

# Reactions to Baby Jesus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] This morning, what I want to do for a little while is look at some of these readings, particularly with reference to four different reactions to the birth of Jesus, two are positive, two are negative, and apply them to our own lives. It is not going to be a deep, exegetical study of the birth of Jesus but an overview. I want to focus on Jesus Christ and how important Jesus Christ is. If you are not a believer here this morning, I want to do that because nothing else really matters and nothing matters other than you having a right relationship with Jesus Christ and nothing should stand in the way of that. If you are a believer, then there is always that on-going, significant, important reassessment of our lives so that Jesus Christ remains in the rightful place of Lordship over us. Interestingly, just for your information, the theme of what Neal is saying tonight, though much more condensed, will be similar, though we have not been colluding. I just thought I would let you know that just in case you think we are just cutting shortcuts. What I want to do is just really refocus again on Jesus Christ and see the different reactions and see because always in Scripture we have people, don't we? And we have people reacting to, usually, to the message of Jesus or the person of Jesus. And in these people we always see ourselves because people don't change.

People haven't changed. Society changes. Culture changes. We like to think sophistication changes, but probably not. But certainly we don't change as core people, made in God's image, who have broken faith with God and who are in a desperate place without a redeemer, without a saviour, and who continue to battle as Christians against some of the unbelief that kept us from Christ in the first place. So I just want to focus on four people, very simply for a few moments this morning. The first is Herod in Matthew 2. That section we read there from verse 13, it's a remarkable chapter. We tend to kind of soft-soap the nativity story a little bit, but there is a lot of blood and gore, and there's a lot of deep, deep sadness and brutal dictatorial purging goes on. That's very relevant this week, isn't it? We've seen a purging in North Korea. Well, this is not dissimilar. What

Herod is doing is doing the same kind of thing. He's trying to establish his power base, and he wanted Jesus dead. Of that there's no doubt. He heard about this king who had been born, and he feigned excitement and interest in this king being born, but he recognised right from then the great threat to his own independence and to his own throne that he had spent a long time achieving the power and the authority and the position that he was in. He was both selfish and brutal and proud of his position, so much so that he, to cover all bases, destroyed, took the life of all two-year-old males and under in that whole district. Can you imagine that? We read over that in our politeness, in our comfort, in our churchiness. Well, that's an interesting part of the story. I wonder what the child will be looked at, dressed up as Herod, and we'll laugh at him as he comes in. The child Herod, or the god, the man Herod, utterly brutal dictator who destroyed the lives of many, many families in order to maintain, as he thought, his position and his power. He wanted Jesus dead. Now, I don't for a moment think there are any Herods here, apart from when we look into our own hearts or I look into mine, but subconsciously that same will may be yours and may be mine at some point in our lives or maybe even today, because you see Jesus, you don't, you would never verbalize that you want him dead, of course. But in reality, in our lives, you recognize Jesus as a threat. You recognize him as a threat to your hard-earned position in your life, that position of independence. You misunderstand him. You misunderstand his claims in your life. You misunderstand his desire for lordship over you to be your king and you rather the independence that says, I am king ultimately of my own life. I am the one who makes the decisions and I am the one who makes the rules. But in Romans 6, we're reminded there of that danger, that therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. If we allow that to happen, if we are afraid of Jesus at that level and want Jesus dead, then we're in a hugely dangerous position because we are

not dealing with our heart. How often is it that in your life, effectively, you're wishing Jesus dead because the Bible is closed, the connection with Jesus is gone, you're no longer praying or speaking to him and you would wish that his conscience-pricking power was not in your life. You want Jesus dead? Yet he loves you. And to reject him for independence, to reject him for the ability to maintain your hard-earned position in life is a dangerous place to be. I was speaking to a friend of mine not terribly long ago who had been to an event, he's not a Christian, he'd been at an event that the gospel was presented and I asked him afterwards what he thought of it and he said, well, I need to do some serious thinking because if this is true, then my life will have to change radically. And that is absolutely right and that is absolutely true. If Christ is who he says he is, and that goes for us as Christians too, let's not be preaching or listening for other people.

[7:11] It's true for us too. If Christ is Lord, that is a hugely significant thing and it means our lives need to change accordingly. It's not simply a slapstick thing that has a religious experience that's changed our life, it's a life, ongoing life-changing event that challenges our independence and challenges our self-reliance in an ongoing way. Herod wanted Jesus dead, that's one response. And the reality is that the depth of our own sin, we might think, well, there's no Herod's here and we're not like him. He was a despot, he was brutal.

