

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 10th January 2021 (Epiphany)

Call to worship – *(from No Ordinary Man – Nick Fawcett)*

After Christmas, Epiphany; after the shepherds, the wise men;
after a marathon journey, arrival – but probably long after the events of Bethlehem.
But one thing was unchanged – the light which had begun to shine then, was shining still;
a light which nothing, not even death itself, would ever be able to extinguish.

This morning we spend a few moments remembering that journey of the magi and considering the meaning of that pilgrimage and their gifts; and considering our pilgrimage and the gifts we bring.

We come now to worship the one at the centre of all, Jesus Christ – God incarnate, Saviour of the world. ‘O come let us adore Him’

Hymn MP 65 – Brightest and best <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmtb3DJMa3Y>

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning, dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning, guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining; low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;
Angels adore Him in slumber reclining, Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all!

Say, shall we yield Him, in costly devotion, odours of Edom and offerings divine?
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean, myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation, vainly with gifts would His favour secure;
Richer by far is the heart's adoration, dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning, dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning, guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Loving God, inspire us as You inspired the magi, to journey in faith, following where You lead until we reach our goal. And, as the magi bowed before the child, recognising in Him, the Lord of all – so, in the silence now, we bow before that same Lord Jesus and, knowing He is God, we worship.

Silence

Lord Jesus Christ, You reveal Your truth to us, but we fail to understand or obey Your will for our lives. Forgive our stubbornness; **help us to see Your glory.**

Lord Jesus Christ, You reveal Your compassion to us, but we fail to show that compassion to others. Forgive our selfishness; **help us to see Your glory.**

Lord Jesus Christ, You reveal Your power to us, but we prefer to trust in our own strength. Forgive our wilfulness; **help us to see Your glory.**

Lord Jesus Christ, You reveal God to us – as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but we persist in our divisions and maintain our differences. Forgive our disunity; **help us to see Your glory – the glory of the Father's only Son, and help us to bear witness to the Word, who became flesh and lived among us – for His Name's sake. Amen,**

May God, in His mercy, draw us to Himself, forgive all our sins and grant us a vision of His glory, that through us Christ may be revealed to all the world. In Jesus' Name we pray. **Amen**

Lord's Prayer

Reading – Matthew 2 v 1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Hymn MP 39 – As with gladness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB8rKNrlpDQ>

As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright
So, most gracious God, may we evermore be led to Thee
As with joyful steps they sped, Saviour to Thy lowly bed
There to bend the knee before, Thee whom heaven and earth adore
So may we with willing feet ever seek Thy mercy-seat
As they offered gifts most rare at Thy cradle rude and bare
So may we with holy joy, pure, and free from sin's alloy
All our costliest treasures bring Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King
Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way
And, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide, where no clouds Thy glory hide.
In the heavenly country bright need they no created light
Thou its light, its joy, its crown Thou its sun, which goes not down.
There forever may we sing ‘Hallelujahs’ to our King

Meditative Reading (imagine yourself kneeling before the Christ child – gaze on Him – look into His eyes as He gazes into yours. Look into the eyes of God. Look into the eyes of Emmanuel – God with us – and wait – quietly. When you are ready, read the following verses – still gazing at the small, vulnerable baby – God with us!)

“For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.

In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker, for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care” (Psalm 95v3-7)

“I am the Way & the Truth & the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14v6)
Now – come and adore.



Hymn MP 490 – O come let us adore Him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9VoSkzyiT4>

O come let us adore Him; O come let us adore Him; O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord

For He alone are worthy; for He alone are worthy; for He alone are worthy, Christ the Lord

We'll give You all the glory; we'll give You all the glory; we'll give You all the glory, Christ the Lord

Reflection

The story is told of a young boy attending his first ever Christmas pageant in the village church. All was dark, except for the candles – as tableau took shape at the front. Mary, Joseph and the baby were in place and the shepherds (with real sheep) had just arrived. The little lad was fascinated. Glancing behind him, into the darkness, he catches sight of the Magi – sumptuously dressed with glittering headgear – just entering the church from the rear. Awestruck, he whispers to his mother, ‘Don’t look now’, he says, ‘I think God has just got here – but I’m not sure which He is’!!

