

Worship at home – 2nd January 2022 - Epiphany

Key Scriptures: Matthew 2:1-12

Key Themes:

Go and Search.

The account of the wise men involves searching. As the new year and indeed a new decade begins let us search for God in all we meet, in all we do and say, so that others might find Him too.

Call to Worship:

A new year has begun.

Let us leave behind all that is past,

And walk together into the future. Let us trust in the God of new beginnings and worship the God of fresh hopes.

Hymn: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

And His righteousness

And all these things shall be added unto you

Allelu Alleluia

Man shall not live by bread alone

But by every word

That proceeds from the mouth of God

Allelu Alleluia

Ask and it shall be given unto you

Seek and ye shall find

Knock and the door shall be opened unto you

Allelu Alleluia

Alleluia

Jesus be my first love

Alleluia

Lord you will guide me

As I seek You

Al - le - lu - ia

Al - le - lu - ia

Al - le - lu - ia

Al - le - lu Al - le - lu – ia

Karen Lafferty

Prayer of adoration:

God the Father, who calls us to set forth:

We worship and adore you.

Christ the Son who journeys with us:

We worship and adore you.

Holy Spirit who inspires us for the road ahead:

We worship and adore you.

Prayer of Confession:

Lord, we are dwellers in the darkness and often content to stay there.

We confess that we are not always seekers after signs, nor do we actively pursue your guiding light. We fail to raise our eyes from the murk of our existence to the intimations of the miraculous in which your world abounds. Forgive us for dwelling on the darkness of our lives we lift our gaze anew in our vision, that we may follow where you lead, our hope rekindled, our strength renewed.

Assurance of forgiveness:

The festive lights are dimming, and the shadows encroach again; we have kept them at bay with cheer, good company and food. But now they creep back, accusing us of all the darkness we have denied awhile. In the weak light of morning, in the dim days stretching ahead, we feel bad about ourselves, diminished by despair at our shortcomings – our lethargy, our fears, our failure to live as we should. Yet you, Father, blaze into our darkness and dazzle us with hope. You, Son. Reach out your hand and raise us up. And you, Holy Spirit, bind us in this active forgiveness that encourages, and inspires, and urges us onwards.

Amen.

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

72 God, help the king be like you and make fair decisions.

Help the king's son know what justice is.

² Help the king judge your people fairly.

Help him make wise decisions for your poor people.

³ Let there be peace and justice throughout the land,
known on every mountain and hill.

⁴ May the king be fair to the poor.

May he help the helpless and punish those who hurt them.

⁵ May people always fear and respect you, God,
as long as the sun shines and the moon is in the sky.

⁶ Help the king be like rain falling on the fields,
like showers falling on the land.

⁷ Let goodness grow everywhere while he is king.
Let peace continue as long as there is a moon.

May the kings of Tarshish and all the faraway lands by the sea bring gifts to him.

May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring their tribute to him.

¹¹ May all kings bow down to our king.
May all nations serve him.

¹² Our king helps the poor who cry out to him—
those in need who have no one to help them.

¹³ He feels sorry for all who are weak and poor.
He protects their lives.

¹⁴ He saves them from the cruel people who try to hurt them.
Their lives are important to him.

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12 - Wise Men Come to Visit Jesus

2 Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. After Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. **2** They asked people, "Where is the child who has been born to be the king of the Jews? We saw the star that shows he was born. We saw it rise in the sky in the east and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard about this, it upset him as well as everyone else in Jerusalem. **4** Herod called a meeting of all the leading Jewish priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** They answered, "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea, just as the prophet wrote:

6 'Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are important among the rulers of Judah.
Yes, a ruler will come from you,
and that ruler will lead Israel, my people.'"

7 Then Herod had a private meeting with the wise men from the east. He learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. **8** Then he sent them to Bethlehem. He said, "Go and look carefully for the child. When you find him, come tell me. Then I can go worship him too."

9 After the wise men heard the king, they left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east, and they followed it. The star went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. **10** They were very happy and excited to see the star.

11 The wise men came to the house where the child was with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened the boxes of gifts they had brought for him. They gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So, they went home to their own country a different way.

Meditation:

Voice of a wise man

I guess some would say that it was all a bit foolish, with still nothing to show for it. Yet, for me, it was all worth it. Every mile travelled, every barrier crossed, and every star followed. It changed everything. He changed everything. Nothing could ever be the same again. That little bundle, cradled in his mother's arms. No words spoken, but in his silence, he held the world.

