

“Christmas Contrasts”

We read in Luke 2:8-20 that God chose to announce Jesus’ birth to humble **shepherds**. This resonates with most people because it communicates that humility gets God’s attention, and He loves the common people. Matthew 2:1-12 records the story of the **wise men** from the East coming to King Herod in Jerusalem to find the One who had been born King of the Jews so they could worship Him and present Him with gifts from their treasures. We, too, desire to worship and adore Jesus. This also communicates that God loves the rich, educated and learned. Tragically, Matthew 2:16 records that **Herod** wanted nothing to do with the newborn King, so he slaughtered all the male children in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas to eliminate any threat to his throne. When we compare and contrast these three groups/individuals who are part of the Christmas Story, we come away with the following three lessons.

First, as we compare and contrast these Christmas characters, we see that *God can work with people who are prepared to receive His message*. The **shepherds** understood the idea of substitutionary sacrifice better than anybody. It was the sheep/lambs they raised on the hills outside of Bethlehem that were often bought by families coming to Jerusalem to use as a sacrifice to atone for their sins. How appropriate that these shepherds should be the first to hear about the “Lamb of God” who would be the “Savior, Christ the Lord.” They simply believed the incredible message God spoke through the angels, and they received the news with great joy! The **wise men** had studied the great prophets of Israel, and the appearance of a star indicated to them that a King had been born in accordance with these prophecies, and they were compelled to follow the star in order to worship Him. But **Herod** didn’t pay any attention to the star or the angelic announcement. His approach was to completely resist, reject and ignore what God was doing through Jesus Christ.

Second, as we compare and contrast these Christmas characters, we see that *they were willing to take a journey of faith to see Jesus*. When they heard the message, the **wise men** and **shepherds** were willing to step out and take a journey of faith, but not **Herod**. The shepherds never questioned the message God sent through the angelic announcement. They simply hurried to Bethlehem to “*see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.*” The wise men went on a long journey, even though they didn’t have everything figured out. Herod’s only concern with Jesus was to eliminate Him as quickly as possible.

Third, as we compare and contrast these Christmas characters, we see that *the shepherds and wise men were willing to pay the price and make the sacrifice, but not Herod*. The shepherds entrusted their sheep into the hands of God as they left them out in the fields so they could go to Bethlehem. The wise men left behind their families and businesses for an unknown length of time to find the newborn King and worship Him. Herod just tried to cling to power and eliminate any threat to his rule. Christmas means surrender. Christmas means the giving of ourselves.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Is your heart ready to hear what God is saying to you?
2. Are you ready to walk by faith and not by sight, even if you don't have everything figured out?
3. Are you willing to trust God and believe, even when things can't be humanly explained?
4. Are you ready to surrender completely to the Lord and wholly give yourself to Him?
5. Let's believe that the "Herods" of this world will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so they will become like the shepherds and the wise men.