But ultimately the depth of our own sin is so great that it required Jesus Christ to pray that prayer in Gethsemane because the thought of having that sin dealt with was so great that he recoiled, the perfect, powerful Son of God recoiled from what lay ahead on our behalf. Not my will but yours be done. He went nonetheless driven by his outstanding love for us. So the depth of sin is great in all of us, even though we're very polite and nice and on the surface tremendous people. But we know that independence and that sin and that pride and that lovelessness and that carelessness just can well up so easily within us. So Herod wanted Jesus dead. There's a question there that we need to ask about our own attitude to Jesus. But then we have the shepherds in the story that we read and in

Luke chapter 2, the early accounts are mainly in Matthew and in Luke. And in Luke chapter 2, we have, when we saw this before, the message of the birth of Jesus going out to the shepherds. In verse 9, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. The angel said, do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy. And then in verse 13, we're told that a great host of the heavenly, a company of the heavenly host appeared with the angels to them. And then in verse 20, we're told that the shepherds returning, returning, glorifying and praising God for all the things they'd seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

So here is, and I mentioned this last week, I'm not dwelling on this, but the shepherds were a very low cast of people in the Middle East yet they were given this astonishing good news and they received that good news. It was a miracle, it was otherworldly, okay.

[10:07] It was remarkable, these guys were shepherds, they wouldn't have seen many things like this before, you know, it wasn't the digital age in which we live, but they responded to this otherworldly message that they'd been given from the angels about the coming of the Messiah.

They would have known about the prophecies of the Messiah, they would have expected at some degree the Messiah to come, but nonetheless there was this utterly astonishing, fear-inspiring revelation to them from heaven of the Savior coming and they accepted that. They accepted the miraculous otherworldly revelation. They didn't look to see what they'd eaten that night to see if there was anything hallucinogenic in it.

Well, wow, what was it that he made for tea tonight? It was pretty good anyway, was that a mushroom they did? I don't know. But anyway, they didn't look for that, it wasn't that kind of event. They accepted and they believed and they acted on it, they therefore glorified and praised God and they shared what they had heard to all who would listen to them.

And that simple response, they didn't over-rationalize the situation, they didn't go be, it was reasonable because it was there in front of them even though it was miraculous and it was really above reason, it wasn't just reasonable, it was beyond that. But they accepted that because it was real and humbly, they responded by faith and in praise. They recognized and they knew of the Messiah and they knew that they needed a Messiah and they praised and glorified God for what they had seen.

Now, we need to respond in the same way as these shepherds, we need to respond by faith. Now, because the message of the Gospel is also otherworldly. We saw that last week when we were

talking about fixing our eyes on what is unseen because what is unseen is eternal and what is seen is temporary. So there is a sense in which we are being asked to believe in something we can't see at one level. We are asked to have faith. Yes, we see Jesus in His Word. We know Jesus, we see Him by faith and we can accept Him with the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is undoubtedly also coming to faith in another, I hate to use the word dimension because it sounds sort of kind of like, I don't know, what's the word for science fiction, you know, another dimension, it's like Star Trek, you know, another dimension. I don't mean it like that. And I don't like using that word because the Bible doesn't use that word, it's not kind of biblical word. But we are seeing a different world and we need to accept that. We need to stop just looking at what we see and touch and feel today and recognise by faith that Christ is real, Christ is tangible, but He is only received by faith and He is ascended to heaven. And we need the Holy Spirit, we need to have Him open our eyes and we need our hearts transformed. So you see, many people will come to faith in Jesus Christ and they will not look any different. You will not wear any different clothes and you will not all suddenly have a kind of halo around you.

