

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Three Responses at Christmas

December 24, 2023
Matthew 2:1-16

**BIG IDEA – EVERYONE RESPONDS TO JESUS IN EITHER ANGER,
APATHY, OR ADORATION**

Olivia understands Christmas. Do you? Here's the big idea with Christmas. If you understand Christmas, it changes your life. Do you see what Olivia said in that video? She had this moment...it's my favorite moment...where she said, "You know what? It was that day that I was born again."

Here's what I want you to know, Christmas 2023: Jesus Christ was born so you could be born again. Jesus Christ died so you could have eternal life. That's what we hope to talk about with the Christmas story today, but before we talk about today we have to talk about last week.

We had an incredible grand opening and launch of this facility. Wasn't it awesome? We had over 3,200 people on campus last week. Thank you for praying. Thank you for inviting. Thank you for coming in the rain. If you were at the 5:00 service and were on the parking team, thank you for serving in the rain. It was incredible. Thank you, guys.

You heard the story. This is how this works. If you're new, let me tell you how this works. The gospel moves forward one relationship at a time. That was Abby and Olivia. The gospel also moves forward not just one relationship at a time but one room at a time. Did you get that? "Hey, I invited her to my house, and then I invited her to my Community Group, and then I invited her to church."

The reason we're celebrating this room is we believe so much life change is going to happen in this room because of all of the relationships you and I have outside of this room. By the way, if you're new... And we have so many new people. It's a great time to be new in our church.

If you're new, I want to tell you about the next room. We don't have 10 ways. We don't even have two ways. We have one way to get connected here. The next room is the Weekender. It's your on-ramp to discipleship and the life of our church. It's up to you. If you want to remain anonymous and in the crowd, it's totally up to you.

We would love it if you would move from the crowd to connected and committed, from saying, "*That church*" to saying, "*My church*," and the only way you can do that is by going through our Weekender. What a Weekender to come to. It's going to be the first Weekender in our new building. We already have, like, 50 people signed up, so you're not going to be the only one. I hope you'll come.

Finally, guys, it's Christmas Eve, and for many of you that's really exciting. Gifts are wrapped and you've got the new house or the new spouse or whatever. For a lot of you things are going well, but at Christmas, for a lot of people, things are not going well. It's not a joyful but a painful time of year, because it's the first Christmas without or another Christmas without.

I'm just going to tell you what the Bible says. *Where the ideal is lacking* (and that's true for some of you today) *the grace of God is abounding*. Part of the message of Christmas is God is with us. So, I just want to pray for those who uniquely need some comfort in this time, and then we'll dive into our Christmas message. Let's pray.

Lord, in a room like this in a church like ours there are going to be people who are in pain, and Christmas is a reminder that they're still single, that they're still infertile, and that Grandpa is not here this year. Sometimes it's very hard when everybody else is celebrating and giving gifts and having parties.

There are certain people who feel like, "Does anybody understand that this is the most difficult time of the year for me?" So I pray we'd be a church that is for everybody and we'd walk with people in the unique seasons and stages of their lives. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. I'm going to start out my Christmas message with some bad news. Are you ready for some bad news? Here's some bad news: you (that means me too) live in the greatest decline of Christianity in the history of this nation. Can you believe it? This nation is 250 years old. That's a long time. It's happening on our watch. We live in the greatest decline of Christianity in the history of our nation.

Here's what that means. That means you and I live in the most biblically illiterate time in American history, which is strange because we have podcasts and iPhones in our back pockets and YouTube channels and we're overly educated, and all of that, and we don't know our Bibles. We certainly don't know what Easter or Christmas is about.

Where do we learn what Christmas is about? The average American learns what Christmas is about by singing Christmas songs. What's your favorite Christmas song? How about "Mary, Did You Know?" Let me give you the answer to that. The answer to that song is "Yes." Luke, chapter 2. "Mary, did you know?" Very short answer: "Yes, an angel told me."

How about "Silent Night"? Every mom in here goes, "When a baby is born in a barn, it is not a silent night." You can't learn it only from Christmas songs, although they're great and teach us a lot. Some people learn it from nativity scenes. Have you driven by Wake Forest Baptist Hospital? Even Wake Forest Baptist Hospital has a nativity scene outside, but did you know the nativity scene is not really fully biblical?

