

Home Group study: week beginning 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020

## **Against All Odds — The Wise Men**

The wise men brought gifts for Jesus which were appropriate to his life.

What would be appropriate gifts for you at Christmas?

**Read: Matthew 2: 1-12**

### **Discovery**

Matthew is the only Gospel writer to mention the Magi. We often refer to them as the Three Wise Men or the Three Kings; a famous Christmas carol tells of 'Three Kings from Persian Lands Afar'. All we know from the passage is they came from the east, and Persia is quite possible.

Recalling Ben's sermon:

- Were there three of them?
- Were they Kings?
- What does the word 'Magi' mean?  
*(Ben told us 'Magi' is the word from which 'Magic' is derived, so they are likely to be magicians and, from the fact they studied and followed the stars they were certainly astrologers)*

### **Understanding**

Although only described by Matthew, the part played by the Magi is quite significant.

Can anyone in the group say what the significance of each of their gifts is?

- *Gold symbolises a King;*
- *Frankincense is used in worship of deities, so indicates that Jesus is God and worthy of worship: many churches use incense as part of their worship today;*
- *Myrrh is a perfumed tree resin which was used for embalming dead bodies, so was predicting Jesus' death and particularly its significance.*

What other vital role do the Magi play in the life of Jesus (v12)?

What is the Magi's motivation for making this extraordinary journey (v2)?

How would they have known that the star indicated the birth of the King of the Jews?

How do they know not to keep their promise to Herod and go back and give him all the details (v12)?

Given that the Magi were astrologers and took their direction from the stars, and from an eastern land which would not have been part of the Jewish nation, how remarkable is it that they are used in this way by God?

Interestingly, in Luke 2, another group of people witness the birth of Jesus; as unclean people the shepherds would not be accepted by the Jewish community either. Why do you think God chose people from outside the Jewish community to witness the birth of the King of the Jews and not some of the Jewish leaders of the time?

### **Application**

Can anyone remember Ben's acronym from Sunday?

1. **S** — *Searching*
2. **T** — *Trusting*
3. **A** — *Adoration*
4. **R** — *Receiving*

The Magi devoted their lives to **searching** for the son of God. Ben quoted French mathematician, physicist, philosopher and Catholic theologian Blaise Pascal (1623-1662): 'There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.'

What do we think of that quotation?

Was that perhaps the real reason for the Magi's search?

For some in the group God may seem a long way off in these strange times; see if anyone needs to search for God again (or even for the first time); discuss together how we can search for God and pray for anyone who needs help in their search.

What does '**trusting**' in God mean to us in the strange times we are going through? If our trust is flagging, how do we begin to overcome that and learn to trust again? (Pray as appropriate.)

The Magi made this tremendous journey to show **Adoration** to Jesus and showed his worthiness to be worshipped by giving him Frankincense. Consider the wonder of the birth of Jesus, maybe think of the glorious scene in Luke 2: 13-14, and spend some time in worship. (*Don't worry if it's too difficult to sing over Zoom: singing may be a major expression of worship but is not the only one.*)

What did the Magi **receive** from God? Are we looking to receive guidance and words from God? What do the Magi reveal about how important it is to receive from God in our lives? Pray for direction for members of the group: especially as we approach a new year which can be a time when we consider fresh starts. How important is it to us that God is involved in those fresh starts?