

“HOW TO RESPOND TO CHRISTMAS?”

Text: Matthew 2:1-6

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INTRODUCTION:

1) The influence of Christianity: In the historic volume, *The Triumph of Christianity*, published by *Readers Digest*, the writer reminds readers on the tremendous influence of the Christian faith to the world in the past 2,000 years. Christian faith sets the path and the standards in the world culture that influences the life of all people beyond any and all other religions combined. Besides the teachings of Jesus on salvation in the Bible, Christian faith dominates cultural elements from social, political, legal, art, music and moral standards of the world since its inception in the first century. By the way, the world calendar was set by the year Jesus Christ was born. With all the great men in human history, none has impacted the world as did Jesus Christ.

2) The battles of Christianity: Although it was prophesied that “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God” (Rom. 14:11; Isaiah 45:23) that Christ is the Lord, the battle of Christian faith has not been settled once and for all. This is true from the very first day when Jesus was born, to all the 2,000 years of world history in different land among different people. Many religions from ancient to modern days, have been trying to compete with Christian faith in many ways. There have been political powers tried to attack, destroy and replace the Christian faith with their teaching or theories like humanism, atheism, capitalism, communism and recently liberalism. Then we see individuals with their personal ego, had tried to fight against the God of Christian faith. The final triumph of Christianity is still yet to come when Christ comes back to bring his faithful on that Judgment Day.

Let us examine how the people at Jesus time responded to him from the very beginning, at his birth. At least there were three ways to welcome the Lord.

THOSE WHO WERE POSITIVE: (Matthew 2:1-2)

1) Here came the magi: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi...came to Jerusalem.” Magi were people of top knowledge in the Persian Empire, some called them wise-men. Chinese Bible translated this word as “doctors,” people with the highest degree of education or knowledge. Through most of the Christian history, particularly in Eastern culture among the Chinese when Christian faith first reached the Chinese

shore, people used to believe that religion in general, Christian faith in particular, were seen as mostly, if not all, for those who were of the lower class, the mostly unlearned, women and children in particular. Many of the higher educated and those who were of the elite of the society, couldn't believe that believing in religion in general and in Christian faith in particular is possible. Many were blocked away from knowing Jesus by their own "ignorance of knowledge." But here we see the first group of people who came to seek to know Jesus were those of the highest level of knowledge, the top class of the top civilization at the time.

2) They came from the East: "Magi from the east came to Jerusalem." The East could be from Persia, India or even China, as some had suggested, but it is for sure "they come from the east." Even today, still people from the east believe that Jesus and Christian faith is a western religion, and therefore the Eastern people shouldn't believe in it because there were enough religions in the Eastern cultures in India, Nepal, China, and Japan, etc. This is surely a misconception mostly from the fact that Christian faith was introduced to the East by Western missionaries. Israel is in Asia and the goal of the Christian message is for "all nations." (Matt 28:19) There isn't such a thing as the East or the West in regard to the coming of the Savior of the world.

3) They came to worship Jesus: "They 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." (2:2) The Magi had a heart of search a Savior for the world long before Jesus was born. These were people who had in their mind the most important event in history, the birth of Jesus, the Christ. Then they took the trouble to travel hundreds, if not thousands, of miles on camel back to reach Jerusalem just to see and worship Jesus. Look at how dedicated they were and their most honest search for the truth.

True people of knowledge, honest people of high position, don't snuggle in their comfort zone. They need to face the true and take the lead to seek and worship Jesus, the Christ, for the good of humanity.

THOSE WHO WERE NEGATIVE: (Matthew 2:3-4)

1) People who can't stand Jesus: "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed." (2:3) Another translation puts it: "He was greatly troubled." Of course he was greatly troubled because the Magi called Jesus: "The one was born the king of the Jews" while Herod was the king of the Jews at the time. Most, if not all, of those people in positions of power and privilege want

things to stay as they are so they can continue to enjoy the privilege. The claims of Christian faith on changes of life, abide by the rules of God and be humble before God were not what the elites want or need. We see leaders of political positions, like King Herod, led attacks of Christian faith, imprisoned Christians, burned down churches, drove out missionaries and set up rules to smear the name of Jesus and freedom of his followers. The birth of Jesus has a direct threat to the power and privilege of the elites.