The wise men, we'll see, do not get to see Jesus until he's a child, probably several months later at least. So, if you want to be biblical, when you go home today, take those wise men out of your nativity scene. Put them in another room and say, "We're bringing these back in June. We're going to be biblical."

Guys, here's what I want to do this morning on Christmas Eve. I want to try to show you something you've never seen and something you always have seen. How do you do that? How do you show somebody something new and something they've always known? It's kind of like the FedEx symbol. Have you ever seen the FedEx symbol? I have a picture of it behind me.

I know you all know this already, but remember that first moment when you realized there was an arrow in between the *E* and the *X*? "Oh!" Isn't that good? Yes. If you've seen that, have you seen the teaspoon in the little *E* at the bottom? Now you'll never not see that. There you go. Here's what I want to tell you guys. Once you see it, you can't unsee it, but sometimes somebody else has to point it out to you.

Turn to Matthew, chapter 2. We're doing a familiar story. It doesn't get any more familiar than a teenage girl named Mary... Now, this story is miraculous, but to you and me... We've heard it so many times. It's like saying the Pledge of Allegiance. Right? Well, she's 14 or 15, maybe 16. She gets pregnant even though she's a virgin, and then she says what you and I would say. As a teenager, you would probably say, "God, I'm not ready to raise God." That's what Mary basically says.

Chapter 1 of Matthew (we're not going to go there today; maybe that'll be next year's message) really has to do with how Jesus came. It's the miraculous birth. It's the conversations between Joseph and Mary. It's the conversations with Mary and the angel. It's all of that. It's really exciting. That's Matthew 1.

Matthew 2 is not how Jesus came but how people are to respond or how they *did* respond. Matthew 1: How Jesus came. We're not talking about that today. Matthew 2:

How will you respond? There are only three ways to respond. By the way, Jesus looms too large in history for you not to respond to him. He's worshiped by roughly a billion people on earth. No one has had more books written about him or songs sung to him or paintings drawn of him than the Lord Jesus.

In fact, the Bible itself is the most read book, the most sold book, the most translated book, and believe it or not, the most stolen book. Who is stealing the Bible? If you need a Bible, we'll give you one afterward. Talk to us. There's another option. There are three ways people respond to Jesus: *anger*, *apathy*, and *adoration*. That's it. It looks different. We'll show you. But either anger like Herod, apathy like the religious leaders of the day, or adoration like the wise men, or the magi.

01 SOME PEOPLE RESPOND IN ANGER LIKE KING HEROD

If you'll turn with me to Matthew 2:1, here's what it says: "***Now after Jesus was born...***" I told you Matthew 1 is how he was born and Matthew 2 is how people respond. "***...in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men...***" Some translations say *magi*. These were scholars who studied the stars. "***...wise men from the east came to Jerusalem...***"

I know on Christmas Eve people are here who aren't normally here (and let me just say we're glad you're here), which means you may be even less familiar with the Bible than the average person. That's fine. So when I read that verse of the Bible you went, "This is strange. What's up with all of these names and places...Jerusalem and Bethlehem and Herod and wise men and the east? What's going on?"

Here's what I want you to know. The Christian faith is based on historical events. I don't know what you think the Christian faith is based on. Some of you might think, "The Christian faith is fable, fiction, fairy tale, myth, and superstition." It's none of that. Christianity is based on historical events...the virgin birth, the substitutionary death of Christ, before that his sinless life, and his resurrection from the dead.

But what do those events mean? Those events in and of themselves... They need to be explained, and then they need to be personally experienced, like they were in the story of Olivia. Well, all this sets up the story of Jesus coming into the world. Look at what it says in verse 2. We'll continue here.

Remember, these wise men come to Herod the king. "***...saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?'***" That's his title. "***For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.***" Here's the message of Christmas. We could talk about it

in different ways. We could say, "God with us, Immanuel." That's a great message of Christmas.

