

Matthew 2:1-12; John 1:9-13; The Newborn King Rejected I. Herod the King II. Chief Priests and Scribes III. The Citizens of Jerusalem

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the season of Christmas is one of joy, light, fun and fellowship.

Everyone is friendly and we all get along- right? But all too soon, the decorations and lights are taken down and life returns to normal. It seems that we live in a world that suffers from amnesia- how quickly we forget “peace on earth and goodwill towards all”! Over the past month we have seen the various Character of the Christmas story- those who were present in Luke 2 and Matthew 2. There was rejoicing in the heavens and rejoicing on earth. Many have bowed down to worship, but not everyone has come to worship this newborn king! The angels may have declared that there was peace on earth, but not all are thinking of peace! So today we conclude our series on the Characters of Christmas by considering the enemies of the King! That the Newborn King was rejected, hated and pursued by men. This goes to prove that there has been and still are various responses to the arrival and celebration of Jesus’ birth. Yes, some rejoice, worship and praise God! But others- many other- respond with apathy or even anger! There is a rejection of this King! While others today are simply pretending- they go through the motions but their hearts remain unmoved by the good news. Imagine it- for the Savior of the world to come to His own but to be rejected as we read in John 1:11. That He came to save a fallen people only to be rejected and despised by the ones you came to help! So today we consider the enemies of this newborn king as we consider this theme: Jesus Christ is rejected by His enemies already as a child.

I. Herod the King

The first person who rejects Jesus as the King- who exalts himself and makes himself an enemy to the coming kingdom- is found right away in v. 1. Herod the king. Remember that there are 4 different men called Herod to be found in the NT- this is Herod the Great. Now in being called, king Herod, we are being set up for a contrast and contest right away. What kind of king is Herod- will he step aside when the true King of the Jews comes? Well, we note that although he was called the king, this title was one that was bestowed on

him by the Romans- not by the Israelite people. He was not anointed to rule in Jerusalem by the people. For their part, the Israelites really hated and feared this man. Herod was a king like the nations- a man after their own heart in many ways. Herod was like king Saul at the end of his life- vicious and petty. Herod had been married 10 times, and he had killed almost every single one of his wives as well as murdering his own mother, brother and most of his own children. So Herod was a cruel man in the line of Hitler or Stalin. He was not the true king of the Jews- in fact there was no Davidic blood in his veins. He was a puppet king- elevated by the Romans to keep the Jewish people in line. He was actually an Edomite- from the line of Esau and not Jacob. He ruled on behalf of Rome- and with Rome's best interest in mind. It was the Roman government and power that kept him on the throne. But he did try to gain- or earn the praise of the people. Although he hated the Israelites, he tried to appease them. He not only built a great palace for himself on the hill overlooking the city, he dedicated vast sums of money for the rebuilding, renovating and expansion of the temple complex. Solomon's temple having been ransacked and falling into disrepair, would be made bigger- better- more ornate. This temple would be called Herod's temple! It was to this Herod that the wise men come in v. 2 saying- where is the King of the Jews. Now this takes some guts- it was very bold for the wise men to say this! Imagine saying to this King Herod who had a fragile grip on the throne- who was so petty and bloody- to ask this Herod where is the King of the Jews! Obviously, you are not the king- Herod. Where is the true King? You are not the king we are looking for! Well, this is troubling for Herod to be sure! The birth of a new king- a true King- a Jewish King- would be the arrival of a threat! There was someone to challenge his rule- his grip on the throne would be taken away! It is for this reason that Herod has to act quickly. As of yet, this king was still just a baby. No threat yet- the people did not know about him and this little boy had no power and no army. So Herod's solution was to find him and kill him. Herod killed his own sons, wives and mother- what was one little boy from Bethlehem? But because the wise men did not come back to tell him where this baby was, Herod was forced to purge the whole city in 2:16. All the little boys under 2 would be put to death. Being a small city, there was likely less than 10 boys born every year. But

Herod becomes like the wicked Pharaoh of Egypt during the days of Moses- killing off the baby boys. Being a pawn of the devil- trying to snuff out the line of the anointed king who would be the seed of the woman. But what Herod does not know is that this special boy- this little child who was a King- had escaped out of his grasp. Jumping down to v. 19 we find the end of Herod's days- he is overcome by a rare, incurable and incredibly painful disease. The Herod who would be king dies and the child of the promise endures. So Herod dies in 4BC- and Herod's son takes his place on the throne. Nations rage- kings plot against the LORD and his anointed- rulers come and go- and yet the one enthroned above laughs! He scoffs and will mock them in scorn! Yet I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill as Psalm 2 says. There can be only one, true King of Israel who will sit on His father, David's throne. One whose kingdom will have no end! Let every man's allegiance be tested! Hostility is common when your own desires are not met- when your own kingdom is not served. Who is your king? You cannot serve two masters! The rulers of men or the King of Kings? Only one will endure- and He will not allow His glory to go to another! Choose you this day whom you will serve!

