

What Is Your Response to Encountering Jesus

Psalm 72:1 – 7 & Matthew 2:1 – 12

Let us first look at Psalm 72 which is a prayer of blessing upon a good king. Yes, in this prayer we have a good king. His kingship weaves its way throughout Psalm 72 and today, on Epiphany Sunday, let us talk about a good king. A good king is one who rules with God's judgment and righteousness. A good king is one whose actions bring peace and justice. A good king is a deliverer of the needy. A good king is compassionate to the weak and redeems the oppressed. Does this description of a good king sound familiar or today is it hard to envision a good king?

All that is mentioned in Psalm 72 about a good king, is it lacking today? A good king is one who rules with God's judgment and righteousness. A good king is one whose actions bring peace and justice. A good king is a deliverer of the needy. A good king is compassionate to the weak and redeems the oppressed. Is a good king hard to find today?

King Herod truly was not a good king. He was put into power by the Roman government to collect taxes for the Roman Empire and King Herod did well at that task so the Roman government was pleased with his leadership. For nine months out of a year King Herod lived in his summer palace located in the port city of Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. I visited Caesarea when I was in the Holy Land two years ago. We landed outside Tel Aviv which is the second largest city in Israel, Jerusalem is #1, but Tel Aviv is the business center of the country. After landing, we had some extra time so we traveled north to the coast to Joppa. Joppa is the city where Jonah was spit out on the beach by the great fish. We then traveled to the ruins of Caesarea. We visited the Amphitheatre, the sports arena or colosseum there, and King Herod's seaside palace. It was there that King Herod would collect taxes for incoming and outgoing goods for the Roman Empire. Caesarea was one of only two port cities in Israel. King Herod had a lavish palace overlooking the Mediterranean and life was good for him. Can you believe King Herod thought life was better at the beach? You, people of BBCC, can you believe life is better at the beach? But King Herod was not a good king.

King Herod did not rule with God's judgment and righteousness, he ruled with his own judgment and ruled by what Roman told him to do. King Herod's actions did not bring peace and justice; they brought harsh punishment for those who opposed him. King Herod did not deliver to the needy; he only delivered to himself and the Roman government. King Herod was not compassionate to the weak and did not redeem the oppressed; he exploited the weak and oppressed the people with heavy taxes. King Herod did whatever he could to keep his power which included killing anyone who would threaten his rule – like killing a new born king, a baby! So, where is our good king?

The Apostle Paul says that Jesus draws us, the church, into the work of manifesting the wisdom of a good king. Through Christ, God's purpose is now shown. In Christ we have a ruler whose power comes from heaven and his wisdom is beyond our understanding. It is this power and wisdom that we – the church - need to tap into.

We need to be drawn in by Jesus. We need to become the workers of the manifested wisdom of the good king, Jesus Christ. It is through Christ; God's purpose is now shown. In Christ we have a ruler whose power comes from heaven and his wisdom is beyond our understanding. It is this power and wisdom that we need to tap into.

In another words, Psalm 72 becomes a prayer for the church to live out the rule of Christ for the entire world to see. We are called to 'Rise and Shine'. Listen to these words from the chorus of 'Rise and Shine' – *So, rise and shine, and give God the glory, glory; Rise and shine, and give God the glory, glory; Children of the Lord.* Wow, that was the first time I have sung for – that's the good news! Now the bad news – that will not be the last time!

We are called to action in the character of the King of Kings. And in this way, we will become the ordinary appearances of the extraordinary Living God, Jesus Christ. We will become through Christ a people of every nation. We will become leaders of them so that they may encounter the Living God that we have encountered.

We become the good kings who rules with God's judgment and righteousness. We become the good kings whose actions bring peace and justice. We become the good kings who are the deliverers of the needy. We become the good kings with compassion for the weak and we redeem the oppressed.

In Christ we have bold and confident access to God through faith in him. Even while confessing our sins, we can be confident that it is the forgiving God who listens as we pray. We come with boldness, seeking to be transformed by our repentance. God's purpose throughout all time has been to bring us together with him; therefore we take the time now to confess what continues to separate us.