The message of Christmas from our text today is *Jesus is King, and you are not*. We like the first part. "That sounds good!" "...and you are not." That's the second part. In fact, we'll see this. Herod got it. Do you get it? A king meets a king. Welcome to Christmas. Christmas is the confrontation of two kingdoms. We'll see what happens in a moment, but I want you to notice, first of all, we're talking about a king and a kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ, it says, was born a king.

Guys, we are obsessed with kingdoms and empires. Every guy loves to watch a good Netflix show about an empire and a kingdom. Do you remember recently...? This was not that long ago. There was something on social media. You know how things go viral. They were surprised. Particularly, women were surprised. They were asking the question, "How much do men think about the Roman Empire?" You know what the answer is: *all the time*. It's the Roman Empire.

Women... I can't speak for all women. Okay. I can't speak for any women, but I'm going to try for a second. Women love a good royal wedding. When Kate (this was years ago now) and William got married... We're just fascinated by royalty. How does it work? Right? Here we are in America looking over in England. We're like, "How does it work?"

Queen Elizabeth dies, and there's Prince Charles. Okay. He's dressed like Cap'n Crunch. You know, Prince Charles becomes... We just love it. We love it. We don't understand it. It's okay. Here's the thing about kingdoms. You read your Bible and you realize almost every king in the Bible... Let me just summarize it. All of the kings in the Bible are bad, basically.

You're like, "Bad king. Bad king. Bad king. Bad king. Josiah...good king. Bad king. Bad king. Bad king. Bad king. King David." Then you read history. It's worse. History is horrible. It's almost all bad kings. That's because... I don't know who first said it. "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Even today, if anyone is still acting like a real king, they're probably not a great person.

Jesus came, and how he came tells you a little bit about the kind of king he is. He's a humble king, and his first throne is a manger. Do you see this? It says he was born king. Let me clarify. Jesus did not *become* king. How does this work? Let's think. We're going to do deep theology for a few minutes. I know it's Christmas Eve and you all want to get home soon. We're going to do deep theology just for a minute.

Here's how this works. Jesus was born a king. He didn't need to become a king because he always existed as king. I know. It hurts my head, and there's a miraculous

and mysterious nature to it, but Jesus Christ has always existed. So, at Christmas a new person does not need to be created; the Son of God needs to be born. That's Christmas.

A new person does not need to be created. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, needs to be born in some miraculous, mysterious way that we don't fully understand at the incarnation...*in carne*, in flesh. It just means that for the first time, humanity and divinity are interlocked. It's this beautiful picture, but not everybody is excited about it. Let me show you what Herod does.

Verse 3: "***When Herod the king...***" By the way, guess what his nickname or his title for himself was: *King of the Jews*. He doesn't like it when somebody else is called *King of the Jews*. "***When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him...***" If you understand the Christmas message for the first time, you will be troubled. Let me be clear. Again, maybe a lot of us are new and don't understand this. Christianity is not about going to church.

The goal of this service is not to get you to come back and go to our church. Please. Let me tell you the purpose of Christianity: for you to submit your entire life and surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's what Christianity is, which is very different than "Come back to church next week, please. Please give and connect." No. We're not doing that. This is about surrendering your entire life to the lordship of Christ. Okay. We got that.

Obviously, this troubles Herod, because Herod realizes, "There's a king that confronts my kingship." I think the reason most people don't become Christians is not because they just can't get there with the creation/evolution argument. I don't think it's they've read everything about the empty tomb and it's just unconvincing to them. I think, at the end of the day, they want to be the king of their own lives and Christianity attacks their narcissism.

I don't know if many people are as honest as Dr. Thomas Nagel is. He is a professor. Here's what he said: "I want atheism to be true..." Yikes! "...and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. [I hope that my belief is right. I hope there is no God.]"

He takes it one step farther. Look at this. "I don't want there to be a God." Yikes! "I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that [my] cosmic authority problem is not [rare]." No, Dr. Nagel. I don't think it's rare, but I don't think it's often communicated as honestly as you just did.

The message of Christmas is "Jesus is King." The shortest statement of faith in the Bible... By the way, it took us a while to figure this out. We looked around and went,

"What's the shortest statement of what it means to believe? What do you say?" The shortest statement of faith a Christian can say is three words, and it's found in a certain place in the Bible. It's "Jesus is Lord."

