

L.C.F. 11th December 2016

Readings: Micah: 5:1-5 & Matt. 2:1-12 &

Preacher: Rev. Adrian Hallett

Sermon Title: "Reactions to the Coming King"

This passage in Matt. is all about 3 different people – or groups of people – all about different reactions.... three different reactions to the coming of the King... three perhaps surprising reactions to the first coming of the LJC.

But maybe not so surprising because people react in the same way today to the coming King....people have always reacted in these three different ways down the ages.

There are three camps if you like...one camp full of hatred and opposition, another camp full of apathy and indifference and one other group full of wonder, amazement praise and worship.

Let's now look at those different reactions – firstly, Herod.

HEROD:

Herod hears about this newborn King... this newborn King of the Jews and he's not happy! That's an understatement... he hears the news and is '*disturbed*'... it's a word that means to agitate... to trouble the mind with fear...to terrify...to put in consternation....to unsettle...to throw into confusion and alarm...to perplex....that's how Herod was when he heard the news..

It's interesting that in the Greek the tense of that verb is in the aorist...What's so interesting about that you say? Well, that tense suggests the suddenness of something... a bit like a stab to the heart... or being cut to the quick..or even a blow to the solar plexus...that's how the news hit Herod....disturbed is an understatement!

It threw him into a panic...wasn't he King of the Jews? 'Am I not Herod, the one and only King of the Jews? There can only be one King and that's

me!' Herod had been given that title by the Romans... it was a title and position that he jealously guarded...a title and position that was his and his alone...no-one but no-one was going to take it from him!

Herod in fact went to extreme lengths to safeguard his title and position.... he would do anything and everything to make sure he held on to that throne... he was a very insecure man... paranoid even...living in fear of those he thought could or would take the throne from him...he would tolerate no rivals – so much so that he murdered three of his sons, he murdered his wife, and whilst he was at it, he got rid of mother-in-law as well!

The Emperor Augustus apparently once said that it was safer to be Herod's pig than one of his sons! That's the sort of man Herod was... not the sort of man who was going to take kindly to news that there was a new King of the Jews who had just been born...he cannot... he will not tolerate that possibility so he goes into action...in fact he becomes very active....he *assembles* (all the chief priests and teachers of the law v.4)...*he questions* them...(where is the Christ to be born?)... *he sends* (the Magi to make a careful search)... then later in the chapter, which we didn't read today, *he reacts* (he's been outwitted by the Magi)...*he's enraged* and he goes back to what he does best – *kills people*...even children under two years of age. That was Herod...

He's a killer...he's ruthless...he's cruel... and he's very thorough...he won't leave anything to chance...the thoroughness he displays is only matched by the wrath he displays. And on top of all that – note his hypocrisy....v.8 – *'As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him'*.

There were literally no lengths to which Herod would not go... there were no depths to which he would not sink – he was prepared to do anything to ensure he could hold onto power...he didn't mind what he did so long as he remained on the throne... That's how disturbed he was...that's how threatened he was by this Jesus, born to be king of the Jews.

PRIESTS AND TEACHERS OF THE LAW:

Now this group of people were the scholars... the clergy if you like...these

were people who knew the Scriptures...these were the people to whom Herod turned when he wanted to know where the Christ was to be born.....they had no problem in answering Herod's question...they pointed Herod to Micah 5v.2 ...they knew the Scriptures... they knew where the Messiah would be born... it wasn't difficult for them.... he will be born in Bethlehem and how did they know that? Because the prophets had foretold that that was where he was to be born. These people knew the Scriptures...these people knew their 'bibles'...these people knew all about the prophets and took seriously what they prophesied.

These people were part of the covenant people of God...they were the spiritual leaders of the people...people who believed the Scriptures...these were people who searched the Scriptures....these were people who had all the advantages, spiritually speaking... who had everything going for them....

They had all the advantages, but did nothing about it. They had a certain 'head knowledge' but it was a knowledge that never touched their hearts....they weren't moved to act...they were observers from a distance..they were disinterested and apathetic.

We tend to think that apathy is somehow 'neutral'...nothing to be concerned about...that its no 'big deal'... We would do well to remember the words of Jesus - *'If you are not for me, you are against me'*. That was certainly true with these people...their apparent apathy and indifference turned into outright hatred and opposition....Just look at the way they responded to Jesus as his ministry developed...

