

Matthew 2:1-12

Today is the 12th day of Christmas...Epiphany, the Gentile's Christmas...and we're Gentiles. According to the song, we should be giving "twelve drummers drumming" to the one we love. But chances are we stopped giving gifts twelve days ago. Christmas comes all too soon and leaves just as quickly. We put away the decorations, finish off our cookies, recycle the tree, and stand in the return line at the store. The most joyful time of the year is over.

But one thing we do not put away is the Christmas message. "Unto you is born a Savior!" is God's truth for us whether we're filled with Christmas joy, or frustrated with trying to pay off the Christmas bills. Just because stores have put away their Christmas wares and replaced them with Valentine's Day cards and candy, doesn't mean that we have to set aside the Christ-Child from our heart and mind. Even though radio stations have stopped playing Christmas music, we continue to rejoice with the song of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." If we in the church allow the world to tell us what we should be celebrating and how we should be feeling, then we are exchanging God's truth for a lie, and we are denying God's Word to us: Do not be conformed to the world.

The world has its own way of reacting to Christmas, and it has been this way for 2,000 years. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the people in the world reacted in various ways. There were those who were troubled by His birth. There were those who were not affected much at all by His birth. There were those who hated His coming and tried to destroy Him. And there were those, not of the world, who loved and worshipped Him. In Matthew 2 we see all four reactions.

One group heard about the birth of Christ, but their attitude was basically, "So what?" They did not make a big deal of it one way or another. They were the Chief Priests and Scribes. Herod came to them and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They answered, "Micah, the Prophet, says: In Bethlehem." And that's the extent of their interest in the birth of Jesus. No rushing to Bethlehem to find the Messiah. No joy expressed over the birth of the promised Savior. No anger either. Just, "Oh, here He is—you'll find the Christ in Bethlehem...it's about seven miles south of Jerusalem." They gave good directions to the Savior, but they did not follow their own directions.

And that is typical of the world today. Nearly everyone knows about the birth of Jesus Christ, but many are apathetic about Him. They display a "so what" attitude. They can give great directions to the church in town, but they themselves don't attend. They know that Jesus lived, suffered, and died on a cross; they know about Easter; but they are so wrapped up in themselves and living their life, that their reaction to the coming of the Savior is "no big deal." This is the first group.

Then we have the second group—the people of Jerusalem. They were troubled by the birth of Jesus. "What's this...a new king?" It bothered them. Although they claimed to be God's people, they really did not want God interfering with their life. Herod was a rotten king, but at least they were used to him. Things weren't good under his rule, but they had grown accustomed to how things were.

Many today are also troubled by Jesus. They, too, wish He had never come. They have grown accustomed to a life apart from God, and they don't want His interference. They don't really like hearing the words of God; the thought of judgment and death frightens them. They claim to be God's people—"Oh, yes," they say, "we are a Christian nation;" and yet they rarely, if ever, go and listen to the words of Christ, and they don't want Christ's messengers to come and speak any word to them. They celebrate Christmas, but mostly for the giving and getting, and the eating, and the time off from work and school. If they sing a Christmas song it's usually one like "Jingle Bells," because although Jesus and His words are troubling, Santa Claus is not. This is the second group.

And then comes the third category—King Herod. Not only was he shaken by the birth of Jesus, he was angered over it. He secretly tried to destroy Him. But this should not surprise us. Herod, now sixty-six years old, had murdered several of his sons because he wanted to protect his right to the throne. He killed one of his ten wives for the same reason. When Herod murdered the baby boys in Bethlehem, seeking to destroy Jesus, this was nothing out of the ordinary for him. His whole life was one of lust, selfishness, and murder.

Now Herod really wasn't the "king," but only a puppet ruler. Marc Anthony had placed him on the throne. Herod ruled Judea but Rome controlled the strings. Herod was a puppet of Rome, but truthfully he was a puppet of Satan. Satan was trying to destroy Jesus through Herod. He was trying to prevent Jesus from coming to His people, and Herod was his tool. He did not succeed then, but he often succeeds today. Today Satan uses his "Herod's" to prevent Christ and His Word from coming to His people. Parents who prevent their children from hearing the words of Jesus are, like Herod, puppets of Satan. Congressmen and other leaders who pass and enforce laws that hinder the proclamation of Christ are Satan's "Herod's" today.

Now the fourth group were people in the world, but not of the world. The Wise Men also reacted to the birth of Jesus, and their reaction was one of joy and expectation. They sacrificed much to come and worship Him. They gave up time and money to find their way to the Savior; and they returned to their homes in peace and joy.

Four different groups of people—four varied reactions to the birth of Christ. But you know... Jesus was born not just for that last group, but for all four groups. Jesus came for those who don't even care that He came. He died for them too. Jesus came for those who are troubled at His coming. He even came for Herod who tried to kill Him, and He came for those, like Herod, who try to prevent His coming to others. And Jesus came also for those, like the Wise Men, who love and worship Him.

And so I have good news for you... no matter who you are; no matter how you have lived; no matter how you have reacted to Christ in the past, He was born for you. He came to be your Savior. He died for you, friend. Jesus didn't come just for those who love Him; He came for all—for those who hate Him; for those who ignore Him.

If your life has resembled those in the first group, who really didn't care too much that Christ was born; if you have lived as though Jesus did not matter too much, repent of your sins, because your Savior is here and He forgives you. If your life has resembled those in the second group; those troubled by Christ's coming; if you have turned away from Christ

and His Word, troubled in your heart by His words of Judgment, repent of your sins, for Jesus is not here to condemn you—He declares you to be forgiven. He was judged guilty for you, in your place. If your life has resembled Herod; if you have lived selfishly and lustfully; if you have prevented others from coming to Christ, repent of your sins—God is not angry with you; Jesus was born for you. He took your sins to His cross and died there for you. You are forgiven.

And if your life resembles the Wise Men who loved to come and worship Christ; if your desire, like theirs, is to give of your time and money to Jesus because He gave Himself for you, then rejoice that God has done this good work in you. The Wise Men did not come to Christ on their own; it was God who drew them by His star. And you are not Christians, you are not here today, nor do you come to God's altar—on your own. It is God, through His living Word who draws you to the Christ. You are not God's forgiven children because you resemble the Wise Men. Rather, because God has forgiven you in Christ, He causes you to live as wise men today.

Let the world react as it will to the birth of the Savior, but do not let the world affect how you react. What you once were, were people of the world, but baptized into Christ you are now God's people. As wise men, God draws you to hear the words of Jesus Sunday after Sunday. As wise men, God opens His Word to you in your home day after day. As wise men, God uses you to joyfully give your money for the work of His church. As wise men, God uses you to serve His church as you give your time to do the work that needs to be done. And as wise men, God allows you also to return to your homes today in peace and joy, because like them, you have come to worship Him who lived and died for you. Amen.