

Advent: The Hostility Towards Jesus

Matthew 2:3-16

Devotional Prayer, Repentance and the Spiritual Life 9 December 2019 (Advent)

Matthew 2:3 (quoted)

Matthew 2:16 (quoted)

"When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matthew 2:3). That is something of an understatement, I should say. Herod's reaction was immediate, and violent: he was "exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men" (Matthew 2:16). The high priest and his courtiers, by contrast, took their time — three years, I should think — to plot and to vent their anger against Jesus. In that period, their initial hostility bred further hostility, which, in time, turned to hatred.

While Herod, in his sudden burst of anger, did not succeed, the other party nursed their hostility, and succeeded — or so they believed. Neither understood that it was all part of the eternal plan of God, and that they could have done nothing to alter it.

Hostility and anger are two sides of the same coin. Anger is an emotion; hostility is more a mode, or manner, of expressing it. One may feel anger, and yet have many options for how to express it: some people are passive in their anger, some passive-aggressive, some openly aggressive. The question before us is this: what made these people hostile towards an infant Jesus? A mere babe. They knew that a Messiah was to come; and had they believed the prophets and the Scripture, they ought to have welcomed the newborn, rather than begun at once to hate Him.

One thing Herod and the Jewish priests had in common was this: if the child of whom they had heard were indeed the Messiah, they did not wish anyone superior to themselves in their midst. They were unwilling to concede even the smallest part of the superiority that gave them such power over others. Whereas Herod saw the matter in political terms, the other party, who knew well of the coming Messiah, saw it in religious terms. This is evident from the two principal charges brought against Jesus at His trial, thirty years later: first, that He claimed to be King of the Jews, and second, that He claimed to be the Son of God.

Both parties, whatever their several motives, did not wish God to preside over them, but wished, rather, to play god over others, and to be worshipped themselves. We have many modern-day Herods, and many modern-day high priests, who continue, again and again, to re-

enact the events that took place over two thousand years ago. Tragically, we have no one willing to play the part of Jesus Christ. During this season of Advent, we ought to undertake a serious self-examination, and consider how we might imitate Christ, and how we might persuade others to do likewise. When Jesus commissioned us to make disciples of all nations, carrying the Gospel to the four corners of the world, His intention must surely have been to eradicate evil, and to declare to the modern-day Herods and high priests that they shall have no place within the Kingdom of God.