

The People Who Missed Christmas: Religious Leaders

Scripture: Deuteronomy 18:15; Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:4–6

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Lots of people miss Christmas. They might observe the holiday by decorating their homes and exchanging gifts with family and friends, but they completely bypass the spiritual significance of Christ's incarnation.

The story of Christ's birth is full of characters who effectively missed the first Christmas. One significant group of them is mentioned in passing in Matthew's account of Herod's treachery. They are the religious leaders. Matthew 2:4-6 describes the scene.

Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

This is shocking. The chief priests and scribes knew exactly where Christ was to be born. These were the theologians, the minds, the brains, the pharisaical aristocracy, the religious elite of Israel. They knew Scripture well enough to quote Micah 5:2, which prophesied that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Yet they missed Christmas.

The Jewish people had been looking for their Messiah since Moses first prophesied that a great prophet would come (Deuteronomy 18:15). They were waiting eagerly for a deliverer. Particularly now that they lived under Roman oppression, the entire nation longed for His coming. He was the great hope of the ages. The destiny of Israel was bound up in His coming. He was their deliverer, Messiah, Christ, the Anointed One. The intensity of their hunger is illustrated in the ministry of John the Baptist. People flocked to hear the one who had been sent to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Yet here were the theological experts, the guardians of spiritual truth in Israel, and they never even bothered to walk the few miles south to Bethlehem to find out for themselves if this was the Messiah.

Why did the religious leaders miss Christmas? Indifference. They didn't care. At least Herod feared Jesus' authority. The innkeeper could claim ignorance. These men had all the facts. They just didn't care. Their Messiah was not really important to them.

If the truth were known, they felt they didn't need Him. They were selfrighteous. They kept the law. They believed they were already all that God could ever ask of them. They were perfect in their own minds, sickeningly proud.

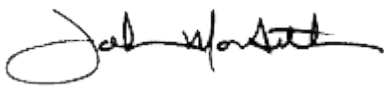
The root of indifference is always pride. These men were too busy with themselves to be concerned

about Jesus. Engrossed in their own pride, their selfrighteousness, their selfsufficiency, they carried on their ritual and their petty theological discussions in the confines of their own comfortable system. They had no time for the Son of God. In fact, when He began His public ministry, these men made themselves His principal adversaries. They hated Him and despised Him and ultimately plotted His murder. They didn't want Him. They didn't need Him.

I'm reminded of the plaintive cry of Jeremiah in Lamentations 1:12 as he watched all of Israel going down the path of destruction. He cried out, "Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?" Jeremiah was saying, "How can you be so indifferent?"

Indifference is a profound sin against Christ. Sadly, it is one of the most common reactions to Him. It is typical of religious people who don't think they need a savior. Such people think they are all right just the way they are. That is a dangerous attitude.

Jesus' primary ministry was to people who had problems and knew it. He said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). In other words, those who are indifferent—who don't realize they are sinners—cannot respond to His call. There may, in fact, be more people in our nation who ignore Christ because they don't realize how sinful they are than people who reject Him because they are wantonly evil and hate Him. Everywhere you look you can see indifferent people who don't care about the Savior because they don't understand their need for salvation. They don't openly oppose Him; they just ignore Him. They don't care about the remedy because they don't believe they have the disease. These people miss Christmas.



(Adapted from [*The Miracle of Christmas*](#).)

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