The Magi, the wise men – the few verses we read of them in Matthew leave many questions. Who were these mysterious men ‘who studied the stars’? How many were there? What kind of star was it which lured them away from family, friends and home-land? How long were they travelling to Bethlehem? Did they travel together all the way – or meet *en route* (as in the film ‘Ben-Hur’)? What kept them going on their arduous journey?

What it is probably safe to assume, is that these men seem to have been going about their everyday lives, when God broke in, drawing them away (perhaps temporarily) to an experience that would change them for ever and they would never forget.

Scholars down the ages have speculated on this mysterious story.

Just as the shepherds were drawn from that hillside to the stable in Bethlehem, so these men from the opposite end of the social spectrum, experienced some inner, irresistible call to follow the star which led them to God! The shepherds were Jewish; the Magi Gentiles. The shepherds were close-by, the Magi were from far away in the East. The shepherds were regarded as the lowest of the low and poor, the Magi were ‘great men’ and, if their gifts were anything to go by, very wealthy.

But both groups hasten to visit the baby/young child – the One who is called Emmanuel – God with us – the One who later said, ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life’.

Let’s draw alongside these wise men and walk with them to Bethlehem and learn from them.

1. Firstly, they were men who were seeking the Truth

Looking for what was important to them – looking for meaning of life. What do we seek – really seek – as we start a new year. What is our motivation for the things we say & do – comfort, prosperity, health, security, happiness & fulfilment – or are we looking for the truth? What about what we do as ‘church’ – is our aim to keep the doors open, to keep up the traditions, to be comfortable with what we are used to – or is our aim to seek & witness to the truth? We will only seek after those things we consider are valuable to us

Jesus said, ‘*I came to seek and save the lost*’ (Luke 19v10) – why? Because we are valuable to Him and we are worth all that He went through! What an incredibly amazing and an encouraging thought! You and I are of infinite value to God!

But how valuable is God to us? Do we seek Him before anything else? Is He an integral part of every day – not just Sunday? Do we spend time getting to know this God of Truth in His Word and through prayer?

Jesus said, ‘I am the Truth’ – He is the only one worth seeking, the only Truth worth looking for, the only Truth there is! The Wise Men were seeking the truth. Are we?

2. They were men who followed the Way – by following the star – the sign that God had given to lead them. As with the identity of the wise men, scholars have theorised down the centuries about the nature of this star – many of these theories are very interesting (including the possible conjunction of planets as happened just before Christmas!) – but in the end they are only theories! What we do know, is that the star, somehow, showed the wise men the way and they carefully and specifically followed it.

Jesus said, ‘I am the Way ... follow me’. Our directions for life are found in Him, through His Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes those directions appear logical and make a lot of sense – sometimes they seem to be exactly the opposite – who would have looked for a king, other than in a palace? Who, humanly speaking, would call the poor, the meek, those who mourn and the persecuted – blessed? Who would think that the way to receive is to give or the

way to gain life, in all its fullness, is to give it up? But whether, the directions of Scripture seem logical or not – they are His Way – and the question is – will we follow?

But even wise men get things wrong sometime! They made for Jerusalem, where they expected the king would be! How often does this happen to us – we think we know where we are headed (often with good reasons, humanly speaking), we press on without reference to Scripture or the HS's leading and end up in a cul-de-sac – way off the road we are meant to be on.

Where is God leading us this year? Where are we, as a church/circuit meant to be going this year? The way may be unusual, the outcome not we expect (or want!), but God's leadings are always right – and best for us. If we've gone off course, like the wise men, we need to change direction and 'go home another way' – where God will always welcome us.

3. They were men who found Life – life with a capital L – and they did this by seeking the Truth and following God's Way.

In the film 'The Bishop's Wife' – the bishop is taken up with building of great cathedral – but meanwhile his family life deteriorating, hasn't time for them or others, relationships strained to breaking point, getting tired, short-tempered and feeling frustrated and unhappy.

