

MATTHEW 2:1-12
TRUE REVERENCE

Let me introduce you to a mysterious object made of brass, full of gears, and found in a shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea some one hundred years ago. It has taken these hundred years to work out its secrets and decide what it is. It is called the Antikythera Mechanism and is described as an ancient analogue computer made two hundred years before Christ. It was used to predict eclipses of the sun and moon, and to map the courses of the planets. The people who used this device were sophisticated mathematicians, scientists who could show that the planets and the sun were created objects with a fixed destiny. They could track the planets and watch the stars and they knew all of this a long time before the complicated telescopes and computers we have today. This knowledge was developed in Greece, but it spread across the whole world as Greek influence spread. I tell you this because I want to find an answer to the question: Who were the wise men?

The answer is “we’re not very sure!” One thing we can be sure about is that they were foreigners, people from outside Israel who came to visit Jesus; they wanted to see the new king who had been born; they had seen it in the stars. They might well have been men with this deep scientific and mathematical knowledge of the stars, people not given to act on a whim or impulse, but people who would investigate things before they acted, people who wanted to know everything about something before committing themselves to it. So they saw a star; did they investigate and find that it was new? It must mean something; it must mean a special event; how did they get from there to “a new king”? We don’t know. They arrived at Herod’s palace, ready with their questions. “*Where is...*” (*Matthew 2:2*) Herod was filled with dismay!

The picture opposite is called “True Reverence”; it is a picture that shows the wise men visiting Mary, Joseph and Jesus; it shows the wise men presenting Jesus with their gifts and the title reminds us that they brought more than just presents; they brought their worship, their reverence. “*On coming...*” (*Matthew 2:11*) and the presents were a demonstration of that reverence and worship. When we give presents, at our best these presents also say something: they say “thank you for being my friend”; they say “I love you”; they say all kinds of other things when we give at our best. Of course, our giving can also say other things; I’ll leave that to you to work out for yourselves. The wise men’s presents were a way of showing their true reverence for Jesus and their worship of Him as King. These sophisticated, intelligent men, who had investigated everything before they left home, came with their true reverence and their gifts for Jesus.



Let’s follow this theme for a second: true reverence for Jesus. It is a great place to start a new year, being reminded of the attitude and spirit that should be in our hearts all the time and every day. The Christian life is a life of love and first of all that love is for Jesus, with reverence and devotion to Jesus. We sometimes give the notion that being a Christian is about following rules and codes, but really it should first and foremost be a relationship of reverence and love for someone so special to us that He is the centre of our lives. This reverence then shapes our lives. Here are two places that show just how, first of all in our relationship with God and secondly in our relationships with other people. Our relationship with God is shaped by reverence: “*let us...*” (*2 Corinthians 7:1*) Our reverence for God makes us want to be holy people, people who live in the Lord’s ways more and more. Then our relationships with other people: “*Submit to...*” (*Ephesians 5:21*) Our reverence for Jesus shapes our attitudes to other

people and leads us to submit to one another and serve one another in love rather than look to dominate or bully others. True reverence for Christ shapes our relationship with God, shapes the way we see ourselves and our relationships with other people; all of this starts with true reverence for Jesus.

The centre of the picture is Jesus. The focus of their journey, of their visit was Jesus. There was so much they couldn't have known for sure, but the Spirit at work in them gave an inkling. They saw a child in a Bethlehem, yet they still gave Him a present of gold, a present fit for a king; they saw a child and gave Him a present of frankincense which is a present about worship; they saw a child and gave Him present of myrrh, the symbol of suffering and pain; what did they see? What did they know? The Spirit had revealed something to these men about Jesus; their focus was on Jesus and they came to worship Him. They could so easily have been distracted by Herod, but no! They kept focus on Jesus and on finding and worshipping the King. They investigated and they discovered. The Spirit revealed to them that Jesus is special and they came to worship Him. The focus of their trip, the focus of their hearts, the focus of their reverence – Jesus.

Where is our focus at start of 2017? On staying healthy? On surviving? On hoping that this year is better than last? Can we make Jesus the focus of 2107? We give thanks to God for the gift of His Son; we give thanks for the gifts and blessings God has given us in Jesus; we look to make our faith in Jesus stronger and deeper; we look for opportunities to serve Jesus in our community and in world; we look for what it means to live in the Lord's ways. God's plan for us as individuals and as church is always to have our focus on Jesus; are we looking in the wrong direction?

These intelligent men, outsiders, foreigners, men who worked things out and investigated things – these men came in true reverence for the child who on outside was little, but who inside was the Son of God, a king, worthy of worship and reverence. We know what they were feeling for: we know that Jesus is the Son of God, the King forever, the Saviour of the world – we have even more reason for true reverence for Jesus. Let that be our 2017 goal, true reverence for Jesus, and let that true reverence shape our lives in every way.