

Welcome to Methodