

Sunday School Notes for January 13: Choosing to Listen

We have all heard the Christmas story over and over again. Let's see how clever you are. How many of the following people were involved in the Christmas story?

Shepherds, *Martha*, Mary, *Moses*, *Jonah*, Joseph, Herod, *Abraham*, Magi/Wise men; chief priests/scribes

Now let's take the YES list and subdivide it again:

- a) Those who were invited to worship and came.
- b) Those who heard the good news but went on with their own lives

*Mary and Joseph had listened to the angel and had allowed God to work in their lives, even though this meant that things didn't happen quite the way they would have planned.

*The wise men obediently followed a star.

*The shepherds were so excited by the angels' message that they set off at once to meet Jesus, the promised Saviour. (Luke 2:15)

But the others who were invited to worship refused the invitation.

The chief priests and the scribes whom Herod consulted, asking them where this baby was born, didn't follow up on the good news. Throughout history the Jews had been waiting for a royal king, the Messiah. Yet these men don't seem to have got excited and it doesn't seem as though any of them went with the wise men to find out if the angels were telling the truth. They didn't really want God to interfere in their comfortable lives so they didn't go.

Herod the Great saw how excited the wise men were; yet he just sent them off to find the baby and asked the wise men to let him know about this special king so he also could go and worship him. But Herod was a thoroughly nasty piece of work. There was no way he was interested in knowing if God was involved in Jesus' birth. Instead he planned to kill the baby when the wise men had found him! So he lost out on the chance to worship Jesus.

Herod was so determined not to have a rival that he actually went against God and planned to kill the baby. But God's plans cannot be interrupted, even by a tyrant.

God warned the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod so they travelled home another way. Because Herod didn't know which baby to kill, he gave orders to kill all the boy babies under the age of two in Bethlehem!

Joseph was also protected by God. He was told in a dream to take Mary and the young child and to flee into Egypt and to stay there until God told him it was OK to leave (Matt 2:13). Obediently, once again, Joseph obeyed God. This means that baby Jesus, like us, lived in Africa. It would have been in Africa that Jesus took his first steps and said his first baby words!

The family stayed in Egypt until Herod the Great died and God told them they could go back home. Even then they didn't go back to Bethlehem because Herod's equally terrible son had taken over from his father. Instead they went north to live in Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

Herod and the scribes who knew their scriptures lost out because they weren't prepared to allow God to direct them. They thought that what they had was wonderful – power and position. And they lost out on life with God.

We might not make such a public mistake, but if we forget that God is the most important part of our lives in 2019, we are doing the same as they did. Let us make sure that 2019 is a year when we allow God to organise us.

Dear God,

When we are tempted to make our own plans

Help us to listen to your voice

When we are busy and feel there is no time to stop

Help us to listen to your voice

When we are angry and want to fight back

Help us to listen to your voice

When we are worried and don't know what to do

Help us to listen to your voice. Amen