

Sermon outline Matthew 2:1-12

The visit of the Magi

The wise men usually turn up each year at Christmas. They are often to be found in nativity plays and on the Christmas cards we send and receive. And then they 'return to their country by another route' until next year.

But we ought not to consign them to Christmas cards and nativity plays. The account of their visit to the baby Jesus has much to tell us. And in particular, it has much to tell us about Jesus himself.

[1] JESUS IS THE RIGHTFUL KING

Herod was the king, as Matthew tells us. He had been appointed to his role by the Romans, first as governor and then with the title of king. He was known as the Herod the Great. And he had done some good, if not great, things. He had built the temple in Jerusalem, he had been known to reduce taxes during difficult economic times and during a particular famine in 25BC he had melted down some of his own gold plate to buy in supplies of corn for the people.

But he was also paranoid about plots against him, and history records that his suspicions led him to murder his wife, his mother-in-law and three of his sons. Herod felt threatened by the idea that someone else had authority, an authority that trumped his. His own autonomy – sphere of personal authority – was being challenged by the arrival of this special child. Interestingly, the Magi (the visitors) were clearly comfortable

with the idea. As the narrative tells us, they wanted to worship him, whereas Herod would try to kill him.

When Jesus grew up and began to teach the message of God, it became apparent that he both claimed, and demonstrated, authority over all areas of life and that included the moral authority to tell people what was right and what was wrong. The Bible insists that Jesus has rightful authority over all people. In fact one day he will judge the whole world.

[2] JESUS IS THE GRACIOUS SHEPHERD

The Magi asked Herod a question to which he did not know the answer, so he called in the Jewish religious establishment. There they are in verse 4. And they knew the answer. They were familiar with the OT and they duly turned to what we know as Micah 5:2,4

This ruler over Israel would be a shepherd as well as a king. Jesus is the king, but he is also the shepherd. As you may know, he referred to himself as the good shepherd, and it would be a strange thing if he had not had Psalm 23 in mind when he said that. The good shepherd leads, feeds, protects and guides his sheep. Would anyone turn down a good shepherd? And yet the sad thing is that the religious leaders seem to have done exactly that! Only the Magi made the final stage of the journey.

[3] JESUS IS THE INCARNATE GOD

(Incarnare = lit. to make flesh)

The Magi duly found Jesus.

And when they found Jesus, they worshipped him. Here was God come in the flesh into the world! It is a truth difficult for the fallen human mind to cope with, but that should not be surprising. What is clear is that throughout his lifetime Jesus gave convincing proof that he was indeed uniquely God in human form.

We cannot worship Christ today with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But we can follow the Magi's example in certain respects:

[a] We can worship Him with our time

Those Magi 'took time out' as we would say today to seek and find Jesus. If you are serious about seeking Jesus Christ for yourself you will need to give time to the process. Some things in your diary will need to be rearranged.

[b] We can worship Him with our minds

The Magi had to change their minds about things in order to seek and find Jesus. They came from a different culture in which they were priests. They had a particular way of looking at the world. That would change once they had found the saviour of the world.

In their worship of God in human form, the gifts of the Magi were acknowledging:

- the lordship of Christ,
- the ministry of Christ as a priest in bringing God and humankind together,

- the saving death of Christ, which would be the means by which human sins are forgiven.

These are the themes that begin to take hold of us when we have become Christians. They are the themes that go on to shape our Christian lives.

[c] We can worship with our words

What might the Magi have said when they got back home? Might they have said something similar to what we know others would later say: (Andrew, for example) *"We have found the Messiah."* [John 1.41]

Let us not forget to share with others the greatest of all gifts, the gift of forgiveness and eternal life which we must ourselves receive, and which we should certainly share with others.

CONCLUSION

Let us celebrate Christmas by remembering what the Magi's visit highlights for us about Jesus:

Jesus is the rightful king

He was rejected by Herod. Is he accepted here today?

Jesus is the gracious shepherd

He was ignored by the religious establishment. Is he received here today?

Jesus is the incarnate God. He was worshipped by the Magi as the king, as the priest, as the saviour. Is he worshipped here today?