

Sunday 9th January 2022 – Epiphany, Matthew 2:1-12 ‘Seeking Jesus’

If you have one resolution for 2022, I wonder: what would it be? Perhaps this is a question you already know the answer to, you’re someone who likes to make a new year’s resolution. It might be to do with health or fitness, it might be related to work or leisure, it might be to do with family time – or it might just be to get to the end of this year in one piece!

I must confess I’ve never been much of one for new year’s resolutions. That’s partly my dismal track record on the rare occasions I’ve made one: the last was 7 years ago related to joining a gym. Needless to say the membership was cancelled in August having been barely used since the middle of February. And I’m not alone in this: research published by Forbes Magazine in 2019 suggested that about 80% of resolutions aren’t kept for any length of time. So if you’re one of the 20% who do manage to keep a new year’s resolution, I doff my cap to you!

New Year also coincides in the church calendar every year with the season of Epiphany, which in the West officially starts on 6th January, and ends with Simeon’s epiphany moment on 2nd February, 40 days after Christmas – just as you’ll find it narrated in Luke chapter 2. But the start of Epiphany in this last week is the moment when traditionally the Wise Men appear on the scene to visit Jesus, which is why we’re focusing on them today.

In recent years it’s become normal to throw the whole nativity story into Advent, so it may have been something of a surprise to see the camels on our front screen today – but I think there’s something valuable in holding these intrepid adventurers back until the new year, because they have so much to teach us about a healthy attitude to this season.

The Magi – to give them their proper name – have a hugely important role in the story of scripture because **they confound our expectations of who God’s good news is for**. They are spiritual seekers, but not part of God’s people in a traditional sense – indeed some of their practices would have been considered very dubious in the context of God’s law, even forbidden. But God reveals himself to these people and invites them to be part of his story. In doing so, God reminds us that this message of Jesus is for everyone. No-one sits outside it, no-one is excluded, no-one can say: I’m not good enough or religious enough. The Magi are God’s great hint at the start of the gospels that his good news is for the whole world. PAUSE

But if there’s a reason why the Magi are chosen to be representatives of this truth, it probably comes down to one simple thing: **they were seeking Christ**. They saw the meaning of the star *because they were looking for it*. And this is what inspires me about them, and what I want to share today: if there’s one resolution I would encourage us all to make this year above all the others, it is to keep seeking Christ – to keep seeking Jesus.

What does that look like? Well, the text of Matthew 2 gives us three simple pointers:

Seeking Jesus is about adventure. For the Magi that led them hundreds of miles, and (if you’re watching the latest BBC blockbuster as we are) it led Phileas Fogg around the world in 80 days – but that’s not the point here: adventure is about a state of mind, rather than a physical journey.

An adventurous faith recognises that with God there is always more to learn, more to be excited by, new ways to grow. It's something we can do at home, or wherever we are – we don't have to travel the world or even leave Milton Keynes – which is good news in the current season. In fact at the moment I think it's particularly important to cling on to the idea of adventurous faith, that focuses on what we *can* do and not what we can't. What adventure could you have this year, even one at home? An adventure in prayer, in learning, in friendship, in encouragement? Let's be inspired by the Magi's sense of adventure.

Second, **seeking Jesus is about joy**. And this might be hard to hear at present, not many of us would claim to be feeling much joy. But this is what the Magi experienced in their journey: v10 'when they saw the star [stopping over Bethlehem], they were overjoyed.' As we reflected in Advent, joy is not necessarily about happiness, but about the sense of being part of something greater than we are, where God's purposes are being fulfilled and his kingdom is being built.

And we find joy in serving Jesus, and others: again, this could be in practical help, but it might be in prayer, or encouragement. Like the Magi we need to keep our eyes peeled: where is your star stopping? What are you being pointed towards? If you find that place, you may find unexpected joy this year.

Finally, **seeking Jesus is ultimately about worship**: v11 'they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.' Over the next three Sundays in January we'll be looking at each of those famous gifts as ways that we can worship this year. But today let's observe this simple truth that to seek Jesus we have to worship him. Our faith is not just a path of wisdom, but of worship.

When I read the stories of the great saints what I usually find most inspiring is not all the things they did, but how in love they were with Jesus, how they delighted in his beauty and his presence, how they remained full of awe and wonder. This childlike trust is what fuelled their great deeds. I want that kind of faith – perhaps you do, too. Let 2022 be a year when we all dedicate ourselves to worshipping our Saviour – not just on Sunday, but throughout the week. **May Jesus keep first place in our hearts.**

So as I close, I wish you every success with whatever resolutions you have for this year. But can I encourage you to keep one above all: seek Jesus. If you hold fast to that one, you won't go far wrong. Amen.