

1PP The Season 4 Giving

Part 2-Matthew 2:1-12

12/11-12/2021

Years ago, there was a BillBoard battle that took place at either end of the Lincoln Tunnel
Near the New Jersey entrance, one Billboard said, **2PP** *"You know it's a myth. This season, celebrate reason!"*

On the New York end, read another, **3PP** *"You know it's real. This season, celebrate Jesus."*
What a contrasting perspective on Christmas, one that is fought out each year this time
What we are celebrating in this Advent season is that God has come to us, a great King, a great deliverer, born as a baby, the most unlikely plan of salvation there could be
This is good news, but many are troubled when they hear of it, often not understanding why
What we are about to see are two groups of people: the disturbed and the worshipers

4PP 1-The gospel is disturbing to people who will not believe

No one knows for certain the year of Christ's birth, but it is likely it was between 5-8 BC, a date narrowed down by the death of a man named Herod the Great

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king..." 2:1

According to one historian, Herod was called '*the Great*' because he was the oldest of the sons of Antipater, as well as a shrewd politician, proficient soldier, orator, and prolific builder
He was born in 73 BC to Antipater, a successful military general, who had aligned with Rome
Antipater sent his young son to Petra where he met Marc Antony becoming life-long friends
His father's loyalty to Rome earned him the title of Procurator of Judea in 47 BC, and in turn, his father installed his 25 year old son as Governor of Galilee
6 years later Antony made him the Tetrarch of Galilee, but in 40 BC, the Parthians invaded Galilee and Herod fled to Rome for safety

The Senate made him the King of Judea at 36 years old, and he ruled for 33 years
While Herod earned the favor of Rome, he was despised by the Jewish people, for he was at best, a half Jew, with many historians believing he had no Jewish blood at all
But Herod the Great he was, brilliant, an outstanding athlete especially with javelin and bow
What the Emperor required is that tax money came in, and the *pax romana*, the peace of Rome was maintained

Herod did everything to please Caesar Augustus, and that warm relationship allowed him to have the autonomy to rule the way he wanted, which was unfortunate because he was a murderous, psychotic king

His father was assassinated with poison, making Herod paranoid the entire time he was king
He killed 3 of his sons, his favorite wife Mariamne, only to afterward wander the palace at night calling for her

Suddenly, ***"wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him."*** 2

Imagine what went through the paranoid mind of Herod!

Well, we don't have to imagine anything, the Bible tells us: ***"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him"*** 3

'all Jerusalem with him' either refers to the leadership of Jerusalem or all its citizens

Herod had called together *“all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”* 2:4

They all were 5PP *‘troubled’*, a word that described the boiling water in a pot...greatly agitated
But notice that Herod asked his wise men NOT where the *‘king of the Jews’* was to be born, but where *‘the Christ was to be born’* 4

6PP *‘Christ’* is not the last name of Jesus, but a title for the Anointed Redeemer sent by God
The heart of Herod was *‘troubled’* not just by the news of the birth of a *‘king of the Jews’*, but by the birth of the *‘Christ’*, the deliverer sent by God
He was troubled by the gospel

7PP 2-The gospel is beautiful to those who will believe

The world, at the time of Christ’s birth, was abuzz with a sense of imminent global change, and the anticipation was centering on Judea, the southern region of the Jewish people

The Roman historian 8PP Seutonius wrote, *“There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world.”*

Another historian at that time wrote 9PP *“there was a firm persuasion that at this very time the east was to grow powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire.”*

At that time, much more than today with our scientific advancements, the movements of stars and natural phenomenon were thought to be divine communications

If an asteroid fell on your head, your final thought would be that the gods just gave a message

There was a group of *Magi*, or *‘wise men from the east’* who were very different than Herod
They were court advisers, counselors to kings, wealthy and influential, like Daniel from the OT
10PP *“Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon”*

Daniel 2:48

Who they were is not known exactly, but most believe they were God-fearing scientists and scholars from the Parthian empire, modern Iran and Iraq, biblical Medes and Persians
That is the area where Abraham was originally from, where Babylon and Assyria were located
They were also believed to be astrologers who believed that the affairs of history were reflected in the movements of stars and planets given as divine omens

They knew of the Hebrew scriptures as well, certainly familiar with the prophecy of Balaam

