

Knowing that Christ has been born probably makes us feel all kinds of things: excited, hopeful, joyful for the future even. But I suspect that fear is not one of those things that we would expect. But yet when the Magi come in our reading for today and asked Herod about Jesus, Herod is afraid. In fact, verse 3 of our reading says: "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Why is Herod afraid? Why is Jerusalem troubled? What is it about the birth of this child that has made them so fearful? It's because they recognize something, Christians. They recognize something about the birth of this child. They recognize that Christ has come to rule all things. They recognize that Christ has been born to rule over the nations. They recognize that every knee is going to bow before him, whether they want to or not. They recognize that everyone is going to have to confess that he is the Lord, either to their everlasting shame or to their everlasting glory. And because they recognize these things, Christians, they know that everything that they hold dear is coming to an end. Because the birth of this child means that this world is passing away, and everything that they want to hold on to, everything that they hold dear, is going right along with it. That's why they're afraid.

And Herod's fear, on the one hand, is easy enough to understand. Herod is a paranoid man, after all, especially in his old age. Herod is a man who killed members of his own family simply because he thought that they were going to try to take his power. And we know from other books that were written at the same time as the Bible that Herod was also called the King of the Jews. The Romans had given him that title when they made him king over that part of the world. And so Herod is not about to share that title with anyone.

And more than this too, Herod was also an outsider. His father had been born in Edom, and his mother had been born in Arabia. And so he was never really part of Israel. The only reason why he was king is because his father before him had been made king by Julius Caesar. So his power was always very weak. Anything could take it away from him, and he knew it. And that's why he was always so suspicious. That's why he was always so afraid.

And so, when the Magi come asking him, "Where is the one who is born king of the Jews?", Herod thinks it's a threat. He thinks that this child has come to take his place. He's come to take his throne. And he's prepared to do anything, anything to make sure that that doesn't happen. That is why Herod is afraid.

But Herod, of course, is right to be afraid, just not for the reasons that he thinks. Because Jesus has been born as the King of Kings. Jesus has been born so that all will bow before him. And Herod knows that every king will have to answer to him, including Herod. Every king who sets himself up against Christ is setting himself up against God at the same time, and a king who tries to go against God is going to fail. The kingdoms of this world will pass away. Their power will crumble into nothing. And all the rulers of the world, all the kings of this world will be forgotten, no matter how hard they try to set themselves up. Herod knows this, and that's why he's afraid.

But Jesus is the king, Christians. Jesus's kingdom will never pass away. His kingdom cannot be stopped. His kingdom cannot be destroyed. His kingdom will overcome and conquer all things. This is why Daniel chapter 7 says: "To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." And Jesus's kingdom will be the only kingdom. All the other kingdoms of the world will disappear. And no

one else can claim to be the King of Kings like him. And everyone who fights against him will have to answer for what they have done. And Herod doesn't want to do that. He doesn't want to bow before God, and that is why he is afraid.

But the world still fears Christ, Christians, and rightly so, because the world wants to be king. Psalm 2, for example, says: "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'" The rulers of this world do not want to submit to Christ. Governments do not want to have to bow before him. They want to do whatever they please. They want to say whatever they say and to answer to no one. Don't you see that going on today, Christians? Just look around you! We see governments trying to do whatever they want, even if it goes against the very laws of God. They think that with a pen and a piece of paper they can change what marriage is. They think with a pen and a piece of paper they can define what it means to be male and female, to go against the very laws of God and to say this is the way that it is now. And that can all seem very official. It can all seem very permanent, like there's nothing that we can do about it. Who are we to fight against the government? Who are we to say anything against them? Who are we to even speak out? It seems like it's a done deal, like there's just nothing that we can do about it, and they can do whatever they please.

But they can't, Christians, because Jesus is the King. And though the nations rage against him, they can ultimately do nothing. Let them try and fight against Him! Let them try to change the laws of God! They aren't going to be able to succeed. Because as Psalm 2 also says, Jesus "shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Jesus will judge them, breaking them so that they will never rise again. And no matter how much they try to change things, it changes nothing. They know that they will have to answer to God for all the things that they have done. And that is why they are afraid.

But Jerusalem also fears the birth of Christ, but for a different reason. They fear him because his birth shows that they have believed in a lie. They wanted to be righteous on their own. They wanted to be righteous by their own works, to say that they kept the law of God, and that God accepted them for that reason. They're good people. They've done everything that God wanted them to do. They have followed after the Lord and even done more than he commanded them. There was no need for someone else to make them righteous. No need for righteousness to come from somewhere else. They had done it all on their own. And who was this Jesus to say otherwise? No, they thought that they were righteous, and they didn't need Jesus at all.

But the birth of Christ showed that their righteousness is nothing. The birth of Christ showed that they had turned away from God. As Romans chapter 10 says: "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." They wanted to come to God through their own works, but they could not find him in that way. But now that Christ has been born to make us righteous through faith, they hated him, and they feared him. They wanted nothing to do with him, because his birth showed them the truth of their own hearts.

And this is also true in our time, too, Christians. People do not want to come to Jesus. Because coming to Jesus means I have to admit the truth about myself. If I call Jesus Lord, that means I

have to say that I am not the Lord. If I call Jesus King, that means I have to say that everything that he says is true. And Jesus says that we are sinners, that we have fallen short of the glory of God, that we have not done enough to get us into heaven. And people don't want to admit that. They don't want to admit that they have messed up, that they have sinned. They want to say they're righteous. They're good people. Yeah, they messed up here and there, but overall the good outweighs the bad, right? Surely that counts for something! Surely that must mean that we're going to get some kind of reward! I deserve to go to heaven because I've done some pretty good things in my life. We'll just forget about the bad. How can you say that I haven't? How can you say that I'm a sinner? And that's why they don't want to come to Christ, because Christ shows us exactly who we are. And Christ shows us, no matter how much the world tries to deny it, that we will have to answer to God for everything that we have done. And that is why they are afraid.

But Christians, let us not be afraid. Let us go and bow down before Christ, bowing down like the Magi who came from afar with their presents to worship the Lord. Let us call him the Lord. Let us call him our King. And at the same time, let us confess our sins, knowing that we have not done enough to make God love us. But this Child has been born so that we would be righteous, so that we would come to God. The birth of Christ will then bring us exceedingly great joy, because we know that our King has come to save us. We can rejoice on this Epiphany, Christians, because our King is the King of Kings, and he will reign forever. And he has come to bring us to himself forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to reign over us as the King of Kings. Help us to receive him this day with rejoicing, knowing that he has come to rule over all things and to save us. In his name we pray. Amen.