the answer was found in the book of the prophet Micah!

Micah 5:2 “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, **from everlasting.**”

I find it interesting that the chief priests and scribes didn't give **all of** Micah 5:2 to Herod. Both accounts are inspired, however, so both appear in God's Word the way God wants them to—there is no contradiction or error. The difference, in my opinion, shows the heart of the scribes.

They got the **place right**—it was Bethlehem. They even got the **purpose right**—He was to be a Governor—a ruler—over Israel. But they missed the point of who the **person was**—the One “whose goings forth have been from of old, **from everlasting.**”

There is only one Being who is **from everlasting**—and that is God! They should have easily connected Micah 5:2 with **Isaiah 9:6** “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the **government shall be upon His shoulder**: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, **The everlasting Father**, The Prince of Peace.”

What about the **wise men**? What was their response to the Word of God?

They had the **place** wrong—that is why they went to **Jerusalem** first and not Bethlehem! But when they learned from Herod the **right place**...who learned **from the scribes**...who learned **from the Word of God**—“they departed”! There was no delay; there was no double-checking—they simply went! And when they got there, they did what they said they were going to do—they worshipped Him!

What about you? C. Are you a seeker—or a neglecter?

According to Romans 1 that we looked at earlier, **you have within you** what all mankind has—an **inborn knowledge of God**! Don't pat yourself on the back for **believing in God**—everyone does! Some choose to suppress that knowledge—they do not want to “retain God in their knowledge” Romans 1:28 says—but deep down they **know there** is a God—and that they are accountable to Him!

The question, then, **is not**: ‘Do you believe in God?’ **The question is**: ‘Do you **seek God**?’ Have you done what **God's Word** says to find Christ...and be forgiven...and have eternal life in heaven—or do you depend upon your own opinions or the opinions of others?

Notice Jesus' words in **Mt 7:13-14**: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for **wide is the gate**, and **broad is the way**, that leadeth to destruction, and **many there be which go in thereat**:¹⁴ Because strait is the gate, and **narrow is the way**, which leadeth unto life, and **few there be** that find it.”

Why is the **gate wide** that leads to destruction? Why do **many go through that gate** instead of the one that leads to life? Because they **neglect—and reject**—what God's Word says about being forgiven!

Oh may that not be you!

Not only do we have the **seekers and neglecters**, we also have haters and worshippers! But since haters and worshippers have **nothing in common**—and we looked extensively at worshippers last week—we're going to zero in on... **2. The haters**

I realize it is not very uplifting to talk about **haters of Jesus** on the Sunday after Christmas, but there are a few reasons we need to do so. 1) It is here in the text

2) Just as there were haters of Jesus—like Herod—**back then**, there are haters of Jesus—like Herod—**right now**! 3) Jesus warned us that just as the world hated Him, it would also hate us.

A. Herod's hatred toward God's Son

How strong was Herod's hatred of Christ?

--In vs 8, he told the wise men to **report back to him** because he wanted to know where Jesus was so he could worship him also. That was a lie, of course, because in vs 16 we see his “true colors.” “Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under...”

Barnes makes an interesting observation about Herod's anger: "He [Herod] expected to send an executioner and kill Jesus alone. But, since he was disappointed in this, he thought he would accomplish the same thing, and be sure to destroy Him, if he sent forth and put all the children in the place to death. This is an illustration of the power of anger. It stops at nothing.... He that has a wicked heart, and indulges in anger, knows not where it will end, and will commonly commit far more evil than he at first intended."

No wonder God's Word warns us so much about the danger of anger!

There are at least three things that should be understood that are not specifically stated.

1) Probably only male children were killed. Since Herod wanted to rid himself of the King of the Jews, the female children were no threat to him, so he probably left them alone.

2) Herod himself did not do the killing; he undoubtedly had his soldiers do it.

The third thing that should be understood is this:

B. Satan was behind Herod's hatred of God's Son

This was **more than** just an angry, jealous tyrant who wanted to protect his throne no matter what—**Satan himself** was behind this attack to **destroy Christ!** How do we know? Because God **tells us through John** in Revelation 12! We don't have time to look in depth at the context, but there is enough here to put the pieces together. **Rev 12:4b-5** "...and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. ⁵And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne."

The "woman" is actually the **nation of Israel**—not Mary—but you can certainly tell from what I have here that the "man child" is Christ. We also know that "the dragon" is Satan and he is the one who wanted to "devour her child as soon as it was born."

Why did—and does—Satan hate Jesus so much and want Him destroyed? Because Satan has known since way back in the garden of Eden that one day he will be destroyed by the seed—the offspring—of the woman! Part of God's curse on Satan after he deceived Eve included these words in **Gen 3:15** "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." At exactly what point Satan understood that **Jesus was the seed** referred to in this verse is hard to tell, but he certainly was behind Herod's slaughter of all these baby boys!

And as mentioned earlier, Satan's hatred **for Jesus** doesn't end **with Jesus**—it is also directed **toward us!**

C. Satan—and the world—will hate God's children

Not a pleasant thought—but a needful reminder—especially in light of what is going on in our world today! **I Peter 5:8** reminds us that Satan is out to destroy us: "Be sober, be vigilant; because **your adversary the devil**, as a roaring lion, walketh about, **seeking whom he may devour:**"

Not only does Satan hate us—Jesus Himself warned us that the world will hate us. Please turn to John 15, beginning with vs 18. Follow along as I read through verse 20 (read). Hard to miss the warning, isn't it?

--end of vs 19 "...therefore the world hateth you."

--mid of vs 20 "...If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you..."

--vs 21 "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake..." Life won't be easy just because you belong to Christ!

--Look at John 16:2 "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Yikes! Those things did happen to most of the disciples!

Will the same happen to us? We don't know, do we? But we do know this—to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!

We also know this: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (**II Tim 3:12**).

How have you responded to the news that the Savior is born? I doubt we have any haters here, but we certainly could have "neglecters." And just know if you neglect knowing Christ, you are in reality rejecting Him!

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, don't just be a seeker of Christ—be a finder! He came to save His from our sins—and wants to save you from your sins—make sure you are saved! Why is the gate to destruction wide? Because people hold out hope that they can save themselves!
2. What about those of us that are saved? Far too many people that claim to have Christ don't seek Him and worship Him the way they once did. May God stir your hearts to whole-heartedly love Him and serve Him.
3. Lastly, the apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:13 “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” Don't be surprised by it—be prepared for it. Be the salt and light that God wants you to be in the place He has you.