

Magi-cal Worship – inspired by a talk by Joel Payne

You may be sad to hear that I will not be pulling a rabbit out of a hat today or sawing Matt in half....but what I hope I will pull out of the metaphorical hat are some thoughts about what we can learn from the magi to help us in our walk with Jesus.

What are the Magi, the wise men, doing in the Christmas story - they're a bit mysterious, don't you think? I think we need to clear up a few things before we continue.

The magi were clever people of wealth from the East. They rode on camels, not donkeys and think of their gifts.... (did any of you give real gold as a present this year) - they were men with money. We also know that they were clever or learned. They studied the stars which is how they knew something momentous had happened when they saw a new star. In fact they must have been well read as they were aware of the prophecy written hundreds of years earlier promising a new star for a new king. When any of you were born – did a bright new star appear in the sky....Just out of interest does anyone here own a star....I know you can buy them online! We might be able to buy one and need special equipment to see it, but for Jesus a bright star came into being and could be seen with the eye.

Another thing that needs clearing up is that in every crib scene there are 3 magi, but we don't know that for sure, we just assume that based on the 3 presents that there were 3 magi – I mean if you were going to meet a new king and you were rich, you would probably want to take an impressive present, not turn up empty handed.

We tend to lump the Magi in with everyone else in our nativity scenes, Mary, Joseph the baby Jesus, shepherds etc. It makes for a neat picture, but it is unlikely that they turned up just after the shepherds. There are a few good reasons to rethink our timeline:

- a) In Matthew verse 1 of chapter 2 he is clearly starting a new section, and talking in general terms about the time/reign of King Herod, not about the next day
- b) the word for child used by Matthew here wasn't used of babies
- c) in verse 16, when Herod tries to get rid of the new king he goes after children under 2 years which makes us think that atleast a year has gone by since the star announcing his birth had first appeared
- d) we know the magi followed the star from a different country and travelled hundreds of miles on camels, so we are talking months not days - which would have taken a similar amount of time as riding a swegway, though not illegal!

So we can conclude that Jesus was probably a toddler at the time of their visit.

So the thing I want to think about with you this morning is how people responded to Jesus's birth. When Herod was told a new king had been born and he consulted with his chief priests and teachers of the law they all knew where the new king was to be born in Bethlehem– yet they chose not to go and see. The chief priests and teachers chose not to make a short 6 mile commute to a neighbouring town to see for themselves. Isn't that interesting and a bit sad?!

The religious leaders couldn't be bothered to worship the saviour, but the magi - foreigners of uncertain religion could. In fact they had given up comfort to go on a journey where they didn't know where they would end up or how long the journey would last. It took what some might consider "outsiders" to make sure the Son of God was worshipped. The magi are the first people who we are told quite clearly worshipped Jesus...the shepherds had visited and seen and glorified and praised God but the Bible does not say that they bowed down and worshipped. The magi bowed down and worshipped him.

So a quick quiz how far would you go? Put your hand up....

For a yard of jaffa cakes who would walk 10 mins? Who would walk 20 mins? Who would walk 1 hour?

For this Dairy Milk bar who would walk 10 mins? Who would walk 20 mins? Who would walk 1 hour? Who would walk to the ends of the earth and back?

For this giant bag of crisps Who would walk 10 mins? Who would walk 20 mins? Who would walk an hour. My daughter would run a marathon for it!

So what can we learn from the magi.....

1. The magi teach us to make an effort

Travelling however many hundreds of miles to worship this new king was a bit of a hassle for them. They must have had other things to do! But they let the Son of God interrupt their lives and call them to worship. What is worship? It is when we show God what he is worth – when our lives, our thoughts, our decisions all say that God is most important. We sing songs to show our love and respect of God, we praise and thank him in prayer at church – worship is not just a Sunday thing it is also a Monday to Saturday thing too. We've got many calls on our time – how strongly does the call to worship feature in your life? How much do you give God his worth? Do we worship in the easiest way, for instance in church on a Sunday with like-minded people, or in a way that requires effort or courage in the office or playground? The magi teach us to make an effort in our worship and that it might be a bit inconvenient at times.

2. The magi also teach us to come prepared

They came with gifts. They thought through what they were going to give when they finally got there. They planned ahead. It is not clear whether they understood the significance of the gifts they gave in worship but no doubt they were planned. Sometimes we think of minimal preparation as more spiritual, having to rely more on God in the heat of the moment, these worshippers however didn't seem to think so. So as we arrived to worship God this morning, did we shamble in still half writing a thank you list, wondering whether we would have time to nip to the sales after lunch or did we consciously chose to remember that we are coming to celebrate and worship the king of Kings.....how prepared is your heart, is my heart to meet with God and to worship him this morning?

3 The magi were full of joy and bowed down and worshipped

They had travelled long, they had searched, they were overjoyed, they had arrived. They did not stay at a distance. They wanted to see, get as close as they could to see this new born child. Their worship involved not just seeing from the doorway, but instead a close

encounter. They knew what to do in the presence of a king. Had they planned to bow or could they simply do nothing else when they saw him? Face to face with God can sometimes mean on our face. When we encounter God, like the magi, like the elders in the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible, like the priests in Old Testament and like so many throughout the Bible, we begin bowed down. Because he is God and we recognise his bigness, his gloriousness, his awesomeness and we are filled with joy as we look into his face and see his love for us.

4. The magi opened their treasures

I think this is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. What a wonderful way to describe worship in the presence of the King of kings. Can it be said of me, of us, of our church that when we come to God we open our treasures? Can it be said that we lay before him the most precious things we have? What are our treasures - money, time, talents, reputations etc? The Bible says that where your treasure is, that's where your heart is. Those who open their treasures are those who have given God their hearts. What of ourselves will we offer and open to God?

So magical worship involves making an effort, being prepared, bowing down and opening our treasures to the Son of God, the prince of peace, the king of kings.

In the bleak midwinter