That is the statement of belief. When coming from the heart, that's what a believer says. Well, that's very similar to "Jesus is King." It's basically synonymous. And what is the definition of *sin*? The definition of *sin* is not simply breaking God's commands. Now listen. When you break God's commands, you also break God's heart and you'll break yourself across time.

Those three things happen together. You break the command, you break God's heart, and you break yourself. Watch somebody for years who breaks God's command. They break themselves. Anyway, that's not the root of sin. The root of sin is "I want to be king. I want to be the lord of my life. I have an authority problem, a cosmic authority problem."

Look at what Herod does in verse 16. If we drop down to the end of the story, it says, ***"Then Herod..."*** Because he couldn't get Jesus. ***"...when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men."***

Of all of the Christmas accounts you put together in the Bible, this is the saddest, obviously. He can't figure out Jesus. He can't control Jesus, so he tries to kill Jesus. He ends up going to this area and having all of the kids under 2 years old killed. Here's what we're seeing. He is trying to control Jesus to get what he wants.

Now, none of us do this in an extreme manner like that. Sometimes we just do it by trying to manipulate Jesus through our prayers. I mean, there's nothing wrong with praying. Seek God. Let your requests be made known to God. But Jesus Christ will not give us our idols. I want to show you one other thing Herod does. This is very interesting. Look at verse 7.

"Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'"

Do you see what Herod does? Herod does what many of us can be tempted to do. Herod basically says, "All right. Get Jesus over here. Bring him to me, and then I'll worship him too." He says he wants Jesus, but he really wants something else. In the Bible, he's the first false worshiper of Jesus.

He shows up to church and everyone is excited. They're like, "Herod is here! I hope he tithes. This is awesome! I can't believe the king showed up to church." Meanwhile, he doesn't want Jesus. He says he wants Jesus, but he wants something else. Jesus for him is a means to an end. For how many of us is Jesus a means to some other end?

For some people it's financial stability and financial security. They never prayed to receive Jesus into their heart, but they prayed to receive Dave Ramsey. Have you met this person? Some people are like, "Dude, the world is crazy, and I'm worried about my kids. I'm worried about how crazy what's on TV is and all this. Okay. Let's get them in church. Jesus is a means to putting my family together."

By the way, you never know what Jesus is a means to that you're not getting until you don't get it. Have you ever seen these people nowadays? People doing this is very popular. They're deconstructing their faith. I've read what they write. It's all the same things. "Jesus didn't give me what I wanted." It's like, "Oh, Jesus was a means to another end."

I'll tell you what it is for some of you in here. For some people, Jesus is the means to heaven and forgiveness, but you don't really want Jesus. Like, if you die and get to heaven and you're playing golf and eating with your friends and hanging with your family and Jesus isn't there, you wouldn't care. Jesus does not want to be a means to an end; he *is* the end in himself.

02 SOME PEOPLE RESPOND IN APATHY LIKE THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES

Anger is the first response. Apathy is the second. Turn with me and look at verse 3 again. ***"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all..."*** All of them. I don't know how many that is...a couple dozen.

"...the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

I want you to see the context. The second response that's wrong is the response of religious leaders, which often represent religious people, and it's apathy. Here's what happens. Herod is like, "Okay. I heard about this Messiah, this Christ, whatever his

name is, and he's the king of the Jews. I don't know a lot of Bible, so get all of the Bible guys in here." So they get all of the Bible guys in there.

"Bible guys, get over here. Okay. I don't know if you know this, but there's a star and..." "No, we know exactly what this is. This is the Messiah." Then they quote an obscure book that maybe some of you have never even read, Micah. They're able to quote an obscure book, minor prophet, obscure passage, Micah 5:2. "Okay. Here's what it is, guys. He's going to be born here." They give him all the information.

Now, here's the sad thing. When we follow the story later and all of the wise men end up going to visit Jesus, guess who doesn't come? None of the scribes and none of the priests. They have no affection. They have no heart for Christ. They have no desire to be with him.

