

**3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 Our weekly message from the 10:45 Zoom Service - Follow the Star or lean on your own understanding – by Sarah Bissell**

Matthew chapter 2:1 – 20 & Proverbs 3:5

“Trust in the Lord with all your understanding and lean not on your own understanding”.

January 6<sup>th</sup> is approaching – Epiphany - the last part of the nativity story – the journey of the kings or the wisemen or scholars. Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of God incarnate as Jesus. The day of the kings is widely celebrated as Christmas day in many countries including Spain where children write letters to the three kings and those that have been good can expect them to leave presents in shoes that have been left by the front door on January 6<sup>th</sup> together with hay for the camels. On January 6<sup>th</sup> in Spain there are in normal years parades through high streets with the kings on big floats and camels.

The story is so well known it's easy to take it for granted. I looked at a bible study about Matthew 2 and learned things that I really should know already – do you all know that Bethlehem is only 6 miles from Jerusalem and it means House of Bread it stood high on a limestone ridge at 2500 feet in height.

Matthew's gospel is often said to focus on proving that Jesus was the long predicted Messiah. We all read that the Jesus was born in Bethlehem to fulfil the prophecy of Micah that the leader will be born there who will shepherd God's people. So we know of the connection to David, but Bethlehem was also where Jacob buried his beloved Rachel and it was there that Ruth lived when she married Boaz.

The wisemen or scholars, as they are known, are said to be skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science. Right now we are depending upon scientists and doctors for all of our futures. The wisemen were waiting for God to show them They saw a star and through a mixture of faith and knowledge worked out that this was the sign of the birth of a new king and they went on a pilgrimage to pay homage. God speaks to us in many ways – most importantly Rick Warren reminded me in a service I watched last week that he speaks to us through scripture, through circumstance – things that happen that many of us call coincidences and through supernatural means, an audible voice, visions, speaking in tongues. We need to be ready and we need to hear what is being said. The wisemen, may have heard an audible voice or heard something that drove them to follow the star but they then used their skills to make that vision a reality.

Perhaps in the stark new year when brightness of the light and joy associated with Christmas starts to fade it is harder than ever for us to conjure up in our minds this exotic and mysterious journey the wisemen must have gone on – how I would I like to be on an exciting journey in a foreign country now!

In 'The Message' version of this scripture we get a very clear picture of the human versus the divine. The kings have the knowledge to know that this star is different and this drives them to follow the star- they are driven to worship the King. But how does this go down in Jerusalem “When word of their enquiry got to Herod he was terrified and not Herod alone but most of Jerusalem as well”. They don't want change they want things to stay the same because Herod has power and doesn't want things to change.

2021 years ago, as today, so many people want things to stay the same or for us go to back to how they were.

There are three groups of men in this passage -

Herod – who is filled with hatred and will gladly destroy Jesus because he will interfere with his life....The priests and scribes who are indifferent to Jesus – they tell Herod the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem but they later do not accept Jesus..... The wise men – they used their knowledge to pursue the star and they worshipped the king when they found him.

What does that star say to us today? It's hard not to think about the human – lives lost, we are facing an even darker tunnel, we are exhausted, lacking motivation, we are lonely. We are longing for things to go back to the way they were, able to go out, children at school, be together not fear for ours and others lives. But if we lean not on our own understanding but on God what can we learn from them following the star?

I have spent the whole weekend crying as a linguist and a European about the robbery of my identity. I want to go back to the way things were. My husband and our old vicar tells me I need to move on – yes this was a terrible decision but where will God work in this? God CAN work for the good of those that love him in all things – but I have to let him, I have to follow the star when I don't where it will lead. Philippians 3:20 says 'We are citizens of high heaven'!

So let's take a moment to close our eyes and see the star. We all know what we want for this year humanly but where will the star take you? I wonder if I have been called out to stop expecting to live this life without any sacrifice?

As we reflect upon God's calling to us, this year, perhaps we can start this difficult New Year knowing that God never changes, and we are loved.

Here is a New Year acclamation.....

'A thousand years in God's sight is like a single day.

Like an evening that has already gone.

Christ is the first and the last the beginning and the end

Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Lord Jesus enter our homes and our lives. You hold the key to God's way of justice. Open us to your kingdom of peace.

As we face the open doors in a New Year:

To a troubled world, peace from Christ.

To a searching world love from Christ.

To a waiting world hope from Christ.'