So he prays! Into story comes Cary Grant, as an angel. He begins to affect the lives of those in the story – not in way bishop thinks he wants – but things begin to change – with not a little reluctance on Bishop's part – but eventually, as he begins to seek the real truth and follow God's way, the Bishop finds a new purpose to life – life with capital L.

The Way was unusual, the destination not what he expected or thought he wanted, but it was God's way to a fulfilled life.

Wise men sought the truth, followed the way and found Him who is the Life. Their response was to offer Him their treasures – those things that were most valuable to them – and they received back far more than they had offered.

At beginning of this New Year – what is your response to the one who said, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life ... follow me' and what gift will you bring to the King of kings? What worship will you offer to the Lord of lords?

(Take a moment of silence for own response, and continue to gaze on Emmanuel – God with us.)

Meditation: GIFTS GIVEN AND RECEIVED (from 'Faces at the Manger' by Barrie Shepherd)

We arrived on the scene weary, and too late for the actual birth:

but from all reports it would seem to have been a normal procedure: no visions, visitants, portents, unless, of course, you consider the star that led us all that dreadful way.

Oh yes, there were local peasants who claimed to have seen a whole skyful of angels but had only their sheep for witnesses; that, and a look of late and joyous dignity.

We had brought gifts, unusual items to be sure,

but proper in this case, knowing what we do today about the fate of the recipient.

I speak of the infant thus because I have no other words with which to name the child we saw and recognized, and, yet, failed to recognize.

The thing is, you see, I felt throughout a sense that all our journey was nothing at all, a single step in comparison to the distance and the proximity we met within that broken manger.

Near and far ceased to exist. Everything and everywhere was present; present also in the sense of 'given', gifted once, for all, forever.

You see, we had not come to Him, but He to us, and the birth (that, as I said before, we really missed), took place anyway in us, in everything that night; and takes place again, right now, as I recall the way it was to give a gift and then receive His gift in return.

If we offer Him our treasures, our time, our talents, our lives – we will find we will receive the greatest treasure of all – Jesus Himself.

'We had not come to Him, but He to us, and I recall the way it was to give a gift and then receive this present in return'

Amen

Intercessions

With the wise men, we follow the guiding star to Bethlehem, bringing gifts to offer to Christ our King.

Lord, receive this offering, **and hear our prayers.**

Gold speaks of wealth and power, kingship and government. We bring to God the nations of the world and their leaders and for all those in any leadership positions in our communities May they place into Your hands, the influence and resources at their disposal, to bring relief and justice to all in need.

Lord, receive this offering, **and hear our prayers.**

Incense speaks of prayer and devotion, worship and praise. We bring to God our churches – both in this local community and throughout the world. We pray especially for May we put aside our differences and, through worshipping and serving God together, may we demonstrate the unity which Christ has won for His people. May all Christians proclaim Your Truth with one voice and show Your love with one heart.

Lord, receive this offering, **and hear our prayers.**

Myrrh speaks of suffering and death, pain and distress. We bring to God all who are suffering, through illness or depression, anxiety or grief, ill-treatment or exploitation, especially May they all know the peace and comfort of Your presence and the healing touch of Your hand.

Lord, receive this offering, **and hear our prayers.**

All of our gifts, all of our life, we offer to the infant King. As He ministers to us, so may we minister His love and compassion to the world. This we ask in his Name and for His Glory. **Amen**

Hymn MP 695 – Thou art the Way <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qgz9MEd3Utc>

Thou art the way: to Thee alone from sin and death we flee;
And all who would the Father seek must seek Him, Lord, by Thee.

Thou art the truth: Thy Word alone true wisdom can impart;
Thou only canst inform the mind, and purify the heart.

Thou art the life: the rending tomb, proclaims Thy conquering arm,
And those who put their trust in Thee, nor death nor hell shall harm.

Thou art the way, the truth, the life; grant us that way to know,
That truth to keep, that life to win, whose joys eternal flow.

The Grace

Jesus says, “I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life”

(Let these pictures speak to you as you begin this New Year)

