



## EMMANUEL CHURCH – WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> JANUARY 2021



*Make some space at home to read and pray through the following, if possible, on the morning of Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021.  
If you are able, join in this service on Zoom – contact Rev. Paul for details of the service, login and password.*

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### Opening Prayer:

Father God, we praise and worship you. We come to thank you for sending your Son Jesus to be born as a baby so that he became both human and divine.

Lord Jesus, we praise and worship you. We come to you, knowing that you understand what it is to live a human life on earth and now you are in heaven interceding for us.

Holy Spirit, we praise and worship you. We come asking that you live in us to guide and direct us. Help us to recognise your voice and give us the strength to obey.

Lord God, Father, Son and Spirit, we praise and worship you.

As you led the wise men to Jesus, so we ask you to lead us through this New Year. Amen.

### Reading: Matthew 2: 1-12 ‘The Visit of the Wise Men’

<sup>1</sup> In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ <sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### Address: ‘Seeking Jesus’

### Prayers of Intercession and The Lord’s Prayer:

As the wise men relied on the light of the guiding star to lead them to the Christ child, we depend on you for the inspiration to follow Christ’s teaching in our lives.

We pray for all who work to combat the coronavirus, scientists and health workers, carers and planners. As the magi persevered in their quest, help us all to remain focussed and steadfast in our endeavours in this new year.

We give thanks for bringing us together as one church, preparing us for your mission in Eastbourne. In this year ahead we pray that we may be inspired and led by your Spirit.

As we step out into the future, in the face of all the changes and challenges that are taking place all around us, we pray that you will continue to be with us to lead and to guide, to help and to protect, to comfort and support. **AMEN. OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN...**

### Blessing: May the blessings of God be with us in 2021 in all we do in His Name. Amen.

## Address: 'Seeking Jesus'

Today we think of the visit of the wise men seeking the King of the Jews, seeking Jesus. We have known the story from our childhood in nativity plays, paintings, poems and carols. But when you rehear the story as written by Matthew you realise how much has been added over the years. We do not know how many there were, only the three gifts they brought. We do not know their names or even if they were kings.



So, what does Matthew tell us? Well, he calls them 'Magi' which we understand to be both astronomers who studied the stars and astrologers who interpreted their meaning. Many Eastern courts had such men as advisers for it was believed that events on earth were reflected by events in the skies. These Magi saw a bright object – a 'star' appear in the sky which they began to study. Maybe this was the 'Great Conjunction' when Jupiter and Saturn appear to come close together. Jupiter was known as the royal planet and Saturn was linked to the Jewish nation. Hence their thought that a new King of the Jews had been born. The Magi decided to find out. They may not have been kings but brought gifts which were thought to be fit for a king or even a god. King Herod's palace in Jerusalem may have been the obvious place to look for a new born king, but they had taken their eyes off the star. Instead of being welcomed they caused panic! King Herod had sons but they were grown up, so to ask, "Where is the new born King of the Jews?" was asking King Herod where was his enemy? Was there a rival to his throne? He needed to know too and the religious leaders were quick with an answer. They knew their Scriptures and directed the Magi to Bethlehem, the city of David. They left, not realising that their question would be disastrous for the families of Bethlehem. Herod would not tolerate a rival and, as we know, ordered the killing of the baby boys under two in Bethlehem, shortly after the Magi's visit.

The Magi had been following the "star" but got side-tracked by their own assumptions. They did not notice that the "star" was not over King Herod's palace, but they looked up again and it led them to a house in Bethlehem where they found Mary and the child Jesus – not a palace they expected, and not a stable either, but a house where Mary and Joseph were living with baby Jesus. And where was Joseph? I reckon he was out working his trade as a carpenter in order to support his little family.

The Magi now trusted the 'star' and went in and worshipped this little child. Rich men, foreigners, strangers on their knees before him – offering the gifts they brought to give to a king, or a god? All very out of place in this Bethlehem house! The Magi had fulfilled their quest: they had found the predicted King of the Jews and went home rejoicing but, I suspect very puzzled. What must Mary have thought? Would her surprises never cease? Imagine when Joseph got home and Mary told him of their visitors. That night God spoke to Joseph in a dream to take the family out of Bethlehem immediately and they fled from Herod to become refugees in Egypt.

What a story, even without the additions over the years. The birth of Jesus led these Gentile strangers to seek and find him using an unusual route following a "star". And so fulfilling many Jewish prophecies that this baby was for the whole world. But why did the religious leaders not go the few miles to Bethlehem to check the prophecies? Did they not believe their own Scriptures? They did not change over the years as the adult Jesus found as tried to tell them the good news which he was fulfilling in their sight. We need to inherit the persistence of the Magi as we move into 2021. To follow Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. To be stars showing the way to those who seek him. Sharing not just our knowledge of the Scriptures but our beliefs as well so that our new building may be the home where many come to worship. Amen.