

**Matt. 2:1-12 (1984 NIV)**  
***Christ's Birth & Men's Responses***

**Introduction**

Very soon, we will be celebrating another Christmas. For Christians, Christmas is more than just shopping, partying, fun, and games. More importantly, the main character is definitely not Santa Claus, but Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God and born in the likeness of human flesh.

Christmas is about God's gift of love in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is about God's invitation to believe in Jesus Christ so that we can experience purpose, power and direction in this life. It is about life forever with God when our existence here is expired.

How then do you respond to this gift and invitation of God? I believe how Christmas will be different to you this year does not depend on how differently others are celebrating it, but on how differently you respond to Jesus Christ.

Christmas celebrations and traditions have evolved so much that the very significance of the occasion has been lost over the years.

A story is told about a new baby being born into a certain family. The parents had wanted a child for many years, and finally God gave them this child. All their friends and family gathered together to celebrate and rejoice in this birth. They had a feast. They talked for hours and finally someone wanted to see this child that they had gathered together to honour. The parents went to their bedroom to get the child. They found the coats of the people piled high on the bed where the baby laid sleeping. When they took off the coats, they found their baby had died from suffocation. The coats had killed this child.

(<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/coat-check>)

We are guilty of re-enacting this same story when Christmas comes along. We all gather together to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, but we forget about the King who was born unto us. We spend many hours and much money to celebrate His birth, but in all our hustle and bustle we forget about the King that was born.

We buy presents, decorate Christmas trees, write letters, and send cards. We write Merry Xmas to our loved ones and friends. And you know what has happened? We have taken Christ out of CHRISTmas. We have we Xed (crossed out) CHRIST out of CHRISTmas.

In Matt. 2:1-12, we are told how different people responded to the news of Jesus' birth. These responses are as real today as they were at the time of Jesus' birth. What are these responses? One response is that of ...

## I. Being Troubled

In Matt. 2:1-12, we are told that Herod, then king of Israel, was greatly troubled when he heard of the birth of Jesus.

Why? It is because Jesus was described to him as “one born king of the Jews”. And this was bad news to him because it meant that someone was going to challenge his no. 1 position and his control. As they say in Chinese: “One mountain cannot have two tigers.” Likewise, one nation cannot have two kings. So, Herod saw a potential rival in Jesus Christ.

He feared losing his no. 1 position and control in the country. And you know what he did? He ordered all male children who were two years old and below to be killed just to protect his no. 1 position and control.

Yes, there are people today like Herod. The fear of losing their position and control in life can lead them to do the most unimaginable things. Yes, there are people today like Herod—they see Jesus Christ as a potential rival in their lives. They are scared of believing in Jesus Christ because they are afraid of losing their no. 1 position and control in life. They fear that they will not be able to do what they want and like in life.

This fear of losing our control to do what we want or like is also true for Christians. Yes, we believe with all our heart that Jesus has saved us. But our struggle is that we cannot say with all our heart that Jesus is the Lord and Master of all aspects of our lives.

The story is told of a time when the US and the former Soviet Union staged a car-racing event. Both countries commissioned their best engineers to produce the fastest racing car possible.

After much experimenting and preparation, the important day arrived for the high-speed contest. It finished with the American car winning just by inches. This was rather hard for the Russians to swallow. The Soviet national newspaper then carried the following report: “Russia and the US competed in a long-awaited race yesterday afternoon. Both cars broke all former speed records. The Soviet Union came in second, and the US finished next to last.”

This is of course a fictitious story. But it speaks loudly of a very true fact of life—i.e. we are fearful of losing our no. 1 position and control in life, and we will do almost anything to guard that (Zuck 1997:196).<sup>1</sup>

But to believe in Jesus Christ is not to lose control in your life. In fact, it is to live a more purposeful life because Jesus Christ can help you better control your life.

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<sup>1</sup> Zuck, Roy B. 1997. *The Speaker's Quote Book*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub.

Perhaps you are like me. I know that there are some things in my life that can be improved if only I can exercise better control. Often, it is too humbling and even too shameful to admit that you are not in control of things in your life. But then, the reality is that our control over many things in life is limited.

Many years ago around Christmas time, I was travelling back from Genting Highlands in Malaysia to Singapore. Along the way, I saw these beautiful private condominiums in Kuala Lumpur. I told myself: "Wow! Those folks living here must be very well secured and comfortable in life."

