

Our Red Carpet Welcome to the King

In a bygone era, 'a woman was interviewing a prospective servant and asked, "Can you serve company?" The applicant replied, "Yes, [ma'am], both ways". The woman looked puzzled and asked, "What do you mean, both ways?" "So's they'll come again, or stay away".' Now, that person would make a truly versatile servant! Seems there are always some people we would rather not have to deal with at all, let alone be hospitable to. But that's not a very Christian attitude. Actually it's antithetical to the Gospel. In fact, if Lord Jesus was not welcoming to even one person on earth, would He even be the Savior of the World?

When He first became incarnate, that is took on human flesh and became a human being, He did not come as a "generic" human man. As much as we like to categorize people as belonging to one group and not another group, like liberals and democrats have been majoring in these days, trying to divide us into ever smaller people groups who feel the overwhelming need to fight against all others just to survive, none of us is generic or the so-called average "Joe Blow", or Jane Doe. Even though most of us do belong, more or less, to one or more groupings, truly no two of us are the same. We were each born into a specific situation, just as Creator Father God had planned from before time itself began.

Our Lord Jesus was no different. Though He is the new Adam, the new mankind, yet He still came as a real, genuine human being, born into a specific set of circumstances and identities like all the rest of us. So what was Lord Jesus' ethnicity? He was a Semite, more specifically a Jew. He was Jewish. He spoke Hebrew in the synagogues, but Aramaic at home and on the streets. He probably knew Greek, since it was the lingua franca of the day. He may even have learned Latin, since it was the language of the Roman conquerors who controlled vast areas of the world at the time, including Jerusalem and the entirety of the Holy Land. He was, from most outward appearances, an ordinary "Joe Blow" from the backwater town of Nazareth. A Jewish carpenter, or construction worker, tradesman of some sort for sure. A blue collar, run-of-the-mill, "down-to-earth" man. In other words, He was one of us. As in us gathered here, in this place, today. Unless, that is, any of us have pretensions of greatness, genius, or a secret stash of great wealth just lying around, or a clandestine life!

Now we know He was born in Bethlehem, in a cave, which was a stable for the family livestock. If there ever was a more nondescript town than Nazareth where He grew up, it was Bethlehem, even smaller and less important than Nazareth. Why, Bethlehem was so small it wasn't even marked on many maps of the area. Yet, He was born as the new, once and forever King of the Jews! Which is what the three royal wise men, magi, astrologers, astronomers, who had journeyed all the way from the

East, spoke of Him. They almost certainly came from one of the capital cities of the Parthian Empire, a successor to the earlier Medo-Persian Empire, which the prophet Daniel, a Jew himself, had served into his old age.

So, since Lord Jesus was born a Jew, in a Jewish backwater town so unimportant that even most Jews who were not residents of Jerusalem didn't know where it was, why, in Heaven's name, would a group of Babylonian or Persian or Iranian or Indian or a mix of Asian nationalities, traipse all the way from there, roughly a thousand miles, to Jerusalem, and then to Bethlehem? That Gospel-writer Matthew recorded this incident, which we commemorate on Epiphany, is of critical importance. For Lord Jesus came as a Jew, to the Jews. And He said so Himself, in Mark 7:27: "Jesus told [the Gentile woman], "First I should feed the children—My Own family, the Jews". And we saw that on Lord Jesus' very own birthday, the only people to welcome Him into the world, were His stepfather Joseph, Mary's husband, and a ragtag, motley group of Jewish shepherds!

Here He was, supposedly the newborn King of the Jews. Really? Where were the trumpets? The royal parade, the celebrations, the stream of well wishers and admirers? Well, there weren't any. Not from the world, there weren't. But God gave His now only-begotten Son a royal welcome such as the world could never have given. Father God sent a whole army of angels, which would have numbered at least in the thousands, sparkling,

glowing radiantly, lighting up the entire night sky. No worldly welcome could hold a candle to that! But God also arranged for a welcome from the world as well. For it was no accident that the shepherds were in the field keeping their sheep that night on that particular set of hills just outside Bethlehem. They witnessed the glorious angelic welcome celebration in the skies, as one angel specifically told them what it was all about. And after the dazzling spectacle was over, the shepherds took matters into their own hands. They decided among themselves, as God knew they would, to go and see for themselves what the angel had told them about. And go they did. Other than Joseph, and the then still in utero John the Baptist six months before, they were the first humans to behold, and welcome Lord Jesus to this world!

Following that, as we read the last couple of weeks, and do so every Christmastime, Lord Jesus was beautifully welcomed at the Temple of God in Jerusalem. First by the priest Simeon, and then by the prophetess Anna, both of whom did all they could to talk up this royal Baby to the people round about them. But, the next visitors, welcomers, of note came some twelve days later. These were the three kings or wise men, and their retainers. Being the royal court personages they were, we don't know how many composed their entourage, but it was definitely more than just three of them. It's not recorded definitively that there were even three of them, but tradition holds that there were three wise men, who each gave one of the three mentioned extravagant gifts

to the Christ Child, as they worshipped Him.

The real salient point here is this: these people who came to welcome and worship the Baby Jesus were not Jews! They were Gentiles! And why in Heaven's name would any Gentiles be interested in some future Jewish king? Why when the royal court in Jerusalem heard from these very wise men that a prophesied king of the Jews had been born, they were not leaping for joy? As Matthew 2 tells us, King Herod was instead "deeply disturbed". And not just him, but "everyone in Jerusalem", that is anybody who was anybody there, all of them were deeply disturbed. For even though this Child was fulfilling prophecy, He wasn't coming in the right way or at the right time. And thus, because He wasn't coming in the way the Jerusalem bigwigs wanted or could control, He could not possibly be the promised Messiah Savior King. And so of course, they turned up their noses at even the thought of Him. Herod, paranoid sociopath that he was, sent soldiers to assassinate Him and all other baby boys to make sure they didn't miss Him by accident! Some welcome from the important, "good" people! Not! Looks like the "real", "important", "leading" Jews were all rejecting Baby Jesus. From the very get go.

But not the Gentiles. For in the three wise men, three important Gentiles and their Gentile entourage, there was a welcome, a rolling out of the red carpet, as it were, from the Gentile world to this Jewish king, Whom they knew was far more than just another Jewish king, but would actually be the King of Kings and Lord of

Lords, the Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God. Though only they came, the Gentile world did welcome the Savior of the World.

That all happened about 2,024 or so years ago. The human King Jesus has come and gone, ascending back into Heaven from which He came. But in His place, He sent His very Own Holy Spirit. So now, whilst Lord Jesus was confined to one place and time wherever He went while He physically walked on this earth, now through Holy Spirit, He can be anywhere and everywhere at the same time, all the time! And the question begging to be answered, who's welcoming Him? Who's rolling out the red carpet for Him to visit and come in? Who, like the three wise men, would study the Scriptures and know when He was due, and then pack up and undertake an arduous, month's long journey just to welcome Him and give Him some costly gifts? Would you? Is Lord Jesus that important to you? Have you thrown open the door to your heart, rolled out the red carpet for Him, and with joy and celebration, welcomed Him into your heart? Let me tell you, He's "dying" to come in. Actually, He did die. For you. Because He loves you that much. Isn't He worth letting in? Isn't He worth giving up the driver's seat of your life to? He knows the way. He never gets lost! He'll always steer you straight. And, no questions, no doubts, He'll get you to your final and forever, glorious destination—peace and joy in your hearts now on earth and sublime eternal life in Heaven. So welcome Him in. Again.

