

The Jesus we never knew x53 Sunday 31 December\_2017. Last talk of 2017.

## **The JESUS we never knew x53. Sunday 31 December\_2017.**

**Our AIM for this year** has been for each of us individually and all of us together to become better friends with JESUS. (This is not presumptuous since Jesus himself has said “*I call you friends*” *John 15: 15* – Christian disciples are those who *love and obey Jesus*). That is the real Jesus – not the Jesus of sentiment or others invention. Aim to know both the historical Jesus and to know Jesus experientially now. We have noted the many misunderstandings that can arise around the person and nature of Jesus. We ourselves can have misunderstandings about Jesus which lead to more misunderstandings as we seek to share with others.

Today is our last session for the year (other than our watchnight service this evening).

### **Matthew 2: 1 – 8. HEROD – “King of the Jews”?(PP1)**

This “title” is used by Matthew both at Jesus’ birth and then at his death – the beginning of Jesus’ life on earth and as he died on the cross it was written above his head. Yet what was inferred by the description? **(ASK THE QUESTION: How did Herod view Jesus?)**

**Matthew shows a total economy of words about the birth of Jesus** (we noted in an earlier talk that he speaks about the GENESIS of JESUS (chapter1 v18) rather than details of the birth). And here he simply says in chapter 2 in *V1 JESUS was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards some (magi) who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem” ...* Matthew focusses on Jerusalem and King Herod’s reign and Bethlehem – he makes no mention of the manger or shepherds and says very little about angels. There is just the visit of the magi to the *house (v11)*. According to Matthew’s account, after the birth of Jesus, some magi (astrologers - wise men) from the east visited **Jerusalem and Herod** to inquire the whereabouts of *“the one having been born king of the Jews” (v2)*, because they had seen his star in the east (or, according to certain translations, at its rising \*) and therefore wanted to pay him homage. They went to the capital city of the region of course and to the residency of the ruler since they were looking for a king.

(\* Star? Comet? Probably a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn (symbolic of Israel in the area of sky called Pisces. Dawning of a power shift in the world to Judea of which Jerusalem the capital city. Jerusalem still controversial politically).

“The exile to Babylon” is mentioned in the genealogy in 1:6, 12 & 17 and Matthew establishes that Jesus is a descendent of King David and 2:4 it is the Jewish Chief Priests that advise Herod that according to the prophecy of Micah (5:2) it is in the town of Bethlehem in Judea from which the MESSIAH will come.

The “visitors from the east” came we think from Persia – modern day Iran. (Tehran to Jerusalem just under 1,000 miles).

(Babylon where the Hebrews including Daniel were exiled is modern day Iraq – 59 miles southwest of Baghdad). We don't know exactly what ancient texts that the magi had access to but possibly some of the Jewish writings.

### **Why did Herod the Great (Herod the 1) get so angry about this enquiry?**

V3 Herod was upset and therefore everyone in Jerusalem was upset and fearful. A bad mday for Herod the King could be a very bad day for everyone. The Magi logically went to Jerusalem the capital city of Judea and also logically to Herod's Palace since they were looking for the one born to be King of the Jews. Herod was also known by this title as he was ruler in Judea and so in hearing of the birth he assumed a rival who would usurp him and his descendants. As he was an Idumean (Greek word for Edomite) many already regarded him as a "half-blood prince" to use a "Harry Potter phrase" (we would now say mixed race/ dual heritage) and not a pure or true Jew. Maybe this new born had a more direct line and was a more legitimate ruler as he was indeed a descendent of David. Herod was certainly (in our colloquial or any parlance) paranoid and a psychopath as we see from his decision to slaughter all male infants under 2 in Bethlehem.

**Bethlehem** had a long history: Jacob had buried his beloved wife Rachel there when she died giving birth to Benjamin. His descendent David was born here: "the city of David", the great shepherd King. And as Micah (5:2) prophesied this was where the Messiah was to be born.

