

1

The King Who Fought Christmas

THE KINGS OF CHRISTMAS

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of 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 in the east and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

— MATTHEW 2:1-3

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

— PSALM 2:1-4

Matthew begins his gospel with a description of the various ways in which people responded to the birth of Jesus. The shepherds and wise men responded by worshipping Him and bringing Him gifts. The religious leaders had the right information about His birth, were only five miles away, yet refused to go see Him! Herod responded with fear and deception. He wanted no new King to threaten his reign. The beginning of Matthew's gospel is a reminder that we can only bring one of two attitudes to Jesus. There is no middle ground, or position of neutrality. Either we bring an attitude of adoration or an attitude of rejection. He is either the Lord of all, or He is not the lord at all.

WELCOME

What is your favorite Bible story, hymn, or family tradition related to Christmas?

WORSHIP

Read Philippians 2:1-11. As much as we love to sing about Jesus in the manger, was never meant for a manger. His rightful place is a throne. He is a King. And He can only accomplish what God sent Him to do in your life as you recognize His kingship, surrender to it, and obey Him. "O Come, All Ye Faithful" (997), "Humble Yourself" (745), "Highest Place" (155), "I Worship You" (64).

WORD

Read Matthew 2:1-18

1. Why do the Magi go to Jerusalem? Why did Herod meet with them "secretly"? What was Herod's response? What was it about the birth of Jesus that so threatened him?
2. What does Herod's response of fear and anger reveal about Herod? About his view of the Messiah?
3. What is Matthew's point in emphasizing God's watchful care over Jesus? In emphasizing the fulfillment of Hosea and Jeremiah's prophecies (vss 17-18, 23)?
4. When, like Herod, have you felt threatened by Jesus' kingship? In what area of your life do you most seek to restrain control? Has God ever "troubled" you about it? Explain.
5. Why is it that the "baby Jesus" seems to get so much more attention than the "adult Jesus" ever gets? Have you ever been guilty yourself of "reducing" Christ? Once we've reduced Christ, it's easier to remove Him from the center of our lives. What are some of the ways you regularly remind yourself that Jesus' rightful place is not a manger, but a throne?

WORKS

Give some thought and prayer about ways in which you might engage those around you—at work or in the neighborhood—in meaningful dialog about the significance of Christmas. We shouldn't miss the opportunities that God puts before us this particular time of year. Millions of people are going to think about Christ during the next couple of weeks when they don't usually do so.