

January 3rd 2021 - Service of Morning Worship

Hymn

Introduction

Grace and peace to us from God.
May he fill us with truth and joy.

We pray together:

Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving, joy-giving, peace-giving presence, that we may praise you now with our lips, in our hearts and all day long with our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

Before we come to confession we pray together:

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confession

The word of God is living and active. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. All is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we give account. And so, we confess our sins in penitence and faith, thankful of the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Our God, for love of you we desire to hate and forsake all sins
by which we have ever displeased you;
and we resolve by the help of your grace
to commit them no more;
and to avoid all opportunities of sin.
Help us to do this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins and make us holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.



Reading

Matthew 2: 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.

Sermon

Sunday 3rd January 2021

Matthew 2 2-12

On this first Sunday of 2021 we have an opportunity to look both backwards to the year just gone and forward with hopefully some hope for the year that is ahead. Last Sunday Jill did a great job at reflecting on the abysmal year that was 2020. If you weren't here last week or didn't watch online then I recommend you head over to our website or our Facebook page and have a look at what Jill said.

Ultimately, Jill shared with us the massive change that happened with the coming of Jesus and the massive impact that God's message of Love, hope, freedom, healing and abundant life should have on us as His followers and upon those we mix with day by day.

So as we look back at 2020, and possibly we can say in human terms it has not been a great year, although as always there has been much to thank God for. A few of those things were that Rachel and I still managed to run our Summer camp not in tents as usual but online; teaching and supporting over 100 young people and 60 adults in



the summer. The resources produced are still being used to teach and inform of what God is doing with us and with others around the world.

Our Fareshare collections started in February which has meant that throughout this year we have been able to support families with food throughout this pandemic. God provided the way for us to do this – but Fareshare was more than about food, as we were locked down it meant supportive conversation were had sometimes 2 or 3 times a week with our families across our estate and Parish. God has been good in providing to the needs of so many people during this time.

And my final reflection of 2020 before we move on, is our online church presence that has meant the learning of new skills to be able to broadcast our services and daily prayers on our Church Facebook page; all of this has meant that we have been able to stay in contact throughout this year, watching and accessing and learning together online. We have been able to reach into your homes and the homes of people that don't currently attend our church with the Good News of Jesus.

It was this same good news that brought the wise men from the East in search of the new-born king so that they could pay homage to him. It is this part of the Christmas story that has always fascinated me. Here were intelligent scholars who knew stuff, lots of stuff, facts and practical knowledge about this that and the other. They used this knowledge to good effect when they saw a new star rising in the East. And they could interpret the stars they knew what the rising of a this particular star meant.

Over the last few weeks I am sure you are aware, there has been a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. I managed to see it a few days ago, my mother also went out to the Peak District to have a look, and my friend had a great view of it at his home in North Wales. On no occasion on seeing the star did I say to my mother or my friend – lets follow this event to see where it leads. Maybe I am not as wise as I thought...

But, this is exactly what the wise men did, they noted that something was about to happen, packed their bags and followed the star. So they could pay homage... which my dictionary tells me is a public show of respect or honour towards someone or something.

As they followed the star, the wise men saw that it was leading towards Jerusalem, and so made the wise summation that the new King must be in the capital city... causing great concern, not least to King Herod, people in power do not like to be usurped, it is interesting to see that the thought of a new born baby caused him to be so frightened. But how do we respond to situations that are out of our control? Covid has brought ✨ with it many reactions, there are many who have been frightened by it. Hopefully here at St James we have been cautious and careful, and followed the guidance... cautious and careful but not frightened.

For King Herod the very thought of a rival king bought great fear. Even when he finds out from His wise men that the baby being sought out might be the messiah foretold by the prophet Micah in our Gospel reading - his fear and rejection remains.



Unfortunately, as we already know there are many people who choose to reject Jesus, it may even make them angry or frightened like Herod, or maybe apathetic or just ambivalent – non-comittal - about it.

