

## Where is the True Spirit of Christmas?

Matthew 2:1-12

- Charles Dickens has caught the attention of generations with his thoughtful rendering of a man who discovered the true spirit of Christmas
- I love “A Christmas Carol” - It is one of those movies that I look forward to seeing each year – (along with “It’s a Wonderful Life” and “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> St” and “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”)
- This morning I want us to focus on the true spirit of Christmas
- There are at least three attitudes toward Christmas revealed in our text for today
- These attitudes are represented in the responses of Herod, the Scribes, and the Wise Men

### I. Herod – The Spirit of Hostility

1. Herod stands as a symbol of the world
  - a. Separated from God
  - b. Living in darkness and unable to see the Light
  - c. Choosing darkness over the Light
2. Jesus came into a hostile environment
  - a. Herod was an Idumean Jew – descendent of Esau
  - b. With his background he knew something about the Scripture and the prophesies of the coming Messiah
  - c. The Bible says, “*Jesus came to His own, and His own received Him not*” (Jn 1:11)
  - d. The rulers tried to kill Him at His birth
  - e. Herod stands for the, evil, cruel, vindictive world system that is anti-God
  - f. A world where human life is cheap and where killing babies is not only accepted, but even expected
3. Herod died but his spirit lives on
  - a. To this day there are those who are offended by the idea of Jesus - even the mere mention of his name
  - b. The world system opposes spiritual truth and wants to erase every trace of Christ from public life
  - c. This group includes those who want to ban Christ from Christmas

- d. They want the lucrative monetary benefits of what Christmas has become, but they don’t want Christ
- e. In many ways it appears that the world has won
- f. But it may well be that more believers are taking Christmas more seriously now than ever before
- g. The true spirit of Christmas cannot be stopped no matter how many nativity scenes are removed from public areas or how many crosses are outlawed or how many stores have employees say “Happy holidays” rather than merry Christmas
- h. Herod would be proud – but the true spirit of Christmas is alive and well – Herod? Not so much!

**TRANSITION:** So, the first response to Christmas is hostility . . . the second response is -

### II. Scribes – The Spirit of Indifference

1. The scribes represent the religiously indifferent
2. Herod as an Idumean Jew had some knowledge –
  - a. But Herod was not a devout practitioner of the faith –
  - b. Herod was an unbeliever by choice
3. The Scribes on the other hand represent the religious establishment
  - a. They are the insiders who know all the facts . . . and do nothing about it
  - b. They could well be described as those who are “neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm” (Rev 2:15-16)
4. When Herod wanted to know where the baby was to be born, he called for the Scribes and they knew the answer!
  - a. The Scribes were the experts – the scholars – the interpreters
  - b. Scribes were originally those who copied the scrolls
  - c. They became not just copyists but teachers of the Law
  - d. They knew about the Messianic prophesies of the OT
  - e. The Scribes pointed Herod to the prophecy of Micah (5:2)

*“But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”*
5. They told him where to look - but didn’t care enough to investigate for themselves

- a. Bethlehem was only six miles from Jerusalem
- b. These students of the Bible had the chance to go greet the Christ-child
- c. But for them it was only an academic exercise
- d. They could have joined in the celebration of the coming of the Messiah prophesied by the prophets of old
- e. Instead they ignored His birth
- f. Who looks worse? Herod or the scribes?
- g. It seems to me that the scribes look worse –
  - 1) Herod, for all his excesses, at least acted consistently with his basic nature – Herod was angry and mean and small - he was an iron-fisted despot who had killed off his own family members because he feared they wanted his throne
  - 2) By contrast, the scribes knew the truth and did nothing about it

**TRANSITION:** Some are hostile like Herod – some are indifferent like the scribes – but some respond in the right way – in the right spirit like the Wise Men...

### III. Worship – Wise Men

- 1. The wise men had been on a journey – searching – desiring to know the truth about the new born King of the Jews
  - a. They had searched the night skies – astrologers
  - b. Having studied the night sky and having discovered the rising of a new star, they set out on their journey
  - c. According to the information given to Herod by the Wise Men, Herod determined that the star first appeared approximately 2 years earlier (Matt 2:7 & 16)
  - d. Tradition tells us that the Wise Men were from Babylonia
  - e. Jewish connections with Babylon were strong and Jewish influence would still have been felt (still today – Iraq)
  - f. Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah predicted Jesus' coming
- 2. It's of interest that these Wise Men had such interest in the birth of the Christ child
  - a. Herod was part Jew – he could trace his heritage back to Abraham through Esau – he saw the child as a threat

- b. The Scribes were purebreds – protectors and interpreters of the LAW of Moses – they knew but didn't care
- c. The Wise Men were foreigners – pagans - yet it is in them that we are able to catch a glimpse of the true spirit of Christmas
- 3. Look at what the Wise Men did (Matt 2:11 ESV)
  - <sup>11</sup>And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*
  - a. We often miss the main point because we focus on the gifts
  - b. It's where much of our focus on Christmas is today
  - c. But the true spirit of Christmas is not found in the gifts
  - d. The true meaning is found in WORSHIP
- 4. Think about responses of the major characters in the nativity story
  - a. Mary – the song of praise – *the Magnificat*
  - b. Elizabeth – filled with the Spirit and blessed Mary
  - c. Angels – (Luke 2:13-14)
    - <sup>13</sup>suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, <sup>14</sup>Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*
  - d. Shepherds – (Luke 2:20) – *“the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard”*
  - e. Simeon – (Luke 2:28) thanks to God for allowing him to see the promised consolation of Israel – the Messiah
  - f. Anna – (Luke 2:38) - the prophetess – gave thanks to God and told everyone waiting for the redemption of Israel about the child
- 5. That is the spirit of Christmas
- 6. Apart from TRUE worship there is no Christmas – despite all the trimmings
- 7. Christmas is the time for worship – real worship – in spirit and truth

**CONCLUSION:** The important question is – “What is YOUR response?”

- 1. Like the Wise Men come, bow down and worship
- 2. If you don't know Christ, this would be a great time to ask Him to redeem you, to save you. That's the *only* reason that He came.