Towards the end of his ministry these were the people baying for his blood...these were the people who wanted him crucified...they were no longer apathetic... their apathy had turned into a frenzied lust for his blood... they were no longer indifferent...their indifference had turned into a demonic determination to get rid of him at all costs... A frightening warning of the dangers of apathy...a solemn reminder that knowledge can be a very dangerous thing – unless it is underpinned by obedience.

THE MAGI:

Now we come to the third reaction to the coming King... the Wise

Men...These were not covenant people... they were Gentiles... they had no advantage of the Scriptures to help them...they were inspired by a star in the east and just because of that, they undertook an incredible journey...a journey that took probably two years...a journey on which they faced hardship...uncertainties...danger...all because a star beckoned them on... they were astrologers...forbidden in Scripture...yet God allowed it...didn't punish them or write them off... he used it to lead them to Jesus.

They came to Christ....they honoured him... gave him gifts...they bowed down and worshipped him...they bowed the knee to the King of the Jews.

They came to Christ...from 'nowhere' we might say...via an unconventional spiritual route...enduring great difficulties..they were simply obedient to what little guidance they had received – to find the Christ and worship him.

So there we have three different responses to the coming King... three responses that have been true down the ages and which is therefore true in our day and age. The question is, 'How do we react to the coming King? Which response is true of us?'

1) THOSE WHO ARE DISTURBED BY THE COMING OF THE KING:

Jesus comes as a babe in the manger...people are comfortable with the nativity scene..they are happy to think of it and re-enact it each Christmas...it's all very cosy and comfortable – because he's no threat.

But this babe in the manger can't be left there – he comes as Lord and King...he comes to set up his kingdom...all who want to enter have to come in on his terms...he makes demands of us...he lovingly makes aware of those things that are wrong in our lives... he calls us to repent...to turn away from those things that are wrong...our sin... and turn to him...and to allow him his rightful place in our lives....for us to no longer live for ourselves – but for him. We have to bow the knee... we have to submit to the King.

He wants to be Lord of our lives....and that is a great threat to man in his rebellion – it was for me...(brief recap of my story....believed in God/Jesus

but resisted his rightful place in my life etc. etc.)

Now we won't (hopefully!) go to the lengths that Herod did, but remember this – if he's not Lord of your life, he's not Lord at all...we may 'dress it up' ...put on a good front...do the right things...go to the right places – so that we may worship him, but in our hearts we know we are doing nothing of the sort...we can be as hypocritical as Herod too...if we refuse to worship him as King.

2) THOSE WHO ARE APATHETIC TO THE COMING KING:

It's possible to be like the Chief priests and teachers of the law...to know the gospel story...be familiar with the bible...even able to answer questions people might put to us and give ourselves a pat on the back! But it's all 'head knowledge'...it hasn't made the longest journey there is – from the head to the heart...so it doesn't really touch us...were not particular bothered...we can take it or leave it... not moved to act...happy to remain as 'observers'...watch what goes on in the life of the church without fully engaging with it...never make the effort to meet with the real Jesus.

Very easy to be apathetic... to know it...to excuse it...to gloss over it..but remember 'He who is not for me is against me'...remember that apathy is not neutral...it will inevitably turn into hardness of heart and opposition to the gospel message.

Finally,

3) THOSE WHO WORSHIP HIM AS KING:

Those who come to faith in Him... by whatever way... by whatever route...enduring hardship and disappointments and hurt. In their lives..turning to God in their difficulties...trusting God to lead them through it all...even people with no Christian background...who may have no knowledge or very little knowledge of the Scriptures....but God leads them on until they find the LJC....then to honour him...to worship him and to bow the knee to the King.

There is only one way a person becomes a Christian...coming to the cross of the LJC in repentance and faith and willingly bowing the knee to the

King of Kings...there are though many different ways of getting there... we need to remember that and encourage people who are either on that journey or who are about to make that journey.

Have you made that journey for yourself? Which of the three groups best describes you as we get ready for the coming King this Christmas? Are you perhaps disturbed at the thought of his coming..... are you perhaps threatened by his arrival, stubbornly refusing his rightful role and rule in your life? Are you perhaps apathetic to it all and just go through the motions of belief? Are you perhaps paying lip-service to it all – the readings... the carols, nothing really touching you, just getting through Christmas until you go through the same charade next year? Or are you, as I trust is the case, one of those of whom it can be truly said, have bowed the knee and *'have come to worship him?*