11PP *“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a*

scepter shall rise out of Israel” Numbers 17:24

The bible doesn’t tell us how many wise men there were in this group, and legends, as usual sprung up around them, even giving them names, Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar whose bones are supposedly buried in Cologne, Germany

Melchior supposedly gave gold, Caspar frankincense, and Balthasar myrrh

Likely there was a large entourage traveling with them, and they make the long journey eventually to a home in Bethlehem where they entered and saw the Christ-king

Jesus is no longer a baby, but very likely a toddler between 1 and 2 years old, and when they saw

Him, the wise men ***“they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” 2:11***

They didn't worship Mary, for she wasn't divine, but the child, Jesus

The custom of the Parthians was to salute a person with the same rank with a kiss on the lips
When the difference of rank was slight, they kissed on the cheek
But when one was of a inferior rank, he fell on his knees, touched his forehead to the ground,
throwing kisses at the same time toward the superior
The reaction of the wise men was this last one, falling down before their king to worship Him

Then they rose and gave gifts, and we saw last week the first one, gold, the gift for a king
That gift acknowledged Jesus as the One in authority over them, to whom all of their affections,
possessions and service belonged

We are to come to Jesus as our Lord: 12**PP** ***“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord” 1 Peter 3:1***

We lay down our demands to God and self-will in trusting surrender to Jesus Christ

13PP (Pic of Frankincense) But what about ***‘Frankincense’***, and what do you know about it?
You've all likely heard of it, as it is a hot selling essential oils, promising to improve your mood,
reduce stress as well as swelling...but that's not all!

It fights infections, aids digestion, fades scars, heals wounds, even possibly preventing cancer
But way before these modern claims, frankincense a coveted and expensive commodities
It comes from Boswellia trees that grow primarily in Southern Arabia and the Horn of Africa
Frankincense farmers slash the bark, called stripping, allowing the resin to bleed out, then its
scraped onto wooden boards or flat stones to dry and harden into chunks of resin
These resins, called tears, were ground into incense and used in the Temple of God
It was mixed with oil to anoint priests, and blended into the meal offering for gifts to God
Yet even more, frankincense was part of all Jewish sacrifices but for sin offerings

14PP ***“He shall put no oil on it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering.”***
Leviticus 5:11

You see, whether the wise men understood or not, 15**PP** *This was a gift for a priest who
administered the sacrifices*

Jesus, our High Priest, without sin, unblemished, pleasing to God His Father, here on earth to
perform the work of redemption

Only Jesus was eligible to die on the cross, and only the cross could save and redeem the world

The emperor on the throne of Rome when these wise men worshiped this Priest-King, was born
with the name Gaius Octavian, whose adopted father was Julius Caesar

Julius was considered a god, and Octavian, renamed Augustus meaning worthy of worship, was
called the Divine Caesar and Son of God

An Egyptian inscription referred to him as a star *‘shining with the brilliance of the Great
heavenly savior’*

A later emperor Domitian, demanded all in his empire to worship him by taking a pinch of
frankincense and sprinkling it into a burning brazier, saying *‘Caesar is Lord’*

Hundreds, even thousands of Jews and Christians refused and were put to death

If the Wise Men had only offered gold, they would have recognized Jesus as the king born to rule

from an earthly throne
But with the second gift of frankincense, it is clearly the message that this toddler king was the
Divine Priest of God, here to bring about the redemption of all who would believe
We have Herod and the chief priests and scribes who seemed unmoved and uninterested in the
Christ, the God-King, deliver born in Bethlehem, 6 miles away
And who in fact were troubled with the news of His birth!
But then we have a group of foreign wise men from hundreds of miles away, who journeyed all
that way for one thing: to worship the God-King
They presented gold, the gift for a king, the rightful ruler over all, even those outside Israel
And they presented frankincense, the gift for a God, the omnipotent Creator
One group was troubled like boiling water, and one group was worshiping with all their hearts

Friends, which group do you belong to?
If you are in the first, the gospel is inviting you to fall down and worship Jesus, your Redeemer
He accepts every person who comes to Him believing that He is both Lord and Savior, gold and
frankincense
Have you already come to Jesus Christ the God-King, but you have grown cold in your heart
Let the wise men show you the worship that is fitting for Jesus, and fall at His feet again!

Let's pray