

Sunday 10th January 2021

Online Sermon - Epiphany

Matthew 2 v1-12

Choices

Would You Rather?

Have you ever played the game 'Would you rather?'

It's usually used as an ice breaker, or discussion starter?

If you are not familiar the game, someone will ask 'Would you rather...?' and then present you with two choices. For example, 'would you rather a winter skiing holiday, or a summer beach holiday'. Then depending on the setting, you might be asked to explain your choice!

Beyond the game Life tends to be about choices, some small others more significant.

In the grand scheme of things, the colour socks I chose to wear probably isn't going to be life changing, but where I live, or the education or career path I chose may well do!

So how do we make those more significant choices?

Epiphany Sunday

This week in the church, we are celebrating Epiphany, the story of the wise men, travelling to see the new king.

It is a story of choices and conflicting reactions.

We have Wise men, choosing to travel a great distance to pay homage to a baby, then in contrast, King Herod feeling threatened and taking drastic action!

What is our reaction to Christ? We may not resist Him in the same way as Herod, but are we prepared to drop everything, and submit to Him fully as our Lord?

The Magi

Returning to the story of the wise men, we know very little about them, other than what is revealed in Matthew's Gospel.

However, we can fill in some of the gaps based on our understanding of the ancient world!

In modern nativities we are often led to believe that it is three kings or wise men that visit the baby Jesus, and that they are hot on the heels of the Shepherds!

In truth we get a different picture from Matthew's gospel!

Firstly, he does not tell us how many travelled just three of the gifts that they brought. Matthew includes the gifts purely for their meanings, as they were prophetic. Gold for a King, Frankincense for a priest, and Myrrh for a significant death.

As to the bearers of these gifts Mathew refers to them as Magi.

From ancient texts, we know that Magi were originally a mystic caste of Persians who dedicated themselves to astrology, divination and the interpretation of dreams.

So, Mathew presents us, with some star gazers of great means, who decided to drop everything on the basis of a star that had appeared.

For the ancients, a new star meant a new king, and it is likely that these Magi would have been aware of the stories of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

But if the star only appeared when a king was born, The Magi would not arrive at the stable to meet Jesus. Their arrival would have coincided with Jesus the toddler! It will have taken the Magi time to spot the star, understand its significance and make their travel plans.

This is supported by Herod's act, to kill all male babies under the age of three, it is why Herod asked, 'When did this star first appear?'

Herod's Response

Whereas the Magi, went to great lengths to worship the new king, Herod went to great lengths to destroy him.

In their search for the new king, the Magi understandably go to the palace, where else would a royal baby be?

Their visit to the palace, causes Herod to panic, he fears that his family's reign is threatened, so he seeks advice from the priests and teachers of the law.

These men knew their scriptures and were able to quote the book of Micah to Herod.

“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.” **(Micah 5 v2)**

And so, in the birth of this child, we see that his life will be one that creates extreme reactions.

From those who go to great lengths to meet him, and others, who see him as a threat?

The Big Would You Rather?

As we meet the risen Christ, we face another 'would you rather' question?

Would you rather continue with your life as it is, or submit to Christ, who described himself as 'The Way, the Truth and the Life'?

There is no star to guide us, but like the scribes and the Priests in Herod's court, we have the scriptures.

But how well do you know them?

At the start of a new year, it's a great opportunity to set a resolution to read the bible more, to help us know and love God better and to recognise His will for our lives.