



What can we learn from the Wise Men?

Welcome

Hello and welcome to Worship – the first Sunday in 2025
Happy New Year!

Call to Worship

So let's come before God as we worship him, a prayer as we leave 2024, and look towards God and 2025 with our hopes for the world and our personal hopes.

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.
Lord of our journeys,
help us this day to have
eyes to see your leading,
ears to hear your guidance,
and a heart of courage,
that we may journey faithfully and find your way –
even when the path may seem difficult and dark.
Amen

Roots on the web 2021

Hymn – StF 196 Come and join the celebration

The bells of Big Ben welcomed in 2025, and our first hymn echoes that. As the new king, Jesus, is born - 'Welcome' all the bells on earth are peeling"

Chorus

*Come and join the celebration
It's a very special day
Come and share our jubilation;
There's a new King born today!*

See, the shepherds
Hurry down to Bethlehem,
Gaze in wonder
At the Son of God who lay before them
Come and join ...

Wise men journey,
Led to worship by a star
Kneel in homage
Bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so
Come and join ...

"God is with us"
Round the world the message bring
He is with us
"Welcome", all the bells on earth are peeling
Come and join ...

Prayer of adoration and thanksgiving

Father God, full of wisdom and power,
whose mighty arm stretches over all the earth:
Like the wise men
we bow down in humble adoration.
Holy Saviour, full of grace, lighting up our world:

Like the wise men
we bow down in humble adoration.

Spirit of the living God,
full of the boundless riches available to us in Christ:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit; three in one:
Like the wise men
we bow down in humble adoration.
and open to your direction.
Amen.

Lord, we thank you that you want to speak to us,
and use so many ways to do so –
some of which can be so completely unexpected
that we don't look for them.
Thank you for what we have explored and learned today.
We cannot expect the unexpected,
but help us to be open to the possibility!
Help us to look out for people and situations
through which you speak to us.
Help us to know what you are calling us
to be and to do in your name.
And help us to act,
to make our faith an everyday faith
in which your will is done,
and your kingdom comes among us.
Amen.

Roots 2021

Hymn – StF 330 Joy to the world

We continue that sense of adoration and thanksgiving in our next hymn 'Joy to the world – the Lord is come'

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders, of His love

Reading Matthew 2 v 1 – 12

On this Epiphany Sunday we hear the account of the Wisemen's visit to worship Jesus

The Magi Visit the Messiah

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’^[b]”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Hymn - StF 224 As with gladness men of old
Our next hymn calls us to journey with the wise men,
'So may we ... with willing feet, ever seek thy mercy seat'
'So may we ... all our costliest treasures bring'

1. As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright,
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Ever more be led to thee.

2. As with joyful steps they sped,
Saviour, to thy lowly bed,
There to bend the knee before
Thee, whom Heav'n and Earth adore,
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek thy mercy seat.

3. As they offered gifts most rare
At thy cradle rude and bare,
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.

4. Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way,
And when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds thy glory hide.

5. In the heavenly country bright,
Need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,
Thou its sun, which goes not down;
There forever may we sing
Alleluias to our King.

Reflection

I am always quite glad when we don't have our covenant service on the first Sunday in January, because that gives us chance to journey with the wise men for a week, characters who quite often get forgotten or just get tagged on the end of the nativity story once we have done the angel and Mary, the journey to Bethlehem, the trauma of no-where to stay and the arrival of the shepherds. And yet these men are an important part of the Christmas narrative and while there is so much about them we don't know, I think that they can teach us so much.

The first thing we can learn from the wise men was that they were **sure** - of who they were, of what they had to do, of what they were being told.

And so that begs the question – are we always sure of our faith? For many of us, I would think that the answer to that question is sometimes no. I don't mind admitting that for me there have been times in my life when my faith has struggled. When we look at the state of our world with war, famine, a refugee crisis, a health service struggling, so much need and pain, I have more

than once questioned – “where are you in all this God?” “Why can’t you - powerful, mighty, miracle worker God make this all go away?”

So if we acknowledge that at times, we are unsure of ourselves or our faith, what else can we learn from the wise men to help us?