[13:36] And amazingly people's eyes, they are now Christians because what will happen is that our heart is being transformed. And that is unseen also. And that is something that must go on and go on happening so that we can come to the place where when we receive Jesus Christ and we believe in the sovereign and the miraculous message of the gospel, we too can glorify and praise God. That only comes from a changed heart. We cannot do that naturally. Just coming to church does not mean you are glorifying and praising God. Just praying does not mean we need the heart that God alone can give. We need this transformation to happen. And very often how we praise God is a reflection on how much we are dependent on God and how much we believe in God and how much we have accepted God as our Lord and Savior, isn't it? Because praise comes from our heart, praise comes from deep, deep within us. And so it is a reflection of our understanding of the gospel and of the Word and our willingness to spread that message. So we come today in a public way to worship. It is only a tiny part of our lives which is all to be worshiped and therefore we look for that motivation that is similar to the shepherds who accepted the message, who accepted it as it was revealed to them. We are asked to do the same. We are not asked to be superly critical. We are not asked to deny reason either. We are to use our intellect. We are to see that and we are to accept the message as it is given and recognize that God is God and Christ is who He says He is. And He has done what He has come to do. And we therefore go with Christ in our hearts and lives, needing and receiving a Savior, glorifying and praising Him and sharing that with others. That's a great response to the gospel. It's another challenge to us. Okay, quickly, the third response which you may or may not know or may or may not recognize in your own heart or not is the innkeeper's response. And there's not much to say. There's a great deal made of the stable and the kind of word, the stable and the inn at Christmas time, isn't there? There's not a great deal made of it in the Bible. I read something this week that said that Mary and Joseph had a stable relationship. But I think that's probably not what's meant by any of these things. But all it says is that she gave birth to her firstborn as son. She wrapped him and placed him in the manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Okay, so we're going to extrapolate a little bit from this for ourselves. We don't know anything really. We're not even told about the innkeeper here. But there was no room for them in the inn. And Jesus went out as it were to the outhouse where the animals were. So I'm kind of presuming a little bit here. But it seems that the person who owned the inn didn't know or appreciate who Jesus was. And Mary coming to the door was a bit of an inconvenience. And he was simply taken up with hosting all those who'd come for the census, feeding them, giving them drink. No time to consider Jesus. He may have then gone on at some point to realize what he'd done. We don't know of his eternal condition. We don't know of his relationship with God. But it seems at this point anyway that Jesus was relegated. There was no particular, imagine the kind of King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. No room for him in the inn. And again to spiritualize that, there's an interesting challenge there for us about whether we have room for Jesus Christ in our lives. It would seem that for whatever reason, and obviously the inn was full, but it wasn't significant enough to find room for Christ there at a physical, practical level. But in our lives, is that what we are doing? Is that what we do? Do we have no room for Jesus in our lives and in our hearts? Because he's not important enough, because it's not urgent enough, because he's not real enough, because we're not interested enough in him. Our lives are far too important to give time and place and the Lordship to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are preoccupied with today. Oh man, at

this time, even more so preoccupied with what's happening and all the arrangements and all the presence and all the things that we need to do. No real time for Jesus Christ, except possibly on our own terms. We'll put him in the buyer of our life, the outhouse of our life, whatever that might be for us, whatever that outhouse might be, that place where he's not really a challenge, where he's out of sight, out of mind. It's easy. And I guess many people might come this evening who don't think about spiritual things much, who maybe have no faith, but who nonetheless are interested in coming along for whatever reason and maybe it's through friendship with people here. But it may be that they are keeping Jesus at arms. This is how near they want him to be. Just this once a year drip into their lives. This life is so important. I think in a secular world that becomes more of a battle for us. This life is all that there is. But this is God, isn't it? This is God who knows, who holds your life in his hands, who knows every atom and every item of this world, who understands and appreciates your heart, who sees the sparrows that fall from the trees and who understands all things and who will be our judge. I'm going to mention a little bit as I close about that this evening. But he has come and prepared a place of safety and security and love and commitment and joy and fullness and hope. And it's shameful for us to have no room for Christ. It's shameful if our lives are so full that we have no time for him because of who he is, the innkeeper. Lastly and very briefly there is Simeon. Simeon, this great Old Testament character who is one of the last of the Old Testament prophets from verses 29 to 35. And he makes his great prophecy about who Jesus is. He is at peace. He is willing therefore to die. He recognizes that Christ will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel. He also blessed the child and he speaks about how the child will be for the rising and falling of many in Israel. And then he also says to many, and a sword will pierce your own soul too. He prophesies the great pain and hurt of her being the mother of Jesus along with the blessing. But he was absolutely satisfied with who Jesus was and what Jesus was going to come to do. He recognized, moved by the [ 21 : 58 ] Spirit that this was the Redeemer, this was the Saviour, even though he may not have truly understood how that salvation would work itself out. But he was satisfied that this was the Redeemer that was to be sent. And he was at peace with God and was willing to just go at that point, go back to heaven to be with his God, satisfied with Jesus. He knew his identity was in his Redeemer and his own life was not that significant and he had this great relationship with God. And so I simply close with that same challenge to us of the need for us particularly as Christians, or absolutely as Christians to be satisfied with Christ.