I said too soon. About two weeks later, these same buildings gave way and collapsed into a chaotic mess. Yes, you may remember the tragedy of the collapse of Highland Towers in Kuala Lumpur on 11 Dec 1993. It was given wide coverage in the press and many stories were reported.

One story told of a doctor who had called home to say that he would be a little late for lunch. Almost immediately after his call, the buildings collapsed, trapping his wife and two kids. You can imagine the shock on this doctor's face when he reached home and saw the rubble before him. Then the awesome reality struck him like a bolt of lightning—his wife and kids were trapped inside that pile of rubble.

He dashed forward like a man suddenly gone mad, and began to dig desperately with his bare hands, crying and screaming for his family. When rescue workers tried to pull him away, he was still digging away with his aching hands and his eyes blinded by tears. When food was offered to him, he said: "How can I eat when my family don't even have water to drink."

I had earlier thought that the folks who stayed in these once glorious buildings were secured and comfortable in life. But such security and comfort cannot be guaranteed for life because life can be no respecter of persons.

Yes, there will be times when we have no control over what is happening because weak or strong; poor or rich, we are all limited in some ways. But when we are overwhelmed, Jesus Christ can help us overcome. So, you should not feel troubled because you fear that to believe in Jesus Christ is to lose control over your life. In fact, to believe in Jesus Christ is to recognise your many limitations and allow Him to help you better control your life.

A second response towards Jesus Christ in the Christmas story is that of ...

### **Being Indifferent**

We turn away from King Herod and look at another group of people—the religious leaders (the Bible calls them the chief priests and teachers of God's

law). The Christmas story tells us that when Herod asked them where the baby Jesus was born, they gave him the correct answer—"In Bethlehem," they said. They looked into their Holy Scriptures and discovered that the event was actually foretold to take place in Bethlehem.

Yes, they had the right answer but they had a problem too. Their problem was that even though they knew where to find the baby Jesus, they did not bother to go and see Him themselves. The answer they had was to solve Herod's problem, not their problem. They were indifferent; they were self-righteous; they believed they had no problem; they believed they were pretty okay in life.

There are people today like these religious leaders at the time of Jesus' birth. They believe they are okay in life. They say: "Jesus Christ is for the weak, the defeated, the wicked, but not for me. I'm successful. I'm strong. I'm moral. I'm honest. I'm helpful. I'm okay."

Psychologists say that those who believe that they are always okay will find it hard to enjoy deep and real relationships with others; they will always insist that there is nothing wrong with them, and if there is indeed anything wrong, it must be others' fault. Such people are in a state of denial because they are often very defensive and they put up a great pretence.

Even Christians can be guilty of this "I am always okay" pretence. We call it self-righteousness. A person who is living in a self-righteous way can appear to be humble. This is because humility is one of the goals of a self-righteous person.

In this sense, self-righteousness is more a way of living than an attitude. It is to live out the goal of self-improvement. For a Christian, it is to improve oneself so that he can be more pleasing to God. The Christian term to describe this pursuit is "sanctification".

But the problem is that Christians undertake this pursuit with so much self-effort that there is very little dependence upon God. Sanctification without depending on God leads to self-righteousness rather than to personal holiness. In our effort to make self more righteous, more acceptable and more pleasing to God, we achieve what we do—self-righteousness.

In fact, this is how Adam and Eve were deceived in Eden. Satan (as a serpent) told Eve that she could know the difference between right and wrong. The implication is that this ability could enable Adam and Eve to choose to do what is right. They were deceived into thinking that they could be "right" on their own. They could be like God and be right like God.

Of course, it is good to want to be pleasing and right before God. But we must not confuse the desire to please God with a life that is lived trying to please God on our own. We cannot possibly become acceptable to God in our own right. This is why self-righteousness can be so detrimental—we either pretend

that we are always okay, or we think we are really okay, or we can make ourselves okay.

So, I have this to say to Christians as we approach another Christmas—“We must appreciate afresh the gift of righteousness we have in Jesus Christ. We who are in Christ are acceptable to God not because of what we have done to deserve it, but what Christ has finished for us when He was here on earth in human flesh.”

Nowadays, we get horrified by news of all kinds of violence we read in the papers. Some of these were reports of teenagers and men who went berserk and started shooting innocent people to death.

But you know, such cold-blooded shootings were not really new. Way back in 1993, an incident happened that shook the whole of USA and caused many Americans to pressure their government to impose more stringent gun laws.

