

Epiphany 2022

The coming of the Messiah King should have filled King Herod and the people of Jerusalem with great excitement and joy; after all he was to be the fulfilment of all their hopes and expectations. But curiously, the thought of his coming had the opposite effect upon them because we are told that Herod was perturbed. He was filled with jealousy, anxiety and sufficient hate that, when the wise men failed to lead him directly to the new born king so he could do his worse, he commissioned the massacre of all the baby boys in the area under two years old.

Today's feast makes a contrast between God's own people who should have welcomed the birth of Jesus, their "*leader [who will come out of Bethlehem] to shepherd my people Israel*" but who in fact sought only to destroy him, with some strangers, some wise men from the east, who fell to their knees and did him homage before opening their treasures and offering expensive gifts.

King Herod failed in his plot to kill "*the infant king of the Jews*" but in the process he cruelly massacred an unknown number of baby boys of similar age. His behaviour, however, is in a way prophetic because some thirty-three years later the chief priests and elders, the high priest Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish Council) and a later King Herod did succeed in plotting and scheming against Jesus and handing him over to Pilate and the Romans for execution.

The birth, the life and the ministry of Jesus invites a response. The response of King Herod and the Chosen Jewish people was laden with self-interest, jealousy, hatred and a failure to understand the scriptures and the ways of God. The response of the wise men was one of welcome, openness and generosity. What is our response? The response of Herod warns us against becoming self-obsessed, blind and putting ourselves and our views first. The response of the wise men teaches us to go in search of Jesus, to give our lives to this cause and to open the treasury of ourselves, our gifts and talents and place them at his service.