

# Christ for All the World!

Psalm 96, Matthew 2:1-12

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising, and have come to worship him.” The star which the wise men saw, a sign from God which guided them across the wilderness, was nothing compared to the light they found in Bethlehem. For there they found Jesus, born of Mary, Christ for all the world. Jesus Christ has continued to shine ever since, to reach around the world, to seek and to save the lost, and to gather people home to God. In his birth we learn that God has not forsaken us. God has not given up on us. God has a plan, a work, and a mission for us to do.

At the same time, the birth of Jesus Christ raises sharp questions for us and for the whole world: Whom shall we worship? Whom shall we believe? Whom shall we serve? To whom shall we offer all that we are and all that we have? To whom shall we dedicate ourselves in life and in death?

Today’s reading gives us two options: King Herod or King Jesus. King Herod represents all the political, military, economic, social, and cultural powers of the world, all the powers that be. When Herod was troubled by the news from the wise men, all of Jerusalem was troubled with him. The chief priests and scribes of Israel were at his beck and call. The police and military were in his command. He knew how to exercise his power through force. So Herod represents the full authority of the Roman Empire and of every empire before and since. Do we want to go along with him? Do we want to place our bets there? Do we want to stake our lives and our futures on the powers of the world?

On the other hand is King Jesus. His power is exercised in weakness, at his birth and at his death. His majesty is made known in humility in the manger and on the cross. And yet, his presence is the occasion of great joy. From his birth, this baby born to be king of the Jews was more than a king, and his kingdom extended beyond Israel. It was non-Jewish wise men from the East who first worshiped him as king. Jesus is not only the royal son of King David, the savior of his people Israel, and King of the Jews, but also God’s anointed one, Christ for all the world.

So, the birth of Jesus Christ raises sharp questions for us and for the whole world: Whom shall we worship? Whom shall we believe? Whom shall we serve? To whom shall we offer all that we are and all that we have? To whom shall we dedicate ourselves in life and in death?

Today's reading gives us two options, King Herod or King Jesus, and it gives us an example of choosing each option. The example of choosing King Herod is King Herod. That is, Herod chose to worship himself. He sensed that the arrival of King Jesus meant the end of King Herod and his kingdom, the end of all that he was and all that he stood for, so he clung desperately to himself. Herod knew, somehow, that in the kingdom of God which Christ Jesus brings, there will be no more political power, no more hunger and oppression, no more tears, no more death, no more soldiers, no more war—and he hated the thought of that! Herod knew that Jesus was king, and it scared him. He detested it, so Herod rejected Jesus Christ and chose to worship himself.

On the other hand, the wise men chose to worship King Jesus, and by their example they urge us to do so. “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising, and have come to worship him.” While Herod pretended to worship Jesus so he could kill him, the wise men risked being killed so they could worship him. They searched him out, fell down and worshiped him, opened their treasures, and offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. With these gifts, they acknowledged him, a baby, a citizen of another nation, as king! If they recognized his royalty while he was still an infant, how much more are we—we who know of his adult life, we who know of his ministry, we who know of his teachings, we who know of his death, we who know of his resurrection—how much more are we to recognize not only the royalty of Jesus Christ but also the divinity of Jesus Christ and so to worship him!

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising, and have come to worship him.” Today's reading about the birth of Jesus Christ is not only a story about something that happened a long time ago. It is also a story about you and me, and it is a story about the world in which we live today. Having heard the story, we become part of it. We choose either to worship King Herod or to worship King Jesus. The two are mutually exclusive. We either go with Herod to reject Jesus Christ, or we go with the wise men to worship Jesus. There is no middle ground. There is no other choice. There is no pluralism here. Yes, Jesus is Christ for all the world. But are all the inhabitants of the world for Jesus Christ? So, the birth of Jesus Christ raises sharp questions for us and for the whole world: Whom shall we worship? Whom shall we believe? Whom shall we serve? To whom shall we offer all that we are and all that we have? To whom shall we dedicate ourselves in life and in death? In these questions, God is calling us to be and to do something new and different. How shall we respond? How shall the world respond?