But there is a choice to be made when we know who Jesus is...

Over the last few weeks there has been occasions where my rabbits have been a little unwell. When rabbits are in discomfort the first sign we will see is them not eating. Have you ever tried to get a rabbit to eat something when they don't want to? They can shut their mouth very tightly - however with the use of syringes and mushed up food you can just about get them to swallow food you squirt into their mouths. Without the food their bodies will start to shut down and they would eventually die.

We humans are even more stubborn when it comes to things of God, but in the same way there is a choice to be made about Jesus, - we can choose to reject, or we can choose to accept. God is not going to force us to follow Him, but He will make it very clear that we are special and wondrous to Him.

The wise men chose to accept that something special was happening, they went away from their normal diary of things and made the quest of meeting and worshipping Jesus a priority.

They even gathered together expensive presents to offer to Jesus. There is a whole other talk about gold, frankincense, and myrrh which we won't go into today... However in reality we don't give gifts at Christmas because the wise men gave gifts to Jesus, we give gifts because God gave us His son Jesus.

As we follow Jesus, do not expect it to be easy. But do expect to be filled with joy, just as the wise men were as they found what they were looking for.

When we find something, we are often filled with joy, it is this same joy that God wants for us each and every day. Jesus talks about the joy of finding lost things – coins, sheep, prodigal sons.

And so, in our reading today, we find the most basic of Christian truths. There are choices to be made... Will we be like King Herod and be apathetic or unmoved and reject what and who Jesus is.

Or will we be like the wise men and step out in faith? Making the difficult journey to Jesus, I am sure that it was not without questions and doubts, or without personal difficulties, or one that needed a change to actions, thought or words.

My hope for all of us as we face whatever 2021 has in store - is that we go on a journey that leads to Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Saviour. And that we start or continue to follow the ways of our Father God and discover the comfort and joy that following Jesus brings into our lives and a journey that takes us in a direction under God's guidance and within his love, his peace, his joy, his compassion.

So have a great 2021 knowing that God already knows the plans he has for us Amen.



Hymn

Creed

Let us declare our faith in God:

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named. We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high. We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intercessions

Intercessions for Christmas 2 (2020)

God of grace and truth, your eternal Word brought life to birth and brings us to new birth in Christ Jesus.

Give strength and courage to all of us who make up your Church, in every part of the world, to testify to your saving presence.

Wherever we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, may we witness to your light and salvation.

At the start of this new year we pray especially for all church leaders; that they will find new, holy energy, despite this past year, to preach the Gospel faithfully and truthfully, both to their congregations and beyond. May your heavenly hope for the future shine from them and inspire others to put their trust in you.

God of grace and truth, inspire with justice and mercy all to whom is given the responsibility of government. We ask that you give our own government, in this critical time of the divorce from the EU, wisdom, clarity and honesty in all their dealings regarding the future of our country. We especially pray that all political parties will be drawn to working together for the good of all, instead of constantly bickering and back-biting.

We pray that our ongoing relationship with the countries of the EU will be constructive and amiable and that all nations will be guided in the ways of peace.



God of grace and truth, right at the start of 2021, we pray for all those living in the community around this church who are being called into your kingdom at this time. Stir up their hearts with a passionate desire to know more about you and lead their steps through our doors.



Guide us into the orbits of these people with a renewed and stronger desire to share our faith in your blessed Son, Jesus. May we be more alert to your promptings to invite people to come to our services.

In this new year we pray that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will bring about a deep interest and longing for the things of God, both in us here at St James, and in those you are calling who haven't yet responded to that call.

God of grace and truth, hear our prayers for all those who are ill whether in body, mind or spirit; or who are in hospitals or hospices. We particularly name silently to you those who we know personally.....In this painful and sometimes frightening time, may they know the touch of your healing and the strength of your presence.

Let us now continue in prayer using the words our Saviour taught us:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.

