



Sunday 3rd January 2021, 10.30, Epiphany

Call to worship Isaiah 60: 1 – 3

SING: "Light of the World/Here I am to worship"

Prayer

Birthdays and notices

Prayers of intercession and Lord's Prayer

READING: Matthew 2: 1 – 12

MAGI – were a caste of priests in Persia (Iraq), magicians, astrologers, who worshipped other gods. They searched the stars for signs. All things that God tells the Israelites not to do in the OT. Gentiles, they did not belong to the people of God.

Sorry, not Kings! Perhaps someone sat down and worked out that you'd have to be rich to make this journey and so they must have been a king. Not so. There was one king of Babylon where they came from so they were definitely not kings.

Sorry, not wise men! Some may have been wise but they weren't magi 'cos they were wise, being magi didn't make someone wise.

They came to pay homage because they believed that the star they had seen signified the birth of a king. Shame it was overcast this Christmas when the planet alignment that was probably what they saw was the same for the first time in 800 years. They came to see the new king, the one born king. Where would you go if you were looking for a king? Well to a palace. They went to Herod's palace in Jerusalem.

Matthew 2: 3 – 6 when Herod heard this news he was disturbed. Herod was violent and insecure and the whole of Jerusalem was disturbed if he was disturbed. Some little known but historical factoids about this King Herod

- He had 10 different wives
- He made 6 different wills, leaving his crown to different kids each time
- He had one of his mothers-in-law executed (Just the one!!)

Historical facts, recorded by the Romans in their histories. Not a nice man!

Herod sent for his religious advisors and asked them where God's Christ would be born. Who told him that this king was the promised Messiah? How did he know? And knowing, what made him think he could thwart God's plan?! The advisors told him that God's Messiah, the King in the line of David, would be born in Bethlehem, in Judea according to the Scriptures. If they knew this then why didn't THEY go and worship Jesus too?

Story so far ... the Gentile magi, searching the stars and engaged in activities that God had forbidden God's people to engage in, found a sign in the stars that a new king had been born. They set off on a long, expensive, arduous journey to worship this new king. They came to Jerusalem and went to the palace 'cos that's where you would look for a king. Herod was not happy to hear their news. He sent for his advisors to find out where the Christ would be born, and they told him



Matthew 2: 7 – 9 Then scheming, evil Herod asked if they would call in on their way back and tell him where the new king was so that he too could go and worship. It was a cunning plan. If Herod had sent troops the locals would have panicked, hidden the child. This way he would get the info he wanted without alerting anyone.

Matthew 2: 10 – 11 The magi followed the star until it led them to a house and a child in Bethlehem. How thrilled must they have been to find what they had invested and committed so much into. Joy or what! It says that they entered the house and saw the child. They “bowed down and worshipped”. The Greek used here can be translated as “lean toward to kiss”. It is a very intimate word for something that they were doing in front of strangers! Worship – leaning toward Jesus as if to kiss. The magi were NOT in the nativity scene. I don’t care how many children’s nativity plays you’ve seen or how many Christmas cards you’d had with pictures of the magi in the stable – they are not true. The Bible says that the shepherds went to a stable to worship a baby. The magi went to a house to worship a toddler, a small child.

Does it matter? Yes. It shows us that Jesus was God’s ongoing, long term plan for the benefit of humanity. It shows us that God’s plan sometimes takes a while to come about. It reminds us that Jesus is not just Emmanuel (God with us) at Christmas time. Jesus was and is and will always be Emmanuel, God with Us. It matters because it reminds us that God’s story is not yet finished. It matters as 2020 ends and a new year begins, it matters as we try and reconcile Covid and a global pandemic with a powerful, loving God.

Way back in time when Isaiah’s prophecies were being written down, a promise of hope was recorded in Isaiah 60, we read it earlier, that in the midst of darkness (Herod, Covid, etc), the Light of the Lord would shine forth (the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not, cannot, will not, extinguish the light).

So what?!! This ancient story – the visit of foreigners to Jesus. At Christmas the angels summoned shepherds to come and worship Jesus. Here God summoned magi to come and worship Jesus. Shepherds were looked down on, outcasts. Magi were not only Gentiles but they were Gentiles who engaged in practices that were forbidden for God’s people. This reminds us that God calls who God will call. That God’s ways are not our ways. It reminds us that God came to earth for the benefit of all people, not just the ones we like or the ones who are like us! It reminds us that the people we might not approve of are the people who God calls to fulfil God’s eternal purpose.

Mainly though this passage is about **commitment**. God’s commitment to us. It is about the commitment of the magi in their costly journey to worship. God called, they committed, Christ is glorified. God calls all disciples of Jesus to a life of commitment and sacrifice. God calls all disciples to journey, to grow as we follow Jesus.

New Year’s resolution anyone? Perhaps in quietness, on this first Sunday of this new year, we might **resolve before God to renew our commitment to worship Jesus, to serve God in the family of this church, to pray for those who live in darkness, to shine in the darkness as we reflect the light of Christ** Pause/prayer

SING: I will offer up my life/this thankful heart

Blessing/Grace