Well they **listened** and not just with their ears. They listened with their eyes. That sounds a bit strange doesn’t it, to listen with your eyes, but they saw the star and they listened. They listened with their intelligence too, with their thoughts, with their knowledge of what the star meant and they realised that it meant that a new king had been born. We need to listen to what God is saying to us. Sometimes with our ears, sometimes with our eyes, sometimes with our intelligence. We listen to God as we read our bible, through the actions of others and as we navigate the world.

We can also learn that they **looked** for Jesus. They had seen the star and followed it, but then when they got stuck, they went on looking. They asked for help, and although Herod maybe wasn’t the best person to ask for help, they were determined to continue their search to the end.

Do we actively look for Jesus or do we just expect him to be there when we need him, at those times when we are struggling? It’s a funny thing, but I have noticed that at those times when I am struggling, doubting, or feeling overwhelmed, I find that I don’t talk to God. My prayer life becomes even more disjointed than normal, I find it difficult to have the discipline to read my bible. But surely it is at these times when I should be more actively looking for Jesus. I need to seek him out through prayer, through listening, as we have already said, through reading my bible or other reading, maybe by making ourselves vulnerable and asking others to pray for us or to help us in that search.

But that’s hard isn’t it? And that brings us onto something else we can learn from the wise men. They **persevered** in their search for Jesus. Their journey was possibly hundreds and hundreds of miles across the desert, they didn’t know where they were going, they had no maps, or satnavs. The only thing they had was the star. When we are struggling in our faith, or finding life difficult, perhaps we should picture that star in the sky to remind us to persevere and to seek because, like the wise men, the reward is to come into the very presence of God.

They were also prepared to take a **risk**. We have already said that the wise men listened with their eyes and intelligence as well as their ears. Can you imagine? We have seen a star and we know it’s telling us that the king of the Jews has been born, and we want to go and see him, but we have absolutely no idea where he is. What do you think you would have done? Would you have been prepared to take the risk and just follow the star with no idea of where you were going? The wise men were prepared to take the risk and go where the star was leading them. Sometimes on our Christian journey, both when we are struggling, but also when it seems to be going well, we just have to take the risk and go where God is leading us.

When the wise men eventually found the child, what was the first thing they did? The bible tells us that they bowed and **worshipped** him. We need to remember that we need to worship Jesus, not just at Christmas, but every day of our lives. Now that’s not to say it has to be a formal hour-long service every day, but I believe we can worship God in the simple things. Just to come to the end of the day and be able to say “today I am grateful for ... whatever...” or “today I saw God in ... the moon in the sky, or the bulbs peeping through, or the robin in my garden.” Maybe write them in your diary or on your calendar so that on December 31st 2025 you can look back – I think that would be quite interesting.

We can also learn that **Jesus is for everyone**. The wise men weren’t Jews, they were foreigners in the land where they found Jesus, and yet they were worshipping him, Jesus, the King of the Jews, the king who is for all and that includes you and me!!!!

They final thing we learn is that they **gave their gifts**. We need to give our gifts back to Jesus. Now we may not have gold, frankincense and myrrh to give Jesus, and it's not talking about giving Jesus the gifts you had for Christmas. It's about giving Jesus your personal gifts, things like your time, your talents, love for others, care for others etc. If you're like me, you might be a bit reticent about acknowledging your God given gifts. It sounds a bit big headed. Or maybe we know deep down that if we acknowledge them we have to use them!

During the pandemic of 2020 / 2021 many of us weren't able to use our gifts as we did before. Many of our activities had to stop. The pandemic has shown us that things change and for some people and some churches the capacity to restart some of those activities just hasn't been possible. But maybe this has opened other opportunities for our gifts to be used. The ministry of the phone call, of encouragement, of letter writing, of praying (– and please don't underestimate that – it is a gift) Deacon Julie sent out an appeal for knitted angels for her to leave as gifts in the City Centre in the run up to Christmas. Many people used their gifts of knitting or crocheting and over 250 angels were knitted!

