Home Service Sheet Sunday 7th January 2024

Call to Worship:                  Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine, for your light has come,

    and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,

    and thick darkness the peoples;

but the Lord will arise upon you,

    and his glory will be seen upon you.

And nations shall come to your light,

    and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we are drawn to Your feet in worship today - Your creation facing its Creator. Our hearts are laid bare by Your light and our sin is exposed. Humbly we come before You asking for Your grace, mercy and forgiveness. We come to You as a people in need of assurance and forgiveness. We come to You as a people in need of Your healing, cleansing and wholeness. We come dependent upon Your mercy and love. Draw us close to You today, enfolding us in Your arms, and filling us afresh with Your Holy Spirit so that we might reflect Your light within this dark world. Help us speak Your Word with boldness that others may be drawn to You in faith. These things we ask through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, amen.

Hymn As with gladness by William Chatterton Dix

<https://youtu.be/6UzYlhF4ffw?si=IauFtXC7YfwGLwFH>

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 Lord, 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.

Saviour Jesus, every day keep us on the heavenly 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 for ever may we sing hallelujahs to our King.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible Reading Matthew 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

   “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

       are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

   for from you shall come a ruler

       who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Reflection

Who were these wise men from the East who came seeking the new-born King, Jesus? Why did they come and what was their intent once they found Him? These are good questions to ask, and by answering them we should get a better idea of why Matthew includes their story in his Gospel. There are various traditions stating that they were kings and there were three of them, but this is not what the Bible says. It simply calls them magi, a word we also find in the Old Testament associated with priests and religious folk in Babylon and Persia. The magi would advise kings and rulers about policy, make predictions about the future and interpret dreams amongst other things.

In the book of the prophet Daniel we find the magi active in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, and following Daniel’s rise to fame he was made the chief of the magi (Daniel 5:11). Perhaps it is through Daniel that the magi knew to expect a special ‘king of the Jews’ to come in the future. The magi were known for their interest in and practice of astronomy and astrology, and so the sign of a peculiar star would have caught their attention. Matthew tells us that their main purpose in coming was to worship this new-born King (v.2), and that is exactly what we find them doing when they eventually find Jesus (v.11). Above all else they recognised their need to worship the One who was promised hundreds of years before – Jesus the Messiah.

We also need to note that the magi were not Jewish, and so were Gentiles. As the prophet Isaiah stated, “nations shall come to your light” (Isaiah 60:3). The promised Messiah and King of the Jews was for people of all nations and tribes, not just the people of Israel. The magi show us this from the very earliest days of Jesus coming to Earth in flesh. Jesus was recognised as the great promised King who was worthy of worship by these Gentiles. Last week we looked at the recognition that God gave to Anna and Simeon, faithful Jews, that Jesus was the longed-for Messiah, and now we have Gentile recognition too!

Jesus was and is the true King of kings and Lord of lords who is worthy to receive the worship and obedience of all creation. God revealed this wondrous news to some unexpected people, but not to others who would be assumed to have the knowledge to realise who Jesus must be. In a similar way, Jesus’ identity has been revealed to us through the Scriptures and through the work of God’s Spirit within us. We too are led to the true light of the world to worship Him who was born to Mary, and who would ultimately save us from our sins.

Within our Bible reading we also hear of Herod, the part Jewish ruler of Israel, and the chief priests and elders hearing about the coming of a new special king. However, their response is not to go with the magi to worship this new-born King. They are much more concerned about preserving the status quo of Herod as Rome’s puppet king of Israel. They have no intention of going to worship Jesus, despite Herod’s words to the magi, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” (v.8) Herod’s real intent is seen later on in Matthew’s account, when he orders the killing of all baby boys of a certain age (see Matthew 2:16-18).

There is one more surprising detail in our reading today, and that is found in verse 11, “And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.” Note where the magi found Jesus and his mother, because it’s not in a Bethlehem stable or inn. Rather they are said to be in a house. This shows us that there must have been some gap between Jesus’ birth and the arrival of the magi. We are not told how much of a gap there was, but I think we can reasonably assume at least a month or two. The traditional nativity scene showing Jesus in the manger surrounded by Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the magi and perhaps some angels is inaccurate. Everything was separated out and didn’t happen at the same time.

Above all else, though, our focus and response to Matthew’s account of the magi coming to Jesus, should be similar to that of the magi. We should come to Jesus with reverence and recognition of who He is – God’s only Son and promised Messiah. He is worthy of not just our worship, but also of the service that we can offer Him of our lives. We can do our part and offer Him our obedient and willing service today. Amen!

Prayer

O God of light and life, we bring to You our prayers for this world. We pray for Your Church, for our fellowship, pastors and all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Build Your Church we pray. May Your Holy Spirit grant to all Your people confidence, boldness and joy to proclaim the good news of Jesus to this world. We pray for all who are coming to faith, all who wonder about faith, and all who are struggling with faith. We pray also for those in need of food, shelter, clothing, and of Your healing touch. Lord, we pray for the world, especially where there is trouble and suffering, far away or near to home. May Your love, comfort and peace be present in the hearts and minds of all who suffer. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Benediction

Father of light, today You have revealed afresh to the world Your Word made flesh. The light of Your Son is strong, and Your love revealed in Him is sure. Draw each of us beyond the limits of this world into the joy of life eternal. We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord, amen.

Attachments area

[Preview YouTube video As with Gladness Men of Old](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UzYlhF4ffw&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

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