



I know that you know all about the birth of the Christ Child. For instance, you know that baby Jesus was in a stable in Bethlehem on the night he was born because there was “no room in the inn.” This is how God was literally, physically, out in a cave. Mary and Joseph came to the inn with the Christ Child about to be born, and they were kindly allowed to occupy space with the animals. BUT think about this: the innkeeper and all who were inside presumably missed the Messiah born among us.

“Just another poor family. Just another baby.” They saw the baby but missed Christ.

Nearby, there were angels singing and shepherds appearing and a great light in the sky. BUT think about this: the people of Bethlehem were asleep. Did the townspeople and those there for the census even hear the music? See the star? Observe the shepherd pay homage to the baby? Or maybe they heard something different, saw something different, but didn’t get up and go to the stable. I wonder what they did instead.

But THAT was Luke’s version of the story, our text for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. TODAY’s gospel lesson tells Matthew’s version. Today we hear about men from afar who interpreted

the signs in the heaven about the child's birth and came to see him. Oh, they might not have known EXACTLY who they came to see. But they came.

The story here, then and through the years, is that the wise men who came were GENTILES, not JEWS, and THEY were the ones who came to the child Jesus. God was and is for ALL PEOPLE. ALLELUIA! But that's not OUR STORY, TODAY, is it? Our story today is about noticing who came to Jesus and who didn't.

Much has been made of the wise men not knowing EXACTLY where the Christ Child was. The star got them to the vicinity of Baby Jesus. But they had to ask around. And who better to ask than the king? Surely the king would know if a great ruler had been born. After all, rulers were only born to rulers, as a rule. So, the wise men asked King Herod.

Notice here that their assumption let them astray. They had been following the STAR, but then they reasoned and must not have seen the star.

Our text says Herod was terrified to hear the wise men's question. You know why Herod was terrified, don't you? Herod knew he didn't have a new-born son. And Herod was petrified about someone overthrowing him. In fact, he had three of his own sons killed lest they take his place. His terror is how Herod missed the Christ Child. He was jealous, in a way. And so his response was to the child's death.

But think about THIS: Herod wasn't the only one in power in Judea to miss the Messiah. Herod consulted his so-called prophets and priests. And they dusted off their texts and found the ancient prophecies: Bethlehem, they said. If the Messiah has finally come, he'll be in Bethlehem. Then they must have rerolled their scrolls and—what? They apparently didn't gird up their donkeys and set out for Bethlehem. Ho hum, Christ is born. Better sacrifice another animal, stay here with the power of this world, and pray the Messiah doesn't change the status quo. Do you think they even thought of that event, those foreigners, that question, again?

Meanwhile, the foreigners arrived in Bethlehem and FOUND the Child. They gave the child costly gifts, worshiping him, then “left by another road.”

Did you notice, the wise men brought the gold and frankincense the ancient prophet Isaiah had foretold? They also brought a third gift: myrrh, an extra gift, the very costly funeral spice myrrh. The men brought a hint of death with them, death for the young boy babies if not for the Messiah. But the child slipped death that day. Did you notice how? Did you notice what the child did to avoid death?

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NOTHING. That's right, nothing. Death came calling and the Holy Family exited to Egypt. They hadn't recognized the danger on their own. The idea just came to them in their sleep. SOMEHOW.

Did you ever have an idea, a premonition, in your sleep? Did you wake up and say, "I'd better leave the country, today?" Must have been an angel shaking them awake, shouting into their very souls.

"Get up! Premature death is coming for this child. He has ANOTHER engagement with death, but not until his 'time has come,' in 30 or so years. Meanwhile, teach him scripture. Tell him who he is and why he is here."

It's a good thing these parents were in a stable. Otherwise, they might have rolled over, hit the snooze bar, and stayed right there. It's a good thing these parents were accustomed to hearing angels. They knew to listen.

Have you heard an angel? Recently?

I say WE HAVE. Just the other day, an Episcopal Church in our Diocese closed. And one the year before that, lone statistics among credible reports that 5,000 Christian churches, roughly, closed each year between 2006 and 2011. Do you know how many moved out of their building? Redeveloped their property? Did anything other than dwindle and declare "success" in their missions by closing their doors? I don't know, either. But I'd guess none. Zero.

Our Church of the Resurrection's time may come, some day. Things look less than ideal. We are worshiping in a cave, for Christ's sake! There HAVE to be a host of heavenly angels, all around us, singing and praise God (as we are), saying "Do not fear" and telling us our mission. Because we get up each day and try our best to do just that.

Have you heard the angels? If so, how will you respond? If not, listen harder, right over there!