II. Chief Priests and Scribes

But King Herod is not the only one who sets himself up over and against the True King that has come. When the wise men arrive in Jerusalem and they ask him concerning the place where the King of the Jews would be born, Herod calls for a gathering of the chief priests and the scribes in v. 4. By way of reminder, the Scribes were the intellectual elite! They were the official interpreters of the OT Law. If you had a question about the Bible, they were the ones to call. And the chief priest, well they were responsible for the temple and all connected activities. So together they made up a significant force of trusted advisors within the city of Jerusalem. These men, being gathered, were asked where the Christ was to be born. And being good OT scholars, they could come up with the answer from Micah 5. In Bethlehem, because Micah speaks of a ruler who will shepherd God's people being born there. Now let's just think about this for a moment. Here we have religious scholars who know the answers- but do not really believe the prophecy! They were able to teach others- but their own hearts remained unmoved! They knew that the Christ would come from

Bethlehem, but not a single one of them actually goes to Bethlehem to worship! It is like the chair of the religious departments in secular universities today. They can quote from the Bible- telling others what some people have believed - but they have no vested interest! No faith- no obedience- and they remain unmoved. The word in their mouth and in their head does them no good! These men had become corrupt and apostate! So close- Bethlehem was only about 9 miles away! But that journey was too long! Did they really believe that the King would come- or was it some vain teaching that held no truth! The Bible is an old book that has no connection or importance today- right?! It was their job to know the OT- and to oversee the temple and the sacrifices. But they did not look to the one who would fulfill those scriptures and bring about the end of their temple! It would be like a waiting on the corner for a bus- when one is parked right in front of you. Seemingly obvious- it is right there! They knew that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem- and now these wise men come saying that they have seen a star in the east that announced his birth. Wouldn't you want to find out? The irony is shocking! But these leaders remain unmoved- uncaring; and they do not follow the wise men to Bethlehem to worship. In fact, as time goes on their will be a growing resistance to the arrival of this child. We find these same two groups- the scribes and the chief priests- again in Mt. 21:15. In Mt. 21 Jesus has just entered Jerusalem amid the shouts of hosanna by the children. The children have identified and praised Jesus as the Son of David! And once again, how do the scribes and the chief priests respond? They were indignant- they were offended. To them it was obvious- Jesus cannot be the king- so they brush off the chorus and outright reject the possibility that the King of Israel- the Son of David has come! And thus, they miss out on the chance to worship the true King!

III. The Citizens of Jerusalem

But there is one more group that we must briefly consider. In v. 3 we read that not only was Herod trouble, but all of Jerusalem was troubled with him. So the citizens- the general population was agitated and anxious. There was a general sense of unease- concern. One of the reasons would be that any arrival of a rival to King Herod had been met with great hostility by King Herod. Herod was not afraid of taking out His frustration

and anger on the people as a whole. For example, when Herod became sick, he rounded up the most illustrious men and had them imprisoned. The reason being- when and if Herod died- it was ordered that these men who were in prison would also be killed. That way, there would surely be weeping on the night he died. So although these men were innocent, their death would ensure that cries of lament would go out when the wicked King perished. That was the kind of man Herod was! If Herod was upset, the people would suffer! If Herod was worried, the common people would pay the price! So the arrival of another king- a rival king of the Jews- would upset the balance of power. Even the Pharisees would say in John 11- if we let this Jesus continue on like this, everyone will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation! The people were concerned that their relative freedoms and stability would be undermined when this new king came. What kind of King would he be? But as time goes on, this child grows, the people realize that Jesus will not be the kind of King they want. Jesus did not fit their pattern; He did not promise them all the food and freedom that they wanted. If Jesus does not secure what we want, we have no use for him. Interestingly, this same city will raise its voice in John 19:15. At the trial of Jesus, the citizens of Jerusalem will cry out- we have no king but Caesar! Jesus is not our king- we choose Rome over Him! That is the kind of reception Jesus would receive from the leaders and the crowds. The masses do not want this man to rule over them- because He is a King like no other! He does not play by our rules- but rules over us! He does not try to gain our approval by giving us what we want- rather He demands obedience by His right of rule! Let all people bow down and kiss the Son- lest we be terrified by His wrath!

To conclude, the coming, ministry and Kingdom of Jesus does not fit the pattern that most expect. Does He give us peace with this world or peace for eternity? Does He bring blessings to my pocketbook or eternal blessings in the world to come? This same confusion, hostility and even apathy concerning the arrival of Jesus continues today! As our theme states: Jesus Christ is rejected by His enemies already as a child. Coming to His own, His own did not receive Him as we read from John 1. But to those who do receive Him- to those who embrace this King with a heart of faith- He gives them the right to become children of God!