I was young, enthusiastic about life and willing to try anything once. I took up star gazing; it seemed like a good idea at the time. It was all the craze back then, and I didn't want to be left out of the action.

It was one night in mid-July, we were gathered, waiting, watching the stars, as always. I didn't really know one from the other, but the social life was good, and I did fancy the girl with the red hair.

However, on that night, the girl paled into insignificance, as the sky was lit by an amazing new star.

In time, we came to believe that this star was a sign, and a few of us could stand it no longer. We hired some camels and set out. We had no real idea of where we would end up, or what we would find when we got there, but we began.

The journey was long and varied. Many times, along the way we felt like giving up and just going home. Yet something drew us on!

As we travelled, we continued to discover that stars we studied were telling us a story. The story of God who created, and sustained, and now in our time, would enter, our world.

We wanted to take some gifts, so we consulted the stars. We settled on: gold for kinship, frankincense for burial, and myrrh for anointing. If we had known we would find a child, we would have taken something else.

Eventually, after a few hiccups like visiting the wrong king, and getting lost a few times, we arrived.

The star we followed stopped, but not over a Palace, or hall of fame, but over a smelly stable. There was no fanfare, or army, just a young woman holding her first born son.

However, we were welcomed. We were strangers from a distant land, but we were not ignored or ill-treated. We were accepted and surprisingly so were our gifts. I guess they were worth some money, if nothing else.

We had come face-to-face with the promised king, the creator of the universe, and He had welcomed us. We returned home, via a different way, having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod.

Thought:

- It is almost impossible to speak of the 'wise men' without being cast back into sentimental images drawn from childhood Nativity scenes.
- However, the story of the visit of the magi to the infant Christ is full of grit and grace.
- It is a story of outsiders and foreigners who, with no more than a star to guide them, take the risk of leaving their homes in search of the King of the Jews.
- The journey must have been slow by modern standards.
- No planes, or car just camel.
- Can you imagine the conversation on the way?
- We may wonder what was solved or resolved by the magi as they travelled.
- Perhaps, at times, like us all, their anxiety and doubts rose up.
- Despite having a star to guide them, they were walking into the dark.
- They met a man, Herod, who looked like a king but was not – at least not the one they sought.
- Finally, in Bethlehem, they found an infant, living very humbly, who was a true

king.

- The magi had no doubt they'd found what they were looking for.
- Perhaps, in their walk towards Bethlehem, they realised there was no going back to their old ways.
- Perhaps God allowed the scales to fall from their eyes, so they could see the truth.
- God's glory was to be found in the road less travelled.
- As I write this Covid cases are rising again.
- Christmas Day is fast approaching, and the country is posed for more restrictions to return with the New Year.
- Some might view this as returning to the darkness, and perhaps in some ways it is.
- However, we must, like the wise men, travel with hope that we will get through this and that the light of Christ is still shining in and through is.
- Point the way for us and for others.
- We must trust that through the new days and weeks, God will be with us as he has always been.
- Like the wise men we must remember that once we have begun this journey with Jesus there is no going back.
- We are changed and therefore we need to react in a Christ filled manner.
- Where we are putting Christ at the centre of our lives, and we are allowing him to change us so that we might become a blessing to others.
- Therefore, this Epiphany as we think about the wise men's journey from darkness to hope, and as we wait to see what is going to happen due to Covid, let us journey with hope trusting that somehow in the midst of it all God is in charge.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession:

We pray to God, who is always ready – for those overtaken with demands.

Give rest, O Lord.

For those overburdened with anxieties, particularly at this time when we are still so uncertain about the further.

Give rest, O Lord.

For those overcome with debt.

Give relief, O Lord.

For those oppressed by powers that despise them.

Give salvation, O Lord.

For those in situations they cannot see a way out of.

Give freedom, O Lord.

For those in need of hope, particularly in these days of COVID-19.

Give hope, O lord.

We pray for those we know who are sick, lonely or in need of our prayers at this time, we think particularly of:

Brain Margetts – Dalwood

Gill and Geoff Nicholas - Axminster

Amen

Hymn: We three kings of Orient are

1 We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

Refrain:

*O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

2 Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign. [Refrain]

3 Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, voices raising,
worshiping God on high. [Refrain]

4 Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb. [Refrain]

5 Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
sounds through the earth and skies. [Refrain]

United Methodist Hymnal, 1989 Author: John H. Hopkins

Blessing:

Lord, as we continue our journey with you this week, as we seek to live out our faith every day, be with us, surprise with your love, nudge us when you want us to see or do something new – for Jesus' sake.

Amen