

Throughout this Advent season followers of Jesus all over the world have been preparing themselves for the celebration of His arrival that we know as Christmas. We're excited because we know that God has blessed us through the coming of His Son.

Most of those who knew of Jesus' birth were excited—his parents, the shepherds, and others were pleased by what God had done. But some people saw this baby as a threat. Let's read Matthew's account of the Magi's visit to Jesus and King Herod's response to His birth.

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ 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. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ "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."

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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."

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

¹³ 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."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."

Matthew 2:1-18 (NIV)

The Magi were wise men, possibly even kings, who probably spent many weeks traveling to find Jesus. They knew he had "been born king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2), and they came to worship Him.

King Herod also wanted to find Jesus, but for a more sinister purpose. Herod felt threatened by Jesus because the Jewish people believed that the Messiah was to be their true king. Hence this baby endangered Herod's own selfish reign. So he went to great lengths to try to kill Jesus.

The difference between these two responses to Jesus' birth couldn't be more striking. Worship or murder. Honor or hatred. Submission or defiance.

As we come to the last few days before Christmas, let's continue to follow the example of the Magi. Jesus is our King and our God, and we are privileged to honor and worship Him.

Reflection and Discussion

- What strikes you about the contrast between the Magi's response to Jesus and Herod's response to Him?
- How can we honor and worship Jesus at Christmas?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

You are our God! You are our King! Thank You for giving us the privilege of honoring and worshiping You. In these last few days before Christmas, please renew our appreciation for who You are and for all You have done for us. By Your grace may we be excited to bow down before You in humble adoration, just like the Magi did.

Amen.