

Herod's weakness: Christmas Reflection from Matthew 2:1-9a

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east asking, 'Where is the infant King of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.'

When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They told him, '*At Bethlehem in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah, for from you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.*'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared and sent them onto Bethlehem with the words, 'Go and find out all about the child and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out.

Herod's faith was very different from that of the Magi. He wanted to kill Jesus, not worship him. Herod was terrified as he saw his own identity eclipsed by the coming of a greater person, with a radically different kingship. An old tyrannical and paranoid king, fearing that this newborn baby will threaten the power he wants to hand down to his sons, becomes the catalyst for the massacre of the innocent children of Bethlehem.

There are enormous struggles between power and fear in the Christmas scriptures; warnings not just of Jesus' precarious safety but of the powers that will battle over his ministry later in life, that will lead to his death. Mary and Joseph had to become asylum seekers at a time when parents most need stability. They had no house, no clear future, and a dictator King bent on killing their baby. Their only weapon was their faith.

How like today when so many people across the world live in fear of the power of others, or like Mary and Joseph are without a home or community to support them and their families. In our current time of recession, political and environmental instability, the Mothers' Union is a great symbol of hope. In such complex global circumstances it offers practical support and prayer to millions of vulnerable families worldwide. Each day the Mothers' Union stands with people at the margins of life and death.

It was not just Herod who failed to understand the Saviour's birth. Few grasped the meaning of this cataclysmic event. Yet there were some, like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi, who saw with the eyes of faith. They believed the truth: that Jesus was the Son of God. We are also called to believe in this truth, this year and in every year until we see him face to face.

Happy Christmas everyone.