

“Where is he...?” Matthew chapter 2 verse 2

It all depends on who you ask. Astrologers from Persia or Arabia turned up at the palace of King Herod of Judah, in Jerusalem. They asked him “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” Herod consulted his wise men, who in turn consulted the scriptures, and they informed the wise men that the messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, a town very close to Jerusalem.

Happily, they were right, and the wise men found the one they were looking for. But perhaps they had asked the wrong person. Because not everyone who knows where Jesus is to be found has purely unselfish motives. The wise men went on their way unaware that Herod was using them for his own ends. He asked them to find the exact location where Jesus was, so that he could worship him for himself. In fact, he wanted to kill Jesus. He knew the messianic prophecies, but was not willing to stand down from his throne so that God's chosen king could rule.

Incredible as it may seem, that kind of attitude is common. When Karl Marx called religion “the flowers on the chain,” and “the opium of the people” he was right. Religion has frequently been used throughout history to keep people subservient to ruling elites. Oppressive class structures have been perpetuated by offering the downtrodden poor the carrot of a future life of ease in heaven. There's a verse of the famous Victorian hymn which is never sung these days. It goes, “The rich man in his castle / the poor man at his gate / God made the high and lowly / he ordered their estate.

Today there are those who place themselves between people and Jesus, making themselves the mediators of God's blessing or his judgment. There are others who enrich themselves at the expense of ordinary people by demanding money as the price of blessing, and more who burden people with conditions, standards and behaviours. But the bible says that “there is only one saviour, and only one mediator between God and people, the man Jesus Christ.”

So if you are seeking Jesus, please remember that the Christian faith is robust in its proper form, which is the community and fellowship of people living out of a direct, individual relationship with Jesus Christ, not mediated by anyone else, but it is notoriously vulnerable to corruption and exploitation by people who see in it an opportunity to manipulate and control others.

Who do we ask, if we want to find out where Jesus is? Look for people like John the Baptist who prepared the way for the coming of the ministry of Jesus and pointed people to him and, in humility, said “He must become greater, I must become less.”

Prayer.

Father, it seems that the whole area of religion and faith is a minefield in which it is so easy to be led astray and deceived. But we know that if we place our faith and trust in you through believing in Jesus Christ then you can guide us by your Spirit into all truth so that we will not be fooled by people who speak deceitfully in your name. Thank you that you promise to keep us safe if we remain close to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

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