One fine day in 1993, a man by the name of Colin Ferguson stepped into a MRT train in New York. Three men were sitting in front of him, reading their papers. Ferguson suddenly took out a gun and shot into the heads of these three unsuspecting men. And for the next 90 min, this madman went on a shooting spree. As passengers screamed to get out in panic, Ferguson shouted teasingly: “I’m going to get you!” He shot dead another two and further wounded 18 others. He was only subdued by some men when he was reloading his empty gun.

Who was this Colin Ferguson? Well, he was born in Jamaica and came from a rich family and attended a top school there. His father was a prominent businessman, and when he died, many government officials attended his funeral.

But the downturn came when Ferguson’s mum died of cancer and the family fortune was shattered. Ferguson then came to the US in 1982 but was not able to recreate his once good life. In 1988, his wife divorced him and won custody of their son. While working one day, he fell and suffered a bad injury, subsequently losing his job. In 1991, he was suspended from university because of problems with both teachers and students.

Ferguson then kept a list of his enemies. In fact, as far as he was concerned, everyone (white, black or coloured) was prejudiced against him. Hence, he believed that the hatred in him was not his fault, but that of others. He failed to see that he had a serious problem because he thought that he was always okay. This blind spot made him indifferent to his own flaws.

One reason why we act indifferently towards our own flaws is that we are afraid that people may reject us if we tell them that we are not okay. But that

should not deter us from believing in Jesus Christ because He accepts us as we are, and He helps us change by His power.

A third response towards JC in the Christmas story is that of ...

### **III. Being Wise**

The Bible tells us that there were some Magi (wise men) who were looking for the baby Jesus when He was born. They had studied the future events and believed that one day, someone would be born “king of the Jews”. So, they came from afar in faith.

When they saw the baby Jesus, they fell down and worshipped Him because they believed He was the one they were looking for. The wise men also offered the baby Jesus their gifts from their treasure chests—they worshipped Jesus Christ by giving their best to Him.

Like these ancient wise men, we need to worship the right way. Many people think that to worship is to do good works. Hence, they give to charity; they help others; they try to be honest; they try to be moral; they try to be a good person in every way possible.

These are not wrong, but if we see them as worship, we then end up worshipping ourselves because so much depend on what we can do. That’s the problem—when we try to worship God by doing the best we can, we end up worshipping ourselves, not God.

Today, it is wise for you to realise that you cannot reach God on your own. God is in the highest and we are only here on earth. But Christmas gives us a hope because it tells us that God has provided a way for us to reach Him—that way is Jesus Christ Himself. We cannot reach God on our own, and so God came down to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus was born in human flesh to lead you and me to know and reach God. It is not what we can do but what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

A wise response today is to worship like the wise men in the Christmas story—i.e. worshipping Jesus Christ by giving of our best to Him. The wise men brought their most precious possessions as gifts before Jesus—gold, incense and myrrh (v. 11). And the most precious possession as well as the best gift you can give to Jesus today is yourself as you surrender more to Him, or let Him come into your life.

### **Conclusion**

There is only one right response towards Jesus Christ in the Christmas story. It is not to be troubled, thinking that you will lose control over your life to Jesus Christ. It is also not to be indifferent, thinking that you don’t need Jesus Christ because you are okay. But the one, right response is to be wise—by giving your life to Jesus Christ, believing and worshipping Him as your Saviour and

Lord; trusting Him to help you better control your life and to accept you as you are without you pretending to be always okay.

For Christians: This is a time for self-examination. Is there a need to release control over some areas of your life so that Jesus Christ can take charge more fully? Is there a need to be honest and confess that you are not okay in some areas of your life so that Jesus Christ can forgive and change you?

For non-Christians: How different Christmas is to you this year does not depend on how others celebrate it. But it depends on how differently you respond to Jesus Christ. And today, there is only one right and wise response you can make—i.e. to give your life to Jesus Christ, and then enjoying it more fully because He will bring purpose, power and direction into your life. Jesus invites you to accept Him as your personal Saviour and Lord. Would you let Him come into your life today?

If you want to know more about Jesus Christ, or how you can believe in Him, I ask you to talk with someone from this church or a Christian whom you know. I am sure they will be most happy to share Jesus Christ with you.

I wish you all the peace and joy of Christmas because our Lord Jesus has come. Amen!