First, God is calling us to worship God as made known in Jesus Christ. This is what we were created for. The wise men give us a good example to follow. They

rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and worshiped, and gave their gifts. King Herod, on the other hand, gives us the bad example not to follow. We are warned not to return to King Herod, with our own self-worship or any worship of anything other than the God and Father of Jesus Christ. We are called to worship God as made known in Jesus Christ. This is who we are. This is what we are all about. This is the joy of our lives. And we are grateful for the cloud of witnesses surrounding us, not only those who have gone before us, but also those who join us by way of radio, and soon by way of the Internet, and who add their worship to ours so that it all may be offered to God together. We dare not neglect worship.

Second, God is calling us to faith. God loves us and calls us into relationship with himself. We are called to believe in God and in his Christ. We are called to be loyal to God and to his Christ. This means that we are called to conversion away from our self-worship, conversion away from the barrenness of self-confidence or the lack thereof, and conversion away from self-centeredness, whether it is small as an individual or large as a nation. We are called to conversion to true worship of God, conversion to a true faith in God which transcends all political and national differences, and conversion to a life which is properly centered upon God who is the center of all. We are called to a faith that is clear, simple, and bold, a faith by which we can understand our lives, a faith which gives meaning to the events of the world, a faith which we can share with others. This is no time to be half-hearted, wishy-washy, non-committal, reserved, pseudo-intellectual, pseudo-sophisticated, hesitant, or tentative. Now is the time to believe! If you have believed in Jesus Christ already for a lifetime, a year, or just a day, I urge you to believe more than ever before. If you have never made an initial profession of faith in Jesus Christ, I urge you to do that, and I urge you to do it now. Do not wait any longer. We are called to believe in Jesus Christ. We dare not choose any other.

Third, God is calling us to give. Again, the wise men give us the best example we have, opening their treasures, offering Jesus gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Why are we called to give? Because giving cannot be separated from worship and faith. Giving without worship and faith would be pointless. Worship and faith without giving would be empty and vain. We give because the world belongs to God, we belong to God, our time belongs to God, our thoughts belong to God, and, yes, our money belongs to God. All of these have been entrusted to us by God, for a while, and we are responsible to God for their faithful use. So, we give valuable and even sacrificial gifts to God to express our gratitude and thanksgiving to God for all that God has given us and for all that God has done for us. Here at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, we could give more than we ever have before. We could pledge more than we ever have before. Do we want to make that

happen? Would you like to be a part of that? Jesus deserves our very best. We dare not do less.

Fourth, God is calling us to mission. We who have received the revelation of God in Jesus Christ are also called to the responsibility and the privilege of sharing our faith, sharing the gospel, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ here and around the world, calling all people to the true worship of God, calling all people to the faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is what it means that wise men from another country came and worshiped Jesus, who is far more than King of the Jews. Jesus is the Christ for all the world, and he is calling on us to get the word out to all the world, friend and foe, near and far. The gospel has not come so far over all these centuries just to stop here with us! We are called to mission and evangelism at home and around the world. This has profound practical consequences. Every indication is that the world will become increasingly either more Christian or more Muslim. There is not room for both. To the extent that it depends upon us, which shall it be? Do we want to sit back and watch the inheritance of the centuries disappear by our neglect? Or will we help preserve and build up the faith and the church? Do we want our grandchildren to study the Bible or the Quran? Do we want them to live in western democracies, based on the Christian understanding of the individual, or under middle-eastern dictatorships? Do we want them to live in freedom or under repression? Part of the meaning of our lives is to share Jesus Christ and the love of God with others. We can do no other. Bring people here to church with you. Bring your family. Bring your friends. Bring your neighbors. Bring your school mates. Bring your coworkers. Bring them all to church to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are here today to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. But this is not only ancient history. We want Christ to be born today into the lives, into the hearts, souls, minds, and strength, of everyone whom we know and love. There is no better gift in the world that we can give than to lead someone to worship the God and Father of Jesus Christ, to lead someone to believe in God and to have saving faith in Jesus Christ. That is why we are here: to worship God, and to preach and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Can you bring someone else here? Churches do not glorify God by wasting away into nothingness. Churches glorify God and his Christ by seeking and gaining new members, by sharing and spreading the gospel, and by growing in worship, faith, strength, numbers, giving, and mission. If each one of us brought just one new member a year, we would double in size every year! What honor we would bring to the birth of Christ! What a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas!

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising, and have come to worship him.” The birth of Jesus, King of the Jews, Christ for all the world, raises sharp questions for us and for the whole world:

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*To God and to the Lord Jesus Christ be the glory now and forever! Amen.*

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