

**Epiphany**  
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**January 6, 2019, Yr C**

Before his baptism in the Jordan and the beginning of his public ministry, the Gospels tell us nothing of what Jesus did or said other than the time he stayed behind in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. It would seem to have been a quiet and uneventful thirty years for him, but a lot of other people were talking about him and reacting to him. It's almost as if the human race, Israel in particular, had been expecting him. So, a quiz: who said this:

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God with us”.”

A. That was Isaiah (7:14) in the 8<sup>th</sup> century foreseeing a future king whom God would send to save his people.

Who said, “And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.”?

A. That was Micah (5:1), another Old Testament prophet, zeroing in on the identity of that future Messiah as coming from the descendants of David, who had been born in Bethlehem. The scribes quoted Micah when Herod asked them where the messiah was to be born. So, Herod knew what he was doing, that he was targeting “God with us”. What kind of evil sits in the heart of someone who would kill God so as to rule on earth? But isn't that what humanity has always done, and still tries to do-- kill God so as to rule on earth? But it always ends in disaster, which is not satisfactory to God, who does not delight in the death even of the wicked. And so God moved to rescue us from this condition of sin and alienation, in which we had become trapped. But not everyone wants to be liberated. God made a move, and people reacted. Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Who said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me as you say.”?

A. That's Mary (Lk. 1:38), the humble maid of Nazareth. Evil does not occupy every heart! God made His move, and some responded with joy, honored to have a part in the redemption of the children of Eve.

Who said, “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”?

A. Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. (Lk. 1:43) She, like Herod, recognized that the prophecy about Emmanuel was being fulfilled. Unlike Herod, she was happy about it and threw her support behind it.

Who said, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”?

A. The shepherds. (Lk. 2:15) They, the poor, the outcast, the bottom of the social pyramid, got the glad tidings directly from heaven, the night of. Herod had to figure it out second hand from a group of wandering foreigners and his own bookworms who knew their way around the dusty old manuscripts. Funny how the humble are blessed in ways that the arrogant are denied. He who has not will lose the little he thinks he has.

Who said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.”?

A. That's Herod (Mt. 2:8) How would things have been different if he had meant it? But it was not for homage that he sent his troops to Bethlehem. He would not scruple to add Emmanuel to the ten members of his own family whom he killed to protect his throne. If you don't reverence God in your own sons and daughters, you will not reverence Him in God's Son either. There was room in Herod's heart for only one act of worship, and that was of himself.

Who said, “Now Master, you may dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation... a light for revelation to the gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”?

A. That was Simeon (Lk. 2:29-32) as he took baby Jesus, forty days old, into his arms. Mary and Joseph had brought their baby to the temple to present him to the Lord. Simeon, who was righteous and devout and awaiting the consolation of Israel, had been told by the Lord that he would live to see that consolation, live to see the Messiah, and he did-- right there in the temple, right under Herod's nose in the very building Herod was constructing to buy favor with the priests and scribes.

In the darkness of his scheming mind, Herod could not recognize the child who was the glory of Israel and the light of the nations. But Simeon could, because he was a true son of Israel. And the magi could, because they, representatives of all the gentile nations, were seeking God's light with sincere hearts.

Before Jesus said anything or did anything everybody was talking about him and reacting to him, which is exactly why he came: to shake us awake and provoke a reaction, hoping it will be a response of love for love, leading us out of our locked-up hearts into his light and his joy.