This is my fear. In a city like Winston-Salem with 516 churches where almost everybody I've ever met has been in Sunday school or youth group or "Mom and Dad sent me to private Christian school when I was in middle school" or whatever it is... People become so familiar with the Word of God and with the things of God and with the people of God and with their great family, and they take it for granted.

I've had the opportunity many times to speak in chapel at Christian high schools and middle schools all over the state, and I don't like doing it. They're some of the hardest rooms to speak into, because you're like, "This is the strangest environment I have ever been in. I think everybody in this school has been inoculated with just enough Christianity."

This is a back-and-forth thing. I know you think this is a monologue. This is a back-and-forth. I can feel how you're responding. I'm telling you, whenever I speak at most of these Christian schools, it's like there's nothing there or there's mostly nothing there. I'm not sure how it works, because everybody has the right answer. You could call, "Johnny, pray for us" at the end, and Johnny would be like, "I know how to pray. I know the words."

If you get caught doing something, you just use the Christian lingo. "I'm struggling." You ain't struggling. Roll the film. He dove into that sin. There ain't no struggling. We know all the lingo. It's so unbelievably dangerous. You know this. And I don't know what to do about it. I have three kids myself. They know all of the answers to all of the questions. Almost all of their friends are Christians.

I don't know. They've been in kids' ministry forever...Goldfish and gospel galore. I don't know what to do about it, because it's such a blessing. There's such a blessing to be... I mean, one of the greatest gifts outside of salvation is being given a great church

and a great Christian family, but you can start getting the right answer and not the real answer. It's hard. You know how it is if you've seen this.

So, what happens is they have all the right knowledge in their head but nothing in their heart. They say the longest distance to travel, though it's so short, is the 12 inches between a person's head and their heart. When a person comes to Christ, all of them should come to Christ. In fact, all of them *does* when a person really comes to Christ. Conversion is not intellectual assent to Bible facts.

Conversion is my head, my heart, and my hands come to Christ. Conversion is my mind, my heart, and my emotions come to Christ. Too often in churches like ours, which really emphasizes Bible teaching... And I love it. Here we are for 45 to 50 minutes a week. Half the service is just Bible teaching. You may even know words like *expositional preaching*. Praise the Lord. You even know what you're looking for.

The problem is in churches like ours the temptation is to have a really big head, really small hands, and a Grinch-sized heart, two sizes too small. What happens at conversion is conversion, becoming a Christian... She used the phrase *born again* in the video. That's a biblical phrase. Born from above, made spiritually alive, being made a new creation... These are all supernatural terms.

When that happens, you get new affections. See, Christianity is not about church attendance or religious activity but new affections. Let me explain this. Jonathan Edwards... I learned a lot from Jonathan Edwards. He was a pastor and theologian in the 1700s. Many consider him the greatest theologian America has ever produced.

So imagine this. He said that underneath your emotions... So, here are your emotions. Some of you are like, "I cry. I get angry." You don't even know why you feel how you feel. That's because underneath your emotions are your affections. Your affections are really simple. They're the deepest part of you, and they're what you love and what you hate.

The problem with your affections is you can't change them. How many of you have been somewhere where you're like, "I hate that I love him"? How much addiction and secret sin is "I hate that I love this, and I don't know what to do about loving this so much when it's something I should be hating."

When you come to Christ, what you love and what you hate changes and transforms. Look. If you don't know this, you'll learn this soon. I'm a recovering Catholic. Yes, I was a card-carrying Catholic up until about eighth or ninth grade. I did the confirmation and the first Holy Communion. If you're here and you're Catholic, you can call me "Father Kyle" and we can talk afterward.

Basically, here's what happened with me. I can't remember what age it was. They give you a Bible. I think it's confirmation, eighth grade. I had zero desire to read the Bible, but as soon as I was a Christian, which happened in March of 2001 for me, I had an insatiable appetite to know God's Word.

I remember being a Christian, and I'm in Spanish 3 class. I'm sitting there, and I'm looking around the room. I can still remember this. I'm looking at my classmates in my public high school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I'm like, "Who's going to heaven in this room and who's going to hell in this room?" I never cared about the spiritual condition of people until I became a Christian. I began to be convicted about sin in my life. I began to have a special love for the local church.

