

The Christmas story is surely one of the greatest stories ever told. It chronicles a birth from which the world records time as before or after. Moreover, it is written in a way that has inflamed the imagination for 2000 years.

We see this in the Gospel of Matthew when he tells us how various people reacted to the announcement of Jesus' birth. **Matthew sets up a powerful contrast, between the Magi and Herod, one blesses and the other curses,** between the reaction of the wise men, who bring their gifts and place them at the feet of the new king, and King Herod, who tries to kill him.

Jesus is born **inside of a religious tradition**, Judaism, and his birth is announced to that faith-community in a manner that befits religion, **namely, by the angels**, by supernatural revelation. But those **outside of that faith-tradition** need another way to get to know of his birth, and so his birth is announced to them through nature, astrology, through **the stars**. The wise men see a special star appear in the sky and begin to follow it, not knowing exactly to where or to what it will lead.

While following the star, they meet King Herod who, upon learning that a new king has been born, has his own evil interest in mind and heart. He asks the wise men to find the child and bring him back information so that he, too, can go and worship the newborn. We know the rest of story:

The wise men follow the star, find the new king, and, upon seeing him, **place their gifts at his feet. The wise men are obedient, they followed the star at its prompting and after laying their gifts at the feet of Jesus, and obediently they travel home by another way. What happens to them afterwards? What happen to them on their journey back home? We do not know and that is exactly the point. Their slipping away into anonymity is a crucial part of their gift. The lesson here is that they now disappear because they can now disappear. They have placed their gifts at the feet of the young king and can now leave everything safely in his hands. His star has eclipsed theirs. Far from fighting for their former place, they now happily cede it to him. Like old Simeon, they can happily exit the stage singing: Now, Lord, you can let your servant go in peace, your word has**

been fulfilled! Like John the Baptist, I must decrease so that he can increase. There is an acknowledgment at the birth of Jesus that “We are in safe hands!”

And Herod, how much to the contrary! The news that a new king has been born threatens him at his core. The glory and light that will now shine upon the new king will no longer shine on him. So what is his reaction? Far from laying his resources at the feet of the new king, he sets out to kill him. Moreover, to ensure that he finds him, he ordered killed all the male babies in the entire area.

The real point is the contrast between the wise men and Herod: The former see new life as promise and they bless it; the latter sees new life as threat and he curses it.

This is a rich story with a powerful challenge: What is my own reaction to new life, especially to life that threatens me, that will take away some of my own popularity, sunshine, and adulation? Can I, like the wise men, lay my gifts at the feet of the newborn king or the King, and move towards a place of service and adoration, content that the world is in good hands, even though those hands are not my hands? Or, like Herod, will I feel that life as a threat and I try somehow to kill it, lest its star somehow diminish my own?

To bless another person is to give away some of one's own life so that the other might be gifted for his or her journey. Good parents do that for their children. Good teachers do that for their students, good mentors do that for their protégés, good pastors do that for their parishioners, good politicians do that for their countries, and good elders do that for the young. They give away some of their own lives to bless the other. The wise men did that for Jesus.

Will you allow the king to reign in your life, can trust that he has the whole world including yours in his hands.?