

Epiphany 2021 - Jesus for the World

Mathew 1.1-12

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How shall we live in 2021? What shall we do as a church in this new year? What is your motto for the year, if any?

The Magi are a good pointer for how to live in this new year.

Magi were scholars in Persia; and as scholars they specialised in gazing at then stars and seeing meaning in the course of the stars.

Yes, that was absolutely not how God wanted his people to think and live.

These Magi had seen and followed a particular star, and they connected this star with the idea that a king was born in Judea.

Mathew was a good theologian - he shows in the story of the Magi that seekers from all nations are welcome in the presence of Jesus Christ.

And Mathew shows, that the promise that Israel would be a light for the nations, as the prophets had anticipated, is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the light for the world.



All people are welcome to come and worship.

Three things stand out for me in what we have read about those Magi.

1. Open hearts and minds

First: The Magi had not come with the proper Jewish theology and they were untouchables as uncircumcised pork-eating heathens.

They did not know anything about Jesus.

But they found Him. They found God. And they worshiped.

Maybe they found Jesus because they were not focussed on keeping what they had, but on finding what their hearts hungered for.

They were prepared to let go of their secure life in Persia. They had travelled from afar, not knowing where they were going.

If we want to meet with Jesus, we have to let go of our preconceived ideas, our securities, our clinging to who we are today.

This idea is unsettling and uncomfortable, a journey in which we do not know all the landmarks; but we have to trust in God who urges us not to turn back or to stop.

2. Open hands

Secondly: The Magi were open-handed. They came with amazing gifts to Jesus. That is the lifestyle of a Christian. A lifestyle of open hands, not tight fists.

Often in sermons about the Magi we make something of the gold, the myrrh, the frankincense.

Gold symbolising a gift worthy for a king.

Myrrh is a gift signifying the death of Jesus.

And frankincense as the gift that pointed at the priesthood of Jesus.

Maybe.

But instead of looking at the symbolic meaning of those gifts, let us at least see that they gave Jesus very expensive donations. They were open handed.

To be a stingy Christian is a contradiction in terms.

As Christians we do not live to hoard stuff, but we use our stuff for loving and serving other people.

How does your giving pattern reflect your faith? If we have fallen at the feet of Jesus, awestruck by what He gave to us, then we become people who give to Him and to others in return.



3. Not give up

Thirdly, the Magi show us the importance of not giving up. If you travel without being sure where you will end up, it is very easy after a while to reconsider.

When the Magi made their long, difficult, dangerous way through the desert of Syria, the concept to go back to the soft arms of mama must have been attractive.

Their journey of a lifetime was hard. And it was only the price ahead of them that kept them going.

Anything in life that is easy to attain, cannot be of much value. And what is hard to achieve, or find, has more value.

So as Christians, in 2021 we will not give up. We know the price that awaits us; being with Jesus Christ; being with God.

Conclusion

Mathew was a radical when he described the worship of Jesus by the Magi. How in God's name could pagan people worship Jesus - they should become Jewish first to qualify for God.

They should be like us before they can worship with us.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, just as they are. No need for people to polish themselves before meeting with our heavenly Father.

God laughs about our pettiness. From the very first moment when Jesus was born, it was God himself who made clear that for Him, no man is unclean, no person is rejected, no-one is beyond the pale.

The first people to worship Him were stinking shepherds and unclean foreigners. And God was pleased.

That is so encouraging for us!

What a richness for us - we can come as we are! You can be yourself when you meet with God.

We are, like the Magi, on the way. Where will the road lead us, in 2021?

As long we focus on Jesus, we will do quite alright.

When the Magi arrived at the place where they found Jesus, "They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."

Let's kneel before Him, open our hearts for Him, be open handed to God and to others. Let us not give up on the journey that is sometimes hard.

Then we may also expect the joy that overwhelmed the Magi, even in the midst of the uncertainty of our times.

Amen.