That we could say today as Christians, young people as well as old people, dismiss your servant in peace. I can go now. You know, we're at that place where our life is in God's hands. We're not asking to go, but we're willing to go. We're willing for God to be sovereign and Lordship will rely. We know that where we're going and we know that we are at peace with him and we are satisfied with him. And we live our lives accordingly. And that's a tremendously significant thing that we recognize that as followers of Christ, we are to go out and be light of the world because we are satisfied with Christ and we recognize who he is. And we know that he is a light of revelation to the Gentiles. And it's our task to share that. It's our task to go out with that.

And one of the interesting things about this society in which we live is that as it becomes more secular, what's the danger for us to do? The danger is, I think, for us to lower our standard and become more like the world in which we live. I think the reality ought to be for us as believers, young people and old people, that the more secular the world is, the more we should stand out as Christians because we're going to be very different in our thinking, in our attitudes, in our decisions, in our celebrations, in all that we do because we are satisfied with Christ and we're living in a panic stricken world that is rushing around looking for satisfaction all over the place except with Christ. And increasingly in parties and in drunkenness and in relationships and in all kinds of things continually without any spiritual, without that unseen dimension at all. People are looking for satisfaction there. So our position as believers should increasingly, as we are like Simeon here, we're satisfied with Christ. So our position should be a standout position. But the reality along with that is maybe not in the same way as it was with Mary who a sword pierced her own soul in a remarkably personal way. But we too will have a cross to carry if we are standing out for Jesus Christ. We will. It's not an optional extra. It's a reality. We will suffer when we stand not for being ignorant. We will suffer for being humble and gracious and respectful and Christ centred if we are following Christ. Because we will stand out.

Because we will recognise the battle in our own hearts. The battle against sin, battle against unbelief, the battle against hatred, the battle like Herod had for independence, all these things we recognise. Please don't think as Christians we're not going to have these battles. Please don't look at other people for the battles. Please don't blame other people for the battles. Please see that the battles first begin with a raging fight within our own hearts. The victory is won in Christ. But there will be a cross to carry.

Burden is easy for us if we give our burdens to Him. It's way as easy as burden is light. But nonetheless we will be cross to carry in Christians. And I want that to be something we remember. It was something that was prophesied for Mary and her life. We'll look at her life later on for the end of the year. And it will be true for our lives. And I want to say that maybe particularly for the young people growing up in the day and generation which we're growing up. If we're going to be faithful to Christ, satisfied with Christ, we're going to stand out for Christ. And if we stand out for Christ, we will also know a sword piercing our own soul. Because that is the way of the Gospel. We are called to be different. And we are called to be different in a secular world which doesn't believe in Jesus Christ.

[ 27 : 06 ] That is a challenge. And that is one of the challenges of the Gospel today. So please consider some of these character traits. Two of which mark out belief and trust and reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ. Two which expose sinful hearts, unbelief, pride and preoccupation.

And seek that Christ is changing and moving and renewing our hearts to give Him His rightful place because He loves us so much that He was willing to do the Father's will from Gethsemane onwards to the cross and to the pit of hell on our behalf. Let's set our heads and pray.

Father God, we ask and pray that we would understand a little bit more about Jesus. That we would know that He is no picture postcard figure of the past or some kind of romantic leader who we can aspire to follow in a meaningless and rather kind of romantic way. But may we recognize that as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He is the one to whom we are accountable, the one who sees into our hearts and knows our failure and our inability to meet His standard, yet in love provided Jesus to do that in our place and provides a full and glorious salvation.

And as the living risen ascended Savior today, may we like the disciples believe as it were, the unbelievable, the unseen. And may we accept by faith this great word incarnate, this word that is given to us and may He be Lord of our lives. At this time as Christians, particularly we ask that we would be stand out not in our own strength and our own wisdom or in our own pride or self-righteousness but as humble followers of Jesus. That we would stand out in love for Him, stand out in love for one another, stand out in forgiveness, stand out in self-control, stand out in satisfaction with Jesus as the bread of our lives and that we would stand out as having this great relationship with Him growing, developing a victorious battle that we face that first looks internally. Lord help us in all these things, give us wisdom, give us grace, grant us the characteristics and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and bless us today. And tonight also may we spend time today praying for the gospel as it will be presented this evening and all the service and all that will happen this evening. We pray that many will come to know and love Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior for we ask these things in His precious name. Amen.