The problem with the scribes and the priests is they had all of the head knowledge, but they didn't have the heart knowledge. The key to Christianity is understanding that real Christians want to be with Jesus. That's how you can tell who's the real Christian. The scribes and the Pharisees and the priests didn't want to be with Jesus. The wise men (we'll see in a minute) wanted to be with Jesus.

Here's what you need to know: Christianity is not moralism. I just want to explain what Christianity... For some of you, I won't see you until Easter so this is my one chance. You're like, "He always talks about the same things, the birth of Christ and the resurrection." Some of you I only get twice a year, so I want to explain that Christianity is not moralism.

There's the moralism of the conservatives and the moralism of the liberals. It's different. Christianity is not about being a good person. On the conservative side they say, "Have your family values" and "Vote this certain way" and all this. On the left they say, "Shop at Whole Foods." They say, "Reduce, reuse, recycle; drive an electric car," or something like that.

Everyone has their "If I do this..." "If I do this, I'm a good person. Watch me virtue signal to you right now." That's what people do. Christianity is not religion. Religion is about me and Christianity is about Jesus. Religion is about what I do, and Christianity is about what Jesus has done.

Religion is about the external and Christianity is about the internal. Religion says, "There are good people and bad people" and Christianity says, "There are bad people and there's Jesus." So, I want you to understand this at Christmas. Christianity is not religion; it's about a relationship with the Lord.

03 SOME PEOPLE RESPOND IN ADORATION LIKE THE WISE MEN

Let's look at the wise men. They're the good example here. Turn with me to the final example. We get two negative examples and one positive. In verses 5 and 6 (we'll read it one more time), the word of God that's given to Herod. ***"They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."'"***

I wanted to take us back for a second to go...*What leads the wise men to worship?*
Answer: the Word of God. Our worship has to start with a right understanding and a right response to God's Word. The problem with the apathetic priests and scribes is they did not respond rightly to God's Word.

Now, here's what I also want you to understand as Christians. We believe God wrote a book. We believe in revelation, not speculation. I get it. If you're not a Christian, then all you have is speculation. Like, "I don't know what happens when I die. I don't know the purpose of life. I don't know what God is like." I just want you to know at Two Cities Church we are not guessing what God is like. God has revealed himself, and that's what we're trying to explain.

So, worship starts with responding rightly to God's Word. How do you respond rightly to God's Word? All of you responds appropriately to all that God has said. We're trying to build here a response culture in our church where we just respond. God says something and we do something.

The first two ways you respond are by praying and obeying. Some of you have some goals for the new year, New Year's resolutions. For some of you it's going to be "Read the Bible in a year" or "Read the New Testament in a year" or "Have a..." Whatever you call it. "...quiet time, devotional, personal time of worship every day."

If you're not having a great time with your devotional life, I'll give you a little mini hack really quick. If you want your devotional life to be twice as meaningful overnight, here's all you do. Next time you have read a part of the Bible and have understood it, you just go, "God, what would you like me to do about this?" That's it. "God, I'm not just reading this to increase my knowledge; I'm reading this to change my life. So, God, what would you like me to do based on what you've just revealed to me?"

That's pray and obey. By the way, what's going to happen is immediately you're going to feel like... You're going to basically be told to do something you don't want to do. That's how you'll know it's God. You're like, "I don't want to do that." That's how you know it's God.

We sing. That's another way we respond. We sing at the beginning. We sing at the end. Partly, we don't know what else to do. What do you do when God has spoken and revealed himself in his Word? You just stand and sing in response. And we'll see in a second they bring, but I want you to see the key to their worship is verse 10. ***"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."***

It's fourfold joy, four different phrases in that one verse for *joy*. You understand that joy is the exact opposite of apathy. Twenty years ago I was a freshman in college. When I was a freshman I was a brand-new believer, and I was introduced to a website called *desiringgod.org*.

I was introduced to that through a ministry and a pastor named John Piper. Maybe you've heard of him. He was very, very famous for a season, influencing hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of people. If I could summarize his key teaching in a phrase, he taught *God is most glorified in you when you're most satisfied in him*. Let's unpack that. What does it mean to glorify God?

