

THE WORLD RESPONDS to the BIRTH of JESUS

The variety of responses recorded in the New Testament to the news that Jesus was born, are exactly the same responses that are in the world today. Every one of us fits one of the five responses of that day.

Before we look at the two that are very familiar - the Shepherds and the Wise Men, let's look at other responses that came with the news (Matthew 2:1-8).

NEGATIVE RESPONSES

All Jerusalem

When the Magi (Wise Men), following the star, arrived in Jerusalem, they began asking,

“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” Matthew 2:2.

This had tremendous effect on the whole city from the king down:

“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him” v.3.

All Jerusalem was astir with the news. Imagine what these Magi would have looked like...wealthy, high society foreigners, dressed in unusual clothes...asking to

see a new-born king! **The social media of the day (word of mouth) would have gone wild. The Wise Men were the centre of attention of the whole city.**

The whole city “disturbed”

Jerusalem was “all abuzz” with the excitement of the arrival of the these “wise men”. We can imagine that maybe there would have been great activity in the city because they had come, the shop owners in the market place calling out their wares, the restaurateurs hoping for their custom, the innkeepers wondering how long they would be staying, mothers pointing them out to their excited children.

What was happening with all the people in Jerusalem at that time would be very much like what is happening at Christmas time in our day. Everyone is astir...businesses, malls, shops, restaurants, all working overtime - the birth of Jesus the greatest opportunity to make money.

Back then, everyone’s attention was on those strange looking men - the outward appearance of who they were and the whole city was disturbed by their message...

A new King is born!

But it was not only the declaration that they were searching for a King, it was also that they wanted to worship Him. In other words, they were looking for...

The Son of God!

To Israel, this meant the Messiah (Christ). All Israel was waiting for His arrival. From childhood they were taught about Him coming (Isaiah 9:1-7). But there is no record of anyone in Jerusalem that day excitedly

joining the Wise Men in searching for Him. There was no active response from the people to their message. None of them turned up in Bethlehem to worship Him.

Herod the King

So much excitement with everyone in the city talking about it, **Herod was greatly disturbed. A new king meant one thing to him - a challenge to his position and power and his very life.**

Sadly, this is true of many today. Believing in Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is a challenge to the independence and rulership over one's own life. So many, sometimes angrily, refuse to accept Him for who He is and surrender their lives to Him.

Hearing the news, Herod had one thought - find the Child and kill Him! This, too, has been a reality even in this our day. Some, with no faith in who He is, have tried to get rid of celebrating His birth altogether - to kill the remembrance of Him, as it were.

Herod called for the religious leaders. He knew they would know where the Christ would be born. They knew and read from Micah 5:2-5:

“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.”

Herod then set in motion a plan to get rid of the Child. He secretly called for the Wise Men and asked them when the star had first appeared. He then told them to go to Bethlehem and, lying, said that he, too, would go to worship Him. Based on the knowledge they gave about the star, Herod worked out the child would be

about 2 years old. His evil heart was then displayed in the slaughter of all the little boys in Bethlehem who were around that age (Matthew 2:13-18).

The Religious Leaders

The religious leaders are another story again. They knew the Word and taught all the people about the coming of the Messiah. But after telling Herod where the Christ would be born they did not go to Bethlehem. They obviously did not believe what the Wise Men were saying. They may have thought in their religious pride, “These are Gentiles. Why would we believe that those heathen had seen a star that indicated the King was born? How would they, as Gentiles, know this was the Son of God? After all, we are the chief priests and the teachers of the Law; we are the authorities representing God to the people of Israel. God would let us know first.”

“Religiosity” focuses on following rules and regulations but it does not receive personal revelation of who God is or what God is doing. Even today there are many people who have a mental understanding that the Babe, born in Bethlehem, is the Son of God. But this understanding is not affecting their hearts and lives at all. Always, God looks at the heart and reveals Himself to “heart” people.

POSITIVE RESPONSES

The Shepherds

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'...When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about''
Luke 2:8-15.

There are four very important things to note about the message that was given to the shepherds:



It was the message of *salvation*

It was a message that a “Saviour” had been born, the fulfilment of the promised Messiah had come.



Why send the message to *shepherds*?

Out of all the people in Israel, many of whom were faithfully looking for the Messiah to come, why did God reveal the message to *shepherds*? These men were caring for the lambs that would be slaughtered as the sacrifice for sin. The message was Lamb of God has been born (John 1:29).



The *shepherds response*

The shepherds believed and their immediate response was to hurry to Bethlehem!

“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger” v.16.



They *spread the word!*

“When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them” vs.17-18.

This is the response of all true believers in Christ. So real is our experience of salvation we “run” to share with others. This is the joy and great opportunity we all have as we celebrate His birth today!

The Wise Men

The Wise Men had travelled from their far off land for up to two years from the time they had seen the miraculous star. They arrived at the house in Bethlehem where the young child now was..

“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” Matthew 2:11.

The understanding of these men was amazing. The gifts they gave reveal what they knew about Him.



They gave Him gold

Gold was always a gift given to a king. But these Magi knew more. They knew this Child was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.



They gave Him frankincense

Frankincense was used in worship. They knew this Child was the Son of God.



They gave Him myrrh

Myrrh was used in burial. They knew this Child had come to die as the Saviour of the world.

SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

In revealing the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ to these two very different groups of people, God was making a declaration. Whether economic, social or cultural differ-

ences, the birth of His Son was for the whole world - whether JEW or GENTILE!

The Greatest Gift of All



“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” John 3:16..

We love the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Yes, let us enjoy the family gatherings, the giving of gifts and the excitement of the celebration. But, in the midst of all that happening, unlike the people of Jerusalem in that day, let us make *Him* the focus of our attention. Let us celebrate the greatest Gift of all; the Gift that came to give us new life and restored relationship with God, the Father, and let us, like the *Wise Men*, worship Him.

With our love and blessings. We hope this article will inspire you at this Christmas time.

Paul & Bunty