In our second scripture reading from the Gospel of Matthew, The Magi are searching. The three Wisemen are searching for the newborn king. The Magi refer to Jesus as the newborn king and with Jesus' birth, the secret plan of God is made known in Christ Jesus. They encountered many things while they were searching for this new born king.

There is much to encounter as we look at the Magi's story of discovery. There is much to encounter with Jesus that is worth remembering regularly. The fact that the Magi's search symbolizes all of our searching for God is a good starting place. So today let us think of ourselves as the Magi. Let us think of ourselves as the wisemen and wisewomen searching for God.

The Magi's worshipping proves the grand scope of God's plan is for all people – Jew and Gentile. This is because the Magi are not Jewish, they were Gentiles and so are we who worship here today! Our presence here today proves once again that God's plan is for all people.

But let us on this, the first Sunday of a New Year, look at King Herod part in our story today. Herod's response to the news from the Magi is controlled by fear, like so much of our world is controlled by fear. King Herod lied to the three Magi telling them to report back to him so he can worship the new born king. King Herod is very scared of this new born king. His power will be taken away so the only thing on his mind is to eliminate this fear and danger.

In my lifetime, I have never seen more fear and fear mongering in our world. It seems that some in our modern world feed on stoking up fear as a way of retaining power. Words of hatred and fear are cast out, and people respond. Tweets of hatred and fear is posted and people respond. Do you know that in the last few years racial violence has increased tenfold!

We seem to be guided by casting fear upon others different than us. King Herod's reaction to the news of a new born king was fear! The Magi's response to the news of a new born king is worship. King Herod's is fear. What is your reaction to encounter Jesus? Is it worship or fear?

But perhaps the most overlooked truth we encounter in the Magi's seeking and finding is how nonchalant and normal the work of God is in our story. It begins with – *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem* – and ends as a time of worship during which the Magi celebrate and recognize that our God has manifested himself on earth – that God has appeared in human form. God is revealed to us through Jesus Christ. God's purpose for the world is made known through Jesus Christ.

The Magi were seeking God incarnate. The Magi were seeking because God placed a great star in the sky to reveal Jesus' birthplace. The Magi were seeking because they were curious to know what was behind the revelation of the star that they understood in part, but not in whole.

We are seeking God incarnate. We are seeking because God has placed in our hearts a longing for the Messiah. We are seeking because we want to know what the bases of our faith is. We may only understand this in part, but we long to understand it in whole.

All this happened simply because Jesus was born in Bethlehem. On my tour of the Holy Land, we traveled to Bethlehem and found the supposed site of this birth. Upon entering this site, we were greeted by a man carrying a lamb on his shoulders and by a group singing '*While the Shepherds Watched Their Flocks*'.

We get God's manifestation in a normal and down to earth way by the birth of child. It is a regular and essential part of life – the birth of a baby. By encountering this story over and over again, we are invited to find what the Magi found then. God's manifestation must no longer be in the form of a star to mark Jesus' birthplace, but God's manifestation must be found in the Holy Spirit continuing revelation of God's purpose in this world.

Let us be those who are curious to investigate the everyday manifestation of God's presence on earth. Let us not greet the news of a new born king with fear like King Herod did. Let us greet Jesus like the Magi with worship!

To conclude this message, I would like to do a responsive prayer with you. Your response is – **'God in your glory, shine upon us.'** I will point to you when it is your time to respond.

Let us pray:

Light of the World, we trust you to make yourself known to us. We do name the darkness that covers the earth and we do cry out from the gloom that controls our world. **Response**

Light of the World, for our sons and daughters who are far away from us, for those who are not strong enough to stand on their own, and for those whom your light has gathered; **Response**

Light of the World, like the nations that come with gifts to proclaim your glory, we offer you our praise and worship; **Response**

O God, we want to rise and shine with your love. Let us go into this world with confidence that your Light has come. Let us not live in fear, but let us worship you like the Magi did on that day long ago. **AMEN.**

Now let us pray the pray the prayer that Christ taught us – 'Our Father....'