Many churches will be holding their **covenant service** over the next few weeks. It's when we re-dedicate ourselves to God, saying that we want to follow Jesus with everything that we have, all the personal gifts and talents we have been given, to use them for his work. So this week, maybe we can begin to think a little bit about that, about what it is to follow Jesus, as we listen and look and persevere and worship and give our gifts, maybe even take a risk, so that we can spread the good news that Jesus is for all.
Amen

Response

One of my favourite pieces about the visit of the Magi is “Three Kings from Persian Lands afar.”
The final line “offer thy heart to the Infant King”
So as we approach the season of covenant services I invite you to ponder
What are the wise men saying to you?
What gifts have you to offer?
What is God saying to you?

Hymn – StF 231 The silent stars shine down on us

I found this hymn in the epiphany section of the hymn book. It's new to me, but I thought the words lead us nicely into our prayers for others

1 The silent stars shine down on us
with bright but sightless eye,
Unmindful of our little earth,
of us who live and die.
Are we but grains of stranded sand
beside a cosmic sea
That lie unvalued and unseen
in such immensity?

2 Creator of all stars you came
to grace our transient race.
In Christ you spoke a word that broke
the silences of space.
Still through that word you call our hearts
to know that we are known,
To trust we do not walk through time
unvalued and alone.

3 We see the star the wise men saw
and hope again is stirred.
We track the footprints left in time
by your incarnate Word.
We see them climb a lonely hill
where Love is left to die –
The Love that formed the farthest star
and hears the faintest cry.

4 O Christ, the bright and morning Star
whose radiance does not fade,
Whose glory filled the universe
before the planets played:
Come, heal our hearts of blinding doubt
till faith shall end in sight.
Shine down upon our darkened earth
and conquer sin's long night.

Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr.

Lord Jesus Christ,

you promised that those who seek will find,
and in the pilgrimage of the Magi we find proof of that promise.

So now we bring to you our prayers for all in our world,
known and unknown to us
who in different ways are searching.

May your light shine upon them:

A beacon of hope and a lamp to their path.

We pray for those who search for meaning,
their lives empty, devoid of purpose,
hungry for something or someone to put their trust in.

In the bewildering variety of this world's voices,
each claiming to offer the answer,
may your love break through
and the message of the gospel touch their hearts,
so that they may find in you
the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

May your light shine upon them:

A beacon of hope and a lamp to their path.

We pray for those for whom the journey of life is hard,
beset by pain, sickness and sorrow,
or overwhelmed by disaster, deprivation and injustice.

In the trials they face and the burdens they struggle with
may your love break through
and the message of the gospel bring strength and comfort,
help, healing and inspiration.

May your light shine upon them:

A beacon of hope and a lamp to their path.

We pray for those unsure of the way ahead,
faced by difficult choices and vital decisions,
troubled by situations in which they can see no way forward
or doubting their ability to cope
with the demands the future will bring.

In the uncertainties of this ever-changing world,
may your love break through
and the message of the gospel bring a new sense of direction,
an inner peace,
and the assurance which you alone can give,
so that, whatever they may face,
they will know that nothing will ever separate them from your love.

May your light shine upon them:

A beacon of hope and a lamp to their path.

We pray for those who have gone astray –

betraying their principles,
or their loved ones,
or above all, you.

In this world of so many subtle yet powerful temptations
may your love break through
and the message of the gospel bring new beginnings,
so that however low they may have fallen,
they will know themselves forgiven,
accepted and restored.

*May your light shine upon them:
A beacon of hope and a lamp to their path.*

Lord Jesus Christ,
Hear our prayer for all who seek purpose, help guidance and mercy.
May they find in you the answer to their prayer
and the end to their searching.

In your name we ask it
Amen

Carol – StF 190 Angels from the realms of glory
Our final carol allows us to sing with the angels, follow the shepherds and journey with the wisemen.

Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:
*Come and worship,
Christ, the newborn King!
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!*

Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant Light;
Come ...

Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great desire of nations,
Ye have seen His natal star;
Come ...

Saints before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In His temple shall appear:
Come ...

Blessing

Lord, as we continue our journey with you this first week of a new year
As we continue to seek you day by day,
be with us and surprise us with your love as we listen and persevere
nudge us when you want us to take a risk, to use our gifts to see or do something new –
for Jesus' sake,
the one who is for all
Amen.