

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 24th Dec 2018)

Read - Isaiah 60:1-3

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. v3

The reason Matthew tells us about the coming of the wise men; how they brought gifts, and how they were searching for a special child that was destined to become the king of the Jews, was to underline the fact that right from the start, people from other nations were coming to Jesus.

The Jews had come to believe that the Messiah would come just for them, not for other nations. But you cannot read the Old Testament carefully without noticing how many times it mentions that God is the God for all people on earth. It stands to reason that if God is the greatest God there is and created everything and everyone, then his ultimate purpose is that all people, all nations, everyone that exists should come to him and acknowledge him as Lord.

Sing to the Lord a new song all the earth... Declare (God's) glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples ... For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.....Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength... Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns". The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with fairness. Ps 95: v1,3,5,7,10

It is too small a thing for you (Israel) to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. Is 49:6

Thank you Jesus that you came for everyone.

DAY 2

Read - Matthew 2:1-8

Soon afterwards, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews?" v1 (TEV)

Who are the wise men?

*Who were the wise men in the long ago?
Not Herod, lest he lose his throne
Not Pharisees, too proud to claim their own
Not Priests and Scribes, whose province was to know
Not money changers, running to and fro
But three who travelled, weary and alone
With dauntless faith, because before them shone
The star that led them to a manger low*

*Who are the wise ones now, when all is told?
Not men of science; not the great and strong
Not those who wear a royal crown
But those amid the tumult and the throng
Who follow still the star of Bethlehem.*

The wise men were searchers, and in many ways they represent people of our new century. If the characteristic of the last century was "doubt", the main characteristic of this century is "searching". Many people today are searching. Searching for a meaningful spirituality; for meaning in life; for meaningful relationships. Many have rejected the Church because they think it is out of touch with these things and the real issues of life.

But if you will take the time and look more closely, you will find that Jesus has the deepest and truest answers to all life's questions. Do an in-depth study of any other religion and you will find that Jesus is the best.

Thank you Lord that you show us who God is.

DAY 3

Read - Galatians 4:4-7

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son born of a woman..... v4

The wise men probably came to Jerusalem about two years after Jesus was born. We usually place them at his birth because of the gifts they brought, but if you think about it carefully, they most likely came a bit later. Otherwise, why did Herod kill the male children 2 years old and younger? It took time to travel in those days.

These were learned men who studied the stars, and there were a number of strange phenomena in the stars at that time that could have led them to the conclusion that a new king was going to be born. Whatever the reason, something moved them enough to make this amazing journey. They were searching, and they came with a deep sense of expectation. They offered their gifts and worshipped. In some ways they were forerunners of Christian faith?

What are you searching for in your life? The world is searching for truth in many wrong ways: exciting experiences, relationships, possessions, power, achievements, alcohol, drugs. Many want to be spiritual but have rejected the Christian faith and are searching for truth in other religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. But only Jesus has the truest and deepest answers to life's questions. In him you will find the truth about life and about yourself. Only Jesus deals with the sin that separates us from our Creator and offers us a way back, at the cost of his life, because he loves us. So what are you searching for? The answer to all your questions lies in Jesus.

..... and the end of all our searching is to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time. T S Elliot – Little Gidding IV

DAY 4

Read - Isaiah 49:1-6

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light to the gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. v6

The story of the Magi (the Wise Men) is good news for outsiders. Here were “outsiders” (unclean people according to Jewish Law) coming to acknowledge Jesus. The message is clear, Jesus is not just for the privileged few, he is for all; all nations, the poor, the rejected, the lost, the marginalized.

In his ministry Jesus continually touched the lives of “outsiders”. He healed lepers who had to ring a bell and shout “unclean” if they came into town. He changed the lives of prostitutes and tax collectors. He healed a man possessed by demons who was living in a graveyard. He gathered around him disciples who were ordinary blue-collar people, not trained in the best Rabbinic schools. He taught about a shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep to go in search of one that was lost. He told a story about a man who threw a banquet in honour of his son, and when those who were invited didn’t come and made excuses, he said to his servants: *Go out into the streets and bring in the poor, and the blind and the lame. I want my banquet to be full. None of those who were invited will taste my banquet.* And when Jesus died on the cross, it was a Roman soldier (an “outsider”) who cried: *Truly, this man was the Son of God!*

The great tragedy of the story of Jesus is that it was largely the “insiders” who failed to recognize him, while the “outsiders” did.

Thank you that you died for me, Lord Jesus.

DAY 5

Read – 1 Corinthians 1:20-30

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.... v27

As we have said, many people today are seeking and searching. They are often intelligent people, but there is something missing deep in their soul. They have questions about faith. They want to believe in something. They want to find their true self. They want to have a meaningful purpose in life. They want spiritual answers to life’s questions but are switched off by the traditional church. So they look for answers in other ways. Some even believe Jesus is OK but won’t go to church. Sometimes they have been hurt by the church and feel the church has let them down. Some even say, “I’ve tried Christianity but it didn’t work”.

Do you know someone who feels they are an “outsider”? Do you have a child who doesn’t come to church? Do you know someone who fits into one of the descriptions above? Or someone who feels “I’ve really messed up my life, I’m a terrible sinner, I’ve failed so many times, there is no place for me.” Won’t you pray that God will help you (or someone else) find a way to reach them and let them know that Jesus came for outsiders.

And if you are someone who feels that you are an “outsider”, please know that God loves you and cares deeply about you. Like the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son he has never stopped loving you, and will never rest until you come home to him. Can I invite you today to take a step back towards God? What are you searching for? The most meaningful and life-changing answers to all your problems and questions lies in Jesus. You may search in many other places but always, if you are honest, you will come back to Jesus.

Thank you Father for your eternal love for me.

DAY 6

Read - Matthew 2:9-12

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. v12

Is there life after Christmas? We go into it with great expectations and anticipation. There are gifts and enjoyment, but when it is over we feel empty and flat, and it held nothing worthwhile. Or maybe we spent a lot more than we should have and now we sit in January struggling to make ends meet. Many suffer with depression at this time because they miss loved ones. If we go into Christmas with reasons other than seeking to meet Jesus, the chances are that we will feel empty. Just another empty Christmas gone by.

But Christmas can change people if we approach it in the right spirit. Think of Charles Dickens’ famous story, “A Christmas Carol”. Ebenezer Scrooge is a self-centred, grumpy old man who hoards money and over-works his staff. Bob Cratchett who works for him is forced to work even on Christmas Eve. He is poorly paid and has a crippled son, Tiny Tim, who is suffering, but is nevertheless always positive and cheerful. Scrooge is visited by three ghosts on Christmas Eve: the ghost of *Christmas past* who shows him what he used to be – a happy child; the ghost of *Christmas present* who shows him how his selfishness is hurting others, especially Bob Cratchett and his family; and the ghost of *Christmas to come*, who shows him how he will be remembered at his funeral. When he wakes up on Christmas day he decides to change his life totally, and he becomes a generous and caring man. Christmas can change us deeply if we allow the Christ of Christmas into our hearts.

And.... they returned to their country route....