

The Light of Christmas; God's baby King – 3

Scripture: Matthew 2:1–14, 16, 19–20; John 1:4–5

Today is the 3rd sermon in our Advent Sermon Series, The Light of Christmas. I hope this series will help you get a fresh perspective on Christmas. I really do love the Christmas season; this is the most wonderful time of the year.

But some aspects of the season can be challenging or even painful. Last week I mentioned that for many people, it's a time of year that causes; or at least raises to the surface, tensions in relationships, unmet expectations. Some of it coming from the family they grew up in; and now with COVID or sickness or family moving away or whatever the case may be - there's pain of absent loved ones.

Let's be honest, for many people, at Christmas, we're faced with problems we can't fix, people we can't control, expectations we can't meet.

Introduction

1. Often, these same problems that cause us stress and grief at Christmas, also steals the magic and wonder of Christmas away from you! So how can we reconnect with the reason of the season? That's what we will look at in this Lenten sermon series.

It's interesting that all of the stress or grief, the anxiety or fear or anything that causes the darkness that you wrestle with in life; notice, all that darkness never put out the light of Christmas.

Remember John 1:4-5, *"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

You just can't get away from divine light that Jesus brought humanity, and the Holy Spirit keeps reminding you of that light. Holy Spirit is that "**something**" deep within you that touches your conscience every now and then, and reminds you that you should seek an answer for that question about God or about the Bible, that question you have been wrestling with.

2. **Let's look at a part of the Christmas story many people overlook.**

The story of Herod... ya him... the villain, the real Grinch of the Christmas story. You see, in some small, but powerful ways, we can all relate to Herod. Herod was a king, but is an extreme example of in a way, each of us even in a very subtle way, we want the powers of this world to help me "get my way," help me in my quest for fame and fortune.

We want God to help us . . . not compete with us. We want to be king and master over our lives.

- **Let's think about Herod a minute.**

a) **Herod was a puppet king over Judea.** While movies in Hollywood generally present Herod as an evil, foolish and immoral king.

In reality, history tells us Herod was a very smart, talented, and bold man. He built cities and ports for shipping; he rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem; Herod built aqueducts. Herod was a builder! **But his goal was his legacy** and to set his lineage as king of Israel.

b) **But Herod was very crafty and politically slick!** For example, after Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC, his nephew Octavian, teamed up with Mark Antony and they killed everyone connected to Caesar's murder. So pretty soon, they became very powerful in the Roman empire.

So Herod figured, the power couple Mark Antony and his wife the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra would win and Mark Antony would become Caesar. So Herod placed his loyalty with him,

But if you know your history, civil war broke out in 31 BC, and Octavian defeated Mark Antony. Herod realized he backed a loser... and he knew what Octavian did to his political enemies. Remember, Herod was all about his legacy, he wanted to hang onto his kingdom.

- **So, Herod made a bold choice and slick.** Instead of running or going to war with Octavian, he went to meet the new emperor. While everyone started thinking about executing Herod, he quickly and eloquently explained how he was loyal to Mark Antony to the end. And now promised to be as loyal to the new Roman Emperor.

- **Octavian was so impressed by the Herod's bold audacity.** Instead of killing Herod, the emperor expanded Herod kingdom, and adding parts of Judaea, Samaria, Jericho, and Gaza.

c) So Herod was smart and very politically ambitious!

Remember, Herod was all about his legacy, and started making bad decisions. He had ten wives and a bunch of sons, and while he tried to set up one of his sons to follow him as king. When Herod thought that son was becoming too powerful or a threat, Herod would have the son executed.

- **He was committed to building his kingdom and controlling his legacy,** he did everything to control everything around him. And when King Herod got mad or threatened, he would make fierce and cruel decisions.
- At the time Jesus was born, Herod was about 70 and sick from a painful, chronic disease and knew he was coming to the end of his life. So Herod was trying to set his power and legacy.

d) Let's listen to the Christmas story and the worst news Herod could hear.

