**ADVENT 416, WHERE IS THE KING? MT. 2:1-16, 22, 23, ROM. 3:10, 11, 8:7, 8, DEC. 18/22.**

 We’re into the final week of Advent—amazing eh! We’ve been using Tim Keller’s ***Hidden Christmas*** to help us along. So far we’ve talked about **the overlap between what the secular world celebrates as Christmas and what Christians celebrate**. We noted that **the great divide** between the 2 comes around “light”. The world sees itself as capable of producing its own light and improving the world by its own efforts. Christians, however, understand **there is no light in us, that we are completely dependent on receiving it as a gift of grace from the outside, from** **God**. At Christmas we celebrate that Jesus, the light of the world, is coming. “The people walk-ing in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” **Jesus had to come or else we would continue to be locked in darkness**.

 “He is called **Wonderful Counsellor**, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Yet “unto us a child is born, to us a Son is given.” Jesus comes to us a gift, undeserved, of grace. But that gift has to be received. We’ll come back to that later. **Christmas means** we’re so lost, so unable to save ourselves that nothing less than the death of God’s Son Himself could save us.

 Last week we talked about what an **awful resume** Jesus had. Resumes in those days didn’t include education and work experience and skills like today; your genealogy was your resume, and Jesus’ wasn’t good! **It included** women (never done at that time), and among them Gentiles, no less—Ruth and Rahab, who was a prostitute and Tamar who seduced her-inlaw into an incestuous relationship. Even King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered Uriah, her husband and 1 of King David’s faithful defenders, in an unsuccessful cover-up. But **His genealogy grounded Jesus in history. He is real; this all happened**. And, His genealogy stated so clearly that **no one is outside of Jesus’ reach and that His holiness can’t be contaminated by contact with us. Every one of us can only be in Jesus’ family by His grace**.

**The angels reported what God had already done, not what we needed to do**. God has already acted on our behalf, for our benefit. **Jesus says I am spiritual reality itself. You could never come up to Me and so I had to come down to you. Christmas brings news and not advice**. The birth of Jesus into the world is good news! Christmas is just the beginning of the story of how God came to save us.

 “**The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel**”, which means, “God with us”. **Jesus wasn’t just a prophet telling people how to find God, but that He was God Himself, who had come to find us**, and that is staggering news. It gives us **the greatest possible hope because** it means that our world is not all there is, that there is life and love after death, and that evil and suffering will 1 day end. And there is personal hope for us despite our failings. **Jesus moved heaven and earth to get near us**.

In **today’s passage, Wise men** from Eastern lands came to Jerusalem when Jesus was an infant still in Bethlehem. They came before King Herod, the ruler of Judea and asked, “**Where is the 1 born king of the Jews**”? Hmm, when you come into a palace and ask, “**Where’s the king?”** it might rock the person actually sitting on the throne, no? It says **Herod was “disturbed**”, 1 of the greatest understatements in the Bible, considering his later action. He had already killed a number of his court and his own family to ensure his absolute power went unchallenged. He consulted his own scholars who told him that **according to the prophets, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem**. As you know, he told the Wise men to go to Bethlehem, find the Messiah and send word back to him so that he too could go and worship Him. Yeah, right. **The Wise men found Jesus and worshipped Him**, and gave their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **But** they were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod. That infuriated Herod, who then systematically slaughtered all children under 2 yrs. of age in Bethlehem. With what’s known about Bethlehem’s size at the time and child birthrates that may have been 20-30 children. **Devastating. Jesus would have been among the victims too, except God warned Joseph** in a dream. Joseph immediately took Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

Today, **we’re no strangers to** refugees from war, persecution and oppression. Jesus can identify with that. **Once Herod died, Joseph returned to Judea and settled in Nazareth**.

More than the fact that this happened, this **passage also reveals something about who Jesus really is and what He came to do. How does this figure into the meaning of Christmas?**

**Where does the fault lie for this kind of evil in the world?** Does it lie with the rich and powerful? Does it lie with the immoral and irresponsible? While we know that God is against those who oppress the poor, the **Bible teaches that the source of the world’s evil is every human heart. Herod’s reaction to Christ is to some degree a picture of us all**.