**Herod had been appointed by the Roman Senate in 40 BC and gained control of the country by 37 BC.** He was famous for many great acts but more notorious than great in his use of power. His response to news of the birth was hatred and fear. Anyone calling themselves "King of the Jews" was a threat. Herod's lust for power masked any better side he may have had. Such "kings" still exist and operate in today's world

HEROD was a [Roman client king](#) of [Judea](#), referred to as the [Herodian kingdom](#). The history of his legacy has polarized opinion, as he is known for his colossal building projects throughout Judea, including his expansion of the [Second Temple](#) in [Jerusalem \(Herod's Temple\)](#), the construction of the port at [Caesarea Maritima](#), the fortress at [Masada](#), and [Herodium](#). Vital details of his life are recorded in the works of the 1st century CE Roman–Jewish historian [Josephus](#). Despite his successes, including singlehandedly forging a new aristocracy from practically nothing, he still garnered criticism from various historians. His reign polarizes opinion amongst scholars and historians, some viewing his legacy as evidence of success, or a reminder of his tyrannical rule.

As some believe Herod's family were converts to Judaism, his religious commitment was questioned by some elements of Jewish society. When [John Hyrcanus](#) conquered the region of Idumaea (the [Edom](#) of the [Hebrew Bible](#)) in 140–130 BCE, he required all Idumaeans to obey [Jewish law](#) or to leave; most Idumaeans thus

converted to Judaism, which meant that they had to be [circumcised](#), and many had intermarried with the Jews and adopted their customs. While Herod publicly identified himself as a Jew and was considered as such by some, this religious identification was undermined by the decadent lifestyle of the [Herodians](#), which would have earned them the antipathy of observant Jews.<sup>[29]</sup>

Herod later executed several members of his own family, including his wife [Mariamne I.](#)<sup>[20]</sup>

**Jesus' Kingship** – a child in its mother's arms was maybe not what the Magi expected to see? (They had no idea what age the King of the Jews would be simply that they had seen stellar configurations in the sky and read prophecies about a rising king in Judea. It was certainly not what Herod assumed. Jesus did not use the weapons/ the violence of Herod's world. His teachings (e.g. *Matthew 5 – 7*) were not the teachings and practices of a King like Herod and yet the specifically featured the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus showed Kingship by love and self-sacrifice – something that Herod did not understand at all or recognize as Kingly qualities. Matthew's Gospel written largely to Jews is all about the Kingdom of God.

#### **On the cross at Jesus' death:**

And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.



**INRI** - stems from the Latin phrase '**Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum**' meaning 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. This was the notice Pontius Pilate nailed over Jesus as he lay dying on the **cross**. (From Nazareth and "out of Africa" – Egypt but born in Bethlehem David's city.

The magi may have been surprised to see a child in the arms of a young woman of the artisan class, but they did not turn away but in their wisdom knelt and worshipped him, giving their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the child.

**Kingdoms of this world:** the contrast between Herod's Kingdom and of Jesus the Christ or Messiah is stark. Herod's was inaugurated by the Romans – an alien, aggressive and cruel power. The rule of Jesus is not imposed and originates in love. Herod used his alliances with the largely corrupt Jewish religious power elites for his

own ends, but Jesus exposed them – choosing to tell them that they must be born again (born from above by the Spirit) if they wanted to see the Kingdom of God. (*John 3*).

**Shocking.** Who did Herod ask about where the one born to be King of the Jews was to be born? He asked the Jewish Chief Priests and the Scribes or teachers of the Law and they knew and told him that the Prophet Micah had said that it would happen in Bethlehem, David's city. But this knowledge and the fact of the magi appearing did NOT make them take even one step towards Bethlehem to investigate. Therefore, the Chief Priests and Scribes sided with Herod. This was not just apathy but a love of power itself. This hardened later into opposition against Jesus' Kingdom and a desire like Herod to destroy Jesus.

**As we approach 2018 let us ask ourselves what does it mean to follow King Jesus.**