Matthew 2:1-14

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

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "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 shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

1) A new king is in town!

Imagine how this worked out. The Magi are wandering around Jerusalem and asking, "*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.*" When King Herod heard this, "he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." Now that you know a little more about Herod, do you see why Jerusalem was disturbed?

When King Herod was disturbed, it was dangerous! Just to name a few examples, he treated everyone with fear, suspicion, and jealousy; and when he was threatened, everyone knew he killed a number of his sons, at least one wife, and had all of the infants under 2 years old killed in Bethlehem and surrounding area.

Everyone knew what happened when Herod was angry. Herod was old, in pain and coming to the end of his life and was trying to make plans for a successor. Now he's hearing that a new king had been born? **That would mess up everything!**

2) The worse news possible

Herod called together all the chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. Every Jewish child was taught Micah 5:2-5, the prophecy that talked about the King of the Jews being born in Bethlehem in Judea.

The prophecy explained, “For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” Herod’s legacy was threatened!

So Herod called the Magi secretly, he said he wanted to talk to these guys, and found out exactly when time the star appeared. So Herod sent them to Bethlehem and told them, “As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and **worship him.**”

- Worship, We think of worship as what happens in a service before the sermon. But the definition of worship is to recognize that you are in the presence of someone or something that causes you to have awe. In the Old English, it means “Worthship” and means to recognize the item’s WORTH.
- This means to surrender or submit yourself to that of which you worship. These are very educated and wise and rich men, but because of who they believe the baby was they dropped to their knees and worshipped.

3) The problem

Then they got a warning in a dream, they were told not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their country by another route. Herod was old and in pain, he was all about controlling and setting up his legacy. He wasn’t about to worship anyone!

- This is why there is a little Herod in all of us. We all don’t mind God helping us get the things we need.
- We don’t mind doing religious things if they help us get what we want.
- But just submitting to God without getting the whole answer or knowing exactly where God wants you to go, or worshipping and surrendering without knowing all of the situation, especially in a way you don’t like, thata doesn’t come natural to anyone.

4) The solution

Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. And he was told, “Get up, take your new family and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to come home. So the got up and left for Egypt.”

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious.

When Herod was angry, people suffered and people died. He'd spent his entire life controlling everything to benefit him. No matter what had happened in the past, Herod always figured out a way to make things work out for himself. Even when faced with the hopelessness of backing the wrong general in a civil war. Herod was slick enough to figure out a way.

- **But now he's been outsmarted by a baby and 2 young parents!**

He was not about to let a baby outthink him! So, Herod gave the nuclear option. He gave orders to kill all the baby boys who were 2 years and younger in Bethlehem and in the surrounding area.

Imagine how Mary and Joseph felt knowing that all the young boys in the area were killed as they escaped.

Soon, Herod died a painful death, and an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph while they were in Egypt.

5) So Herod became a footnote in a toddler's story.

In an instant, Herod the Great, who had built cities and ports and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, he lost his legacy and became nothing more than a footnote in history, in the story of Jesus.

- Imagine explaining to Herod, that all of his plans, and all the sacrifices he made to preserve his legacy. . . gone!
- Then 80 years later . . . Herod was long gone. Jesus grew up, entered ministry was arrested, crucified, and resurrected. The temple had been destroyed.
- John, who had seen it all, who sat at the toddler king's feet, summarized it this way in the beginning of his Gospel. "In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and "is shining even now." and the darkness has not overcome it.

6) That brings us to you and me.

- What will your story be in relation to the Light of the World?
- Will you resist or worship?
- Will you built your own kingdom or participate in God's kingdom?

- Will you stay with something that will eventually disappear or surrender and allowed God to do something bigger than you?
- One day, somebody will tell your story in relationship to the Light of the World. What story do you want told?
- The good news is that the darkness has not put out the light of life in you. Would you bow your knee and worship your king who has included you in his kingdom? He has something for you to do that will last beyond you.
- The Magi got it right: they worshiped.