

Fall on Your Knees

It's time to rediscover the humbling power.

My favorite scene in the new movie *The Nativity Story* shows a nasty King Herod barking military orders to his guards. He feels threatened by the prophecy of a new king in Israel, and he wants to make sure this renegade messiah gets caught. So he tells his soldiers to nab him when he arrives in Bethlehem.

Herod says the phantom king will be easy to identify since he will be a man of wealth and significance. So the soldiers station themselves all around Bethlehem, looking for a well-dressed guy traveling with an entourage.

But no such man of importance arrives in the little Judean town—only poor Jews, including an exhausted young peasant who has traveled 100 miles with his very pregnant wife, a donkey and barely enough provisions to stay alive. The soldiers let Mary and Joseph pass. After all, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

That amazing moment provides the essence of the Christmas story. When God sent His only begotten Son into the world, the “important” people didn’t recognize Him. Jesus’ parents were commoners. He didn’t come with fancy robes or royal fanfare. He slept on a bed of hay, and angels announced His birth in a lonely field when only a few shepherds were awake to hear the news.

Judging by Madison Avenue standards, this was a public relations disaster. There were no news conferences, press releases, book signings or fireworks displays. Jesus got absolutely no airtime on CNN or *Face the Nation*. It’s true

that He got His own star, but only a watchful few even noticed it.

Herod expected any king worth his crown to enter the city with banners, dancing girls, trumpet blasts and big-budget hoopla. But God didn't do it man's way. He slipped in the back door.

Even the mysterious magi who visited Jesus after His birth took the low-key approach to publicity. When they saw the child they "fell to the ground" to worship (Matt. 2:11, NASB) and then returned to their country unnoticed. After being in the Messiah's presence, they had no interest in returning to Herod's luxurious palace to play his power games.

Bethlehem, as simple as it was, changed everything.

This Christmas, I hope to spend some time kneeling on the floor as I think about that manger. There is something about the birthplace of Jesus—a crude, cramped room that smelled of dirt and animal waste—that helps me reorder my priorities. If this is where the Savior made His debut, then it is only in the place of humility that His presence will abide.

Unfortunately in today's church many of us have adopted Herod's values. We are impressed by fame, wealth and sophistication. We think God likes grand entrances, entourages and red carpets. We've been seduced by our celebrity-obsessed culture. Some misguided ministers have even reinvented the Christmas story to fit their self-centered theology.

One prominent television preacher told an Atlanta newspaper recently that Jesus was actually very wealthy, and that He got much of His treasure from the magi when they visited Him as a

child.

The Bible actually does not tell us the amount of gold the wise men presented to Jesus, but Bible scholars say it could not have been enough to make Jesus independently wealthy during His time on Earth. After all, if Jesus were that rich, why would He have needed a coin from a fish's mouth to pay His taxes? And why would He have needed to borrow a tomb from an affluent friend?

People can waste their time arguing about how many gold coins Jesus had stashed under His mattress. But my Bible says plainly: "For your sake He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). The point is that Jesus—who deserved all the applause in the world, and who owns all its riches—took the lowest road when He came into the world. He was teaching us that the path to greatness starts when we lay down our reputation and become servants.

My prayer is that we all will find a place to kneel near Bethlehem's manger. There, amidst the sheep, the straw and the simple swaddling clothes, we will rediscover the humbling power of Christmas.

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