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Body, Mind and Spirit

A tale of two responses

By Todd Outcalt

Now that Christmas is complete and all of the tinsel has been removed and deposited into the landfill, we enter this odd season of Epiphany – a brief affair focusing on Christ's revelation to the world. For some reason, I've always preferred Matthew's account of the magi to Luke's account, which is centered in angel, announcement and humble birth. I have always found Matthew's Gospel to be much richer in preachable and teachable insights – especially as we consider the tensions of our world and of our time.



Take, for example, the disparity of the two worlds and the two responses we find in Matthew's gospel.

On the one hand we encounter a king by the name of Herod. Herod's response to Christ is more typical of life as we live it. Herod was self-centered, anxious, and in short, consumed by fear. His fear of losing his power, prestige or position led to corruption and bloodshed. He lied, coerced, and cajoled in order to keep his position and save face. His response to Christ was not so much a response to God as a response to the idea of sharing in the work of God – a work that Herod was unwilling to assume. Certainly we see this scenario played out time and again today in every nation, government and position of power. Fear causes us to lose our center of gravity, to stumble into darkness, to protect and defend what we believe is most important to us: namely, ourselves or

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our own interests.

But on the other hand, we have the magi – these mysterious gentiles from the Far East. What was their response to Christ? Well, they were willing to move with God, even though they didn't have all the answers or fully comprehend the way. They traveled by faith – though their faith was weak, not clearly-defined and seeker-oriented. They were willing to ask for directions and had to work with others. And their ultimate response to Christ was one of extravagant generosity.

I wonder, now that Christmas has come and gone, and a new year and decade is upon us, what will our response be to Christ? Will 2010 be a year dictated by more fear and trepidation? Or will 2010 be a year of faith, commitment and generosity toward the work of God?

As we enter a new year and decade – with all of our fears about the economy, the world at war, the future – I have to believe that there is a message in the magi. We can relieve our tensions, our fears, our trepidations by moving in harmony with God, by practicing generosity and being attentive to the movements of God's grace.

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Todd Outcalt is senior pastor of Calvary UMC in

Brownsburg and the author of twenty books, including 2009 titles Before You Say "I Do", Your Beautiful Wedding on Any Budget, and School's Out. His next book, Ultimate Christian Living, will be published March 1 by Health Communications, and includes essays by or about Rick Warren, Max Lucado, Billy Graham, Bishop Will Willimon, and our own Linda McCoy, pastor of The Garden, a ministry of St. Luke's UMC in Indianapolis.

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