Every once in a while, you know, a dad... He means well, and he's trying to be Christian, so he tells his son, "Glorify God on that soccer field." The kid is like, "Okay. I mean, I'm going to play soccer. What do you mean 'glorify God on the soccer field'?" To glorify God literally means to make him look great. So now you know. Now the adventure of your life will be to figure out how to do that based on your temperament, your relationship, your job, your calling.

Okay. That's great. "I want to make God look great." Here's another way to say it: "I want to make the invisible God visible through how I live my life." Wow! That's something to get up for every day. Now, how do you do that? John Piper's answer is you enjoy God. The number-one way you make God look great is by enjoying him. In fact, that's how you make *any* person look great.

For example, say some guy in our church... Let's call him Jimmy. You know, it's the new year, and he wants to be a better husband than he is. He has read about it. He knows he needs to do date nights and all this other stuff. So he decides, "I'm going to surprise my wife in early January, and we're going to do a date night."

He gets dressed up. He buys the flowers and the chocolates and all that kind of good stuff. He surprises his wife. She doesn't see it coming. He knows her favorite restaurant. He takes her there. It's going very, very well...appetizer and food and drink. Dessert comes, and she's just overwhelmed. She says, "Oh, Jimmy. We never do this. Why did you do this?"

Imagine if his response is "Because this is the right thing to do." He'll be sleeping on the couch if that's what he says. "Because I have to. Because I read somewhere that

this is what husbands do." What does she want to hear? She wants to hear some version of, "Well, because nothing makes me happier than spending special time with you, and I wanted to prioritize that in the new year." If he says that, she's going to go, "Oh, Jimmy!"

For so many of us, our answer to why we do things when it comes to Christian faith is duty, not delight. We have the "I have to" not "I get to" mentality. We want to have here the mentality of "I get to pray. I get to read my Bible. I get to share my faith. I get to give. I get to invite. I get to serve."

I don't know if you've seen this recently, but Joe Rogan... You should all know who Joe Rogan is. He's the number-one interviewer in human history. He has more people watch and listen to his interviews than anybody else in human history by a long shot. This guy is super-duper famous. Anyway, Joe Rogan just interviewed Hulk Hogan. A friend of mine sent me the clip.

Hulk Hogan is on there, and he's talking to Joe. You know, it's very casual. He says, "Joe, I've got to tell you about my church. I love my church." Go watch this. Joe Rogan says, "Don't say the name of your church on the podcast, because if you do, everyone is going to come to your church." He says, "I want everyone to come to my church!" He says, "Joe, I plug in at church, and I don't plug out."

You could tell... He's talking about how much he enjoys his church and enjoys following Christ and enjoys being a Christian, and Joe Rogan is looking at him the way a cow looks at a new gate. Like, "I've never heard anyone ever say anything positive about the church." God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him.

Worship is joyful. Worship is humble. Look here. They bow down to a child. Verse 11: ***"And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him."*** Humility is also connected to posture. By the way, if you ever see people raise their hands in worship and go, "What is that about...?" I remember when I was first coming to church I saw somebody do that and I thought, "What is wrong with them? Are they stretching in service?"

The reason you do that... That's a picture of surrender (because Christ is King), it's a picture of celebration, and it's also what little kids do when they want to be picked up. So now you know why people do that. Sometimes your body will do something because your soul is feeling it. Sometimes your body will do something and your soul will begin to feel it.

There's a posture. They're humble. Why are we humble? *Humility*, by the way, just means seeing yourself rightly. That's all it means. We're humble for two reasons. First because we're created. You're finite. I'm finite. We're ignorant. There's so much we

don't know. We're going to die. We're unbelievably fragile. For that reason alone we should all be so humble.

Then we're humble because we're sinful. What's a prideful person? A prideful person is somebody who has never met God. That's the definition of a prideful person, because once you meet God and once you stand at the cross, you have to realize, "I'm so sinful God had to die for me. I'm so loved God was *willing* to die for me. Both of those humble me."

