

Christmas Update
25th December 2020

Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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.'

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When 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."*

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 worshipped 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.

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Do people still get socks for Christmas? In fact, I know that some school children have given the residents of our nursing home a pair of socks each and I also know that they were very well-received. Of course, you might get socks from your favourite aunty, and you get them every year and every year you get to change them: "the bit where you say "they're really lovely socks, Aunty – where did you get them?" and she says "Marks and Spencer" and you go to Marks & Spencer on Boxing Day to change them" for something that you actually like and will wear! The musical socks with a picture of Rudolph whose nose lights up with every step you take – you don't fancy that then?

There are no socks in the Christmas story but there are gifts. The wise men had travelled a long distance following the star; they had been drawn to a strange phenomenon in the sky and had decided it was worth another look. They followed it all the way from home to Jerusalem; they read the signs in the sky and decided that this star was the sign of a new king somewhere. Herod's palace in Jerusalem seemed to be the place to which it was leading them. Of course, Herod knew nothing about this new king and the wise men asking the question sent him into a whirl of anger and anxiety. His advisers searched the old books and found a prophecy from 700 or 800 years before promising a king to be born in Bethlehem. So that's where the wise men went next.

They found Jesus. By the time they arrived, Jesus might well be nearly 2 years old. They were looking for a king and something in their souls told them that they had found what they were looking for. Outwardly, it seemed unpromising; there was no palace, no wealth; there were no guards, no servants. Yet, something told them that this was the King for whom they had been searching. They

came before Jesus in the attitude of greeting a king – they bowed before Him and worshipped Him, recognising Jesus as the King of whom the star had told them. Then they brought their gifts, suitable for a king rather than a little boy! Even the fact of giving gifts was a way of saying “this child is important; this child is a king”. No matter what the gifts were, the sheer act of giving is a way of recognising the greatness and importance of Jesus.

There were 3 gifts, well known to be gold, frankincense and myrrh. These are gifts that mean something. Gold is a gift fit for a king; it always has been one of the most valuable substances on the planet, a gift of great value today as it was 2000 years ago. Frankincense was used in the temple, a sweet-smelling incense that represented the prayers of the people going up to God; here is Jesus, the One who stands between God and the people, representing God to us and representing us to God, the Mediator who takes away our sin and who brings the blessing of God to us. Myrrh was used to embalm people who had died – even in these gifts at this early stage in Jesus’ life, the cross casts a shadow over His life; this will be His destiny, to suffer and to die. “In those three gifts we see who He is, what He came to do, and what it cost Him.” (Michael Green)

Christina Rossetti wrote one of our favourite carols, *In the Bleak Midwinter*. The last verse is often sung as a solo in the cathedral versions of the Service on Nine Lessons and Carols; in that last verse she gives us a voice to express our giving to Jesus:

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;

Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

These last three words are huge: the proper response we make to Jesus is to give our hearts to Him in love, in faith, in goodness.

Jesus came as a king; the wise men tell us that. He came as God’s incredible gift to the world, One who would bring the kingdom of God into the world in a new way, who would stand between God and us, and who would suffer and die to make all of that happen. What a deep love God has for the world to give us such a gift as this! Our proper response to God’s gift is to give Him our love, our trust and our goodness. These are the values of God’s kingship in the world: we are to be people with love in our hearts for God and for other people; we are to learn to trust God in all the circumstances of our lives; we are to be people with goodness and kindness in our hearts, lives shaped by the values we see in Jesus Himself. God has given us Jesus; let’s open our hearts to receive His gift. What will we give Him in response; will we give our hearts?

Prayer: Father, we thank you for your indescribable gift, the gift of Your Son. We thank You that Jesus came to be a great King, to stand between God and us as the Mediator, to suffer and to die for us on the cross. What a great gift You have given to us. Open our hearts to respond by giving You our love, our trust and our goodness today; make that our gift to You every day.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

From December's Prayer Focus:

Even if we cannot gather in person

Emmanuel, God with us.

Even if some Christmas traditions have had to go

Emmanuel, God with us.

Even if we might not be able to hug family and friends

Emmanuel, God with us.

Even if we cannot sing Christmas carols beside each other

Emmanuel, God with us.

Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year

Emmanuel, God with us.

(Prayer written by Christian Aid Scotland.)

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

At Christmas, we give thanks for all those who have worked hard in our communities in 2020, to keep people safe and to help others. At Christmas, we pray for all the Covid-related matters for which we have been praying for months, remembering people who suffer, medical staff who care for them, residents in Care homes and their families and the staff; and those who have been bereaved in 2020. May the grace and peace of Christmas fill their hearts and their lives.

- ***For people disappointed and frustrated by the change to the Covid lockdown, depriving them of contact with their families as they had planned, and to which many were deeply looking forward to and longing for. Be with those at Christmas who are on their own, and who feel their loneliness deeply; be with those who are meeting over Christmas for a short time and keep them safe.***
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety. For the plans centred on Christmas, that the nation will stay safe and people will respect the need to keep other, more vulnerable, people safe.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital are high again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the vaccine, giving thanks that it is becoming available; for wise use of the first doses, given to people in greatest need across the world.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; this week we have a selection of Christmas carols; go and have a listen. (Some of the links look a bit different this week, but they should all work as usual!)

Hark the Herald angels sing [Hark! The Herald Angels Sing - YouTube](#)
Silent Night [Silent night \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)
See in yonder manger low [2 See in Yonder Manger Low - YouTube](#)
Child in the manger [Child in a manger - YouTube](#)
Come and join the celebration [Come and join the celebration \(with lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

We would have had a visit from Out of the Box at Christmas; here is their version of a song called "Save the world"; it is a brilliant version. [Save the World - A Christmas Puppet Parody - YouTube](#)

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other Christmas resources:

- Our Christmas Day Service is at 10.30am on Zoom; here is the link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83064379290?pwd=UUx4QmRJZ1hhdHp3VnpCbkpjcllxZz09>
- There is a Christmas Day service on BBC Scotland today coming from St Giles Cathedral.
- This Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in. This week we are taking part in a service led by the Moderator of the General Assembly, Martin Fair.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of "Every Day with Jesus" Booklet for January and February 2021 are now available. The Editor is Micha Jazz, Director of Resources of Waverley Abbey, who continue to publish the booklet, and Micha Jazz is now producing the daily notes from God's Word for your life and relationships, replacing insight from the late Selwyn Hughes. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Christmas Offerings This Christmas we want to give you the opportunity to help children in need. We are supporting 3 charities: the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, SWAN UK, and CLIC Sargent; all of these charities support children and their families and we would encourage you to be generous to them over Christmas. The best way to do this is to give via the Church bank account, Sort Code 83-19-15, Account number 00184681, with the word "Christmas" in the reference box; you can give by the "Donate" button on the website and choosing Juniper Green Parish Church; you can give the Minister or the treasurer Douglas Buchanan a cheque or some cash. Please be generous and share the light with others this Christmas.

Bring some sparkle to Christmas:

The Star: download a star from www.jgpc.org.uk and colour it in, then place it in your window; when you're walking through the community see how many stars you can find; Christmas is not cancelled!

The Pebble: find a pebble and draw a character from the nativity story, then place the stone on the steps at the front door of the church; let's see what we can create there to remind the world that Christmas is not cancelled.

The Nativity Trail: some members of the nativity cast have been let loose in the shops and businesses in Juniper Green; see if you can find them; there is a guide to download on the church website.

#CommunityChristmas