2) People who blindly followed: “And all in Jerusalem followed him.” (2:3b) The people in Jerusalem didn't really like King Herod because he wasn't a Jew but an Idumean, was appointed governor of Galilee and later king of Judea by bribery. He sided with the Romans in every term in controlling the Jews and was considered by many Jews as a traitor. But when they faced a new challenge, they blindly followed the king in feeling troubled.

In political and social arena, politicians and civil leaders often used the power of the mass to really support for their own benefits and most of the people will just blindly follow, like this case and many others in history and in today's world. Millions of ordinary people oppose the Christian faith not because they know what it is, but because of the path their leaders set for them. No wonder Jesus called the Pharisees “The blind leads the blind.”

3) People on religious warfare: “When he had called together the chief priests and the scribes (teachers of the law), and asked them where the Christ was to be born.” (2:4) Today, the American Atheists Society lost an argument in a legal battle against Christian faith because there is a cross made of steel beams from the destroyed World Trade Center stands at the 9/11 Memorial ground. Atheists wage a war against Jesus and Christian faith in the past 50 years has grown to a strong power in our society and the government.

The Muslim religion has stepped up their attacks on Christians in their majority Muslim countries, burned down hundreds of churches, slaughtered countless faithful followers of Jesus, sanctioned by their Muslim leaders and government officials. Christian faith and Christians has become targets of ridicule and persecution not just in Muslim countries but here in our own society. Bible reading, Christmas celebration, symbols of God have become target of bans and law-suits. If you have a clear eye, we are in a religious war right here in American, once considered by many as a Christian nation.

PEOPLE WHO JUST DON'T CARE: (Matthew 2:5-6)

1) They knew but kept silent: “In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is

what the prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a king who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.” (2:5-6) This answer was given by the chief priests and the scribes, or teachers of the law, when Herod asked for information of the coming king of the Jews. Did this elite people know that there is a king to be born to shepherd his people, the Israelis, yes, they knew. Did they seek to find the king and worship him like the Magi did? The answer is no, they didn't. These people had their position, business to take care, life to live, money to make. The last thing they cared is the coming of the Messiah for their people and their nation.

2) They knew but were irresponsible: From the fact that they were able to answer the question Herod asked, we know that they knew the coming of Jesus and the mission he has come for: To shepherd the people of Israel. To shepherd is to care for the need of God's people. Isn't this what the priests and the scribes suppose to do? Don't they have the responsibility to be on the watch for the well being of their people?

Today there are still people who are irresponsible for the well being of important needs of their own people. How many Christians really care the souls of their family, friends and others they love? How many Christians are truly care the church of their God and the ministries? I am sure most of them know what is there and the needs are, but they are just being irresponsible to answer the call of needs.

3) They knew but failed to do right: When the chief priests and the scribes led the people shouting “Crucify him!, crucify him!” they knew exactly what they were doing: They schemed to murder the Son of God, and the people all followed their lead blindly. That is why when Peter preached of their sin of killing Jesus in Acts 2:22-36, they felt heart-cutting, and asked Peter what should they do. (2:37)

Being silent and don't care doesn't protect us from guilt and the sins of omission. Knowing the right thing but fail to do it could lead people end up did the most terrible thing they first didn't expect would do. If you know the importance of believing in Jesus for salvation of your soul and the souls of your family and other loved ones but fail to believe and help other to believe, you may end up doing the most harm to yourself and the purpose of God, the precious souls of yourself and that of your people.

APPLICATION:

1) Follow the right leader: Have you ever followed the wrong driver in front of you, hoping that he will drive faster, but ended up he didn't drive the way you like to see him drove. This is a small mistake to make. But in regard to your soul and the souls of your loved ones, you can't afford to follow a wrong leader and end up missing the boat for the most important thing of your life. Celebrating Christmas is more than just a church activity, it is a time for all of us to make a decision about Jesus Christ: How would you respond to his coming into the world and hopefully into your heart.

1) Regardless of how you feel: What I want to say is regardless of how you feel about Christmas or Jesus Christ, He and Christmas are going to be here for a long, long time until either he comes back or we go to meet him. Here isn't many options anyone could do to ignore Christmas and Jesus be it in the past or the present day. Instead of holding negative or resisting Jesus, you will be far better off if you choose to face him in a positive attitude, take him into your heart, seek and worship him as Lord of your life and Savior of your soul, then you are going to have a truly blessed Christmas.