True worship is joyful. True worship is humble. True worship is generous. Look here. ***"Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."*** When you meet Jesus, it turns you into a giver. Listen. You can give without loving. People do that all the time, especially at the end of the year. People give out of guilt and all this other stuff.

You can give without loving. It's impossible to love without giving. When you love Christ, it turns you into a giver and changes how you view everything. They gave three gifts. They gave gold, frankincense, and myrrh...gold because he was a king, frankincense because that was what was used in worship, and myrrh had to do with his burial. It shadows and points to his life.

As we close this story up and as we've looked at all of the different pieces and parts, I just want to say that you can see the three responses. There's the response of anger by King Herod, the response of apathy by the priests, and the response of adoration by the wise men.

What led the wise men to Christ? The answer is *stars and Scripture*. If you go back through the whole story, what led these wise men to Christ? Stars and Scripture. Here's what's interesting. And I've seen this in my own life over the many years of doing ministry. People come to Christ at Christmas that you would never expect.

Do you know that the magi, or the wise men, were probably some of the least likely people you would ever expect to come to Christ? They studied the stars for a living. They were the wrong religion. They were the wrong background. They were wealthy. They were well educated. They were respected in a different culture, and they're the people who end up coming to Christ at Christmas? Are you kidding me? Not the scribes, not the priests, and not King Herod who's confronted with another king?

Let me tell you. God might have been using 2023 and some things in your life. I don't know each of your stories. I wonder if God has led you here to this moment through a star. What are stars? Stars are things that are bright that only come out at night. When it's very dark, finally you can see a star. What I've seen in 20 years of ministry

is when most people come to faith in Christ, it's when something very dark is happening in their life and God puts a star in their life.

Sometimes her name is Abby. Sometimes it's a parent. Sometimes it's a friend. Sometimes it's being reminded of things in the past. Sometimes it's a guilty conscience. Thank God for *that* star. Sometimes it's a romantic relationship. Sometimes it's something painful you're going through, and God is like, "I'm going to use whatever star I can to bring you to my Son."

Then you're going to need the Scripture as well. Here's what I want to tell you on Christmas Eve. We're about to be done. We're going to sing. We're going to head out. I want to tell you at Christmas you can change or deepen your response to Jesus. However you came in here this morning, you don't have to leave the same way.

When I used to meet with college students, I used to meet with them for lunch, and I used to say, "You know what? You can believe before you get back to your dorm. Before you enter your dorm again, you could be a Christian. You could be a different person than you are right now. I want to tell you you could believe."

Some of you need to stop being angry. We know why people are angry. Let me tell you why everyone is angry. "Because God is not giving me what I want." That's why. People are angry because the world is not working the way they want it to work. I would encourage you not to be angry at Christ. Christ has only done good for you. I want to encourage you to be angry at the sin that's holding you back from Christ.

The sin that holds people back from Christ is the worst part about themselves that they still love. I want to encourage you against apathy, against the "I have to," against the religious mindset. I want to encourage you to pray what King David prayed in Psalm 51. He prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of my salvation." Christmas is a great time to be reminded of all Christ has done for you.

Finally, for a lot of us, we don't necessarily need to change our response to Jesus; we need to deepen it. We need to do what Olivia did, which is we need to read the Scriptures. We need to look at the Gospels. We need to see Christ, love what we see, and be changed by it. We need to realize afresh the great truth that Jesus Christ was born so you and I could be born again. Let's pray.

Lord, all over this room I just pray if anybody is angry because the world is not working the way they want it, maybe, Lord, that's the star you're using to bring them to yourself. Lord, I pray that you would trouble people in this room the same way you troubled Herod, that your Word would not be able to leave their minds and hearts this Christmas season and they would wrestle with you and come to realize

Christianity isn't about going to church; it's about submitting and surrendering to the lordship of Christ.

Lord, I pray for the apathetic, the people who just have been around here. Lord, we pray for our middle schoolers and our high schoolers who have been so blessed to grow up in the homes and the churches that they have. Lord, we pray for them that you'd wake them up spiritually, that you'd give them deep affections for Christ. Lord, as we sing together now, would you deepen our worship and deepen our commitments and deepen our affection as we head into 2024 together. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.