

Sunday 03 January 2021 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

Today is Epiphany Sunday. In **Matthew 2.1-12** -The account of the wise men involves searching – initially by looking in the wrong place – for the new-born king. They eventually find him by following the star to Bethlehem. God’s guidance in a dream warns them to take a different route home. Looking for the direction God has for us is not always as easy as following a star or hearing from God in a dream. Particularly at the start of a new year and a new term, we may all be called to reflect on where best we can look for and recognise signs from God that offer us guidance. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

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.

A prayer of confession

Lord, just as the wise men set out into new territory in search of you, help us to step out of life’s narrow tramlines.
Forgive us for seeking you out only in areas we know and in which we are comfortable.
In their day, the wise men were outsiders, yet were guided by a star and spoken to in a dream; their steps directed for your purpose.
Forgive us when we fail to see – or even dismiss – your leading from unexpected places and unlikely people.

Lord, forgive us.

**Widen our vision and expand our minds
to search and discern you in all places and people,
that we may be drawn closer to you.
Amen.**

Our Father who art in heaven...

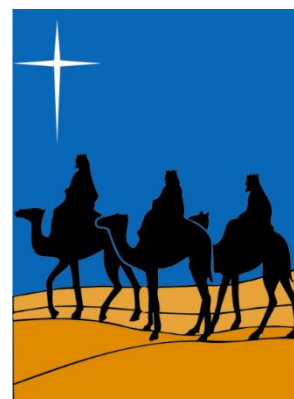
Song God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen Keith & Kristen Getty (Live)

[\(314\) God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen \(LIVE\) - Keith & Kristyn Getty - YouTube](#)

Matthew 2:1-12 - Scholars from the East

2 ¹⁻² After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory— this was during Herod’s kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the new-born King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signalled his birth. We’re on pilgrimage to worship him.”

³⁻⁴ When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”



⁵⁻⁶ They told him, “Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It’s you, Bethlehem, in Judah’s land,
no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel.”

⁷⁻⁸ Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, “Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I’ll join you at once in your worship.”

⁹⁻¹⁰ Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

¹² In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

The Message (MSG)

Go and search

Joseph married Mary whose child was ‘from the Holy Spirit’, and after the birth of Jesus which means ‘he saves’ (Matthew 1: 20-21) the only visitors to his Bethlehem home mentioned by Matthew are Eastern Magi or astrologers. They have ‘observed his star at its rising’ and come to pay homage to the one they joyfully recognise as ‘king of the Jews’.

It is significant that the Magi come 'from the East', from amongst the nations or Gentile lands. They have 'read the stars', and they seem aware that this is a significant moment for the Jewish nation and for the world. By contrast God's own people do not. However, the idea that God would send a prince or king, usually described as 'of David's line', is well evidenced in the prophets; see Jeremiah 23.5 and Ezekiel 34.23-4, for example.

Herod, however, Rome's puppet king is threatened by what the Magi say, he tries to find out when and where the child was born. The Chief Priests and Scribes know their Scriptures and pinpoint Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace, and Matthew now quotes Micah (5.2) as the proof text. Herod's murderous reaction to the news is in contrast with that of the trusting, humble and perceptive Gentile kings.

Seeing God at work in Christ is not easy. The Epiphany shows that we need to look for God at work in the world around us and be as sure as we can that he is seen to be at work in us, individually and as a Christian community.

The gifts of the Magi may have symbolic meaning, but they also signify the homage paid to the child whom Mary holds out to them. There will be another great contrast here, between the openness of Mary, and those other mothers in Bethlehem who will desperately clasp their children to themselves in a vain attempt to escape the massacre. The challenge for us too also is to offer our gifts to Christ and freely seek to share Christ with the world around us.

Intercessory prayer

Gracious God:
to all dreaming of a better world,
give courage;
to all dreaming of an end to violence,
give peace;
to all dreaming of freedom,
give patience;
to all guided by the star of compassion,
give resources;
to all guided by the fear of loss,
give trust;
to all guided by the need to be busy,
give rest;
to all led by the need to be powerful,
give humility;
to all led by the longing to draw closer to you,
give encouragement;
to all led to your table,
give yourself.
To all people, and to all creation, give your love.
Amen.



Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .

Song **Go tell it on the Mountain – Keith & Kristen Getty (Live)**

[\(314\) Keith & Kristyn Getty - Go Tell It On The Mountain \(Finale/Live\) - YouTube](#)

HOLY COMMUNION Prayer of Thanksgiving – Epiphany

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you have freely bestowed your glorious grace on us.

In the beginning you brought all thing into being
through the Word who was with you,
and destined us for adoption as your children,
making known the mysteries of your will,
through the law and prophets.

In Jesus, your Word became flesh among us,



that the fullness of your grace and truth
might enlighten the world.
Though he came to what was his own,
his own people did not accept him,
but crucified him.
You redeemed him from the strong hands of death,
and turned our grieving into joy.
So now, as those you have marked with your Holy Spirit,
we live for the praise of your glory,
our lives like a well nourished garden
and our hearts radiant over your good gifts.



The Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Wine

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way also the cup saying 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Alleluia.*

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

Prayer after Communion

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the gift of your Son.

God with us, you have fed us with yourself and strengthened us for journeying ahead.

God of truth and power, you take our weakness and our sin and refashion us by grace.

A sending out prayer

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.