**If you want to be king and someone else comes along** saying he is the king, 1 of you has to give in. **Only 1 person can sit on an absolute throne. Jesus came to us claiming to be God, the King. “If anyone comes to Me** **and doesn’t** hate father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—even their own life—**you cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14:26).” This passage isn’t about hating anyone; it’s about an absolute commitment to Jesus**, a call to unconditional loyalty. **And it meets deep resistance in every heart**. Our **2nd reading today from Rm. 8** says that the **mind in its natural state is hostile to God; it does not, in fact, it cannot submit to God**. Worse still, in this natural state we cannot please God.

At the centre of our being is **a voice that says, “No one tells me what to do**.” **Have you heard that voice in you? It’s alive and well in me**. **Our culture and training prompt us to hide that side, even from ourselves**. Of course we want to be seen as cooperative, as a team player, as a kind and loving person. We want to see ourselves that way too. **But we can’t get rid of it**.

The **Bible reveals that the evil of the world ultimately stems from the self-centredness & the self-righteousness of every human heart**. We like the world to orbit around us. **Think about it**: every thought we have comes from how we perceive the world. We’re the centre of the universe.**We don’t want to serve** God or our neighbour—we want them to serve us. There's **a little King Herod in every heart** that wants to rule and is threatened by anything that compro-mises that. We want to be the **captain of our own soul**, the master of our fate. I did it my way!”

**We get irritated when anyone encroaches** even a little on us. **But Jesus’ claims of auth-ority are ultimate and infinite. No heart, without help, can gladly surrender to them**. In our other Romans reading, **Paul says** there is no one who is righteous, not even 1; there is no 1 who understands; no 1 who seeks God.” Come on, Doug. **Aren’t there** **millions of seekers** after God?

Well, Keller gives **2 answers. 1st**, **to want the things God gives**—love, help, strength, forgiveness, happiness—**isn’t to actually seek or want God Himself**. This may be more like gold digging, like marrying only for money. **In support of this, think** how many people leave the faith because their lives weren’t going like they expected and God wasn’t answering their prayers. **2nd, people may seek God as they want Him to be, but no 1 seeks God as He reveals Himself**.

**This is a hidden truth of Christmas. Herod’s dark and violent lust for power points to our** **natural resistance to or even hatred of the claims of God on our lives**. We create Gods of our liking to mask our hostility to the real God who reveals Himself as our absolute King. **No 1 seeks the true God, the Lord born at Christmas unless our hearts are supernaturally changed**.

**We try to tame God, seeking to put Him in our debt; we do many things so He has to bless us in the ways we want. Where’s the true King?** It’s the most disturbing question to our heart because **at all cost we want to remain on the throne of our own lives**. **We may use relig-ion to stay on that throne,** trying to put God in the position of having to do it our way because we are so righteous, rather than serving Him unconditionally. **Or we may just flee from God**.

**If the Son of God was really born in a manger then we have lost the right to be in charge of our lives**. **If you think what I’m saying is overstated**, consider how hard it is to pray. Why do you think it is so hard to concentrate on the most glorious person possible? Why, when God answers prayer, do you say, “I’ll never forget this, Lord!”—but you do. How many times have you said, “I’ll never do this again!—but you do. **There’s a little King Herod in you. You can’t just glide through the Christian life. Something in you still fights it**.

**Nevertheless, at the climax of His life Jesus ascended a cross, not a throne**. He turned the world upside down. **He didn’t come flaunting power, though He had it all**. He came as our substitute to bear evil, suffering and death—the consequences for our turning away from God. **He did this so that, if we believe, we can be reconciled to Him, so when He comes the 2nd time as King, He can end all evil without ending us**. In His weakness there is really great strength.

**Where does this bring us? There’s comfort coming out of Bethlehem. Whoever you**

**are, whatever you’ve done, whatever your background is**, however badly you’ve messed up, **if you repent and come to God through Jesus, not only will He accept you and work in your life**, He delights to work through people just like you. He’s been doing it through all of world history.

**There’s also a challenge coming out of Bethlehem. Christians are needed everywhere**. But **Christmas teaches that our heads are not to be turned** by the wealthy or influential or fa-mous or talented or beautiful. **We are to have no prejudices about anyone**. **We are to live among all & love and serve everyone as neighbour**. **Christmas means** that race, wealth, pedigree and status do not matter. It means not being prejudiced against the poor or for the wealthy.

**Go and turn your world upside down, like Jesus, for Jesus. Let Him be King in you and for you! Then let the world see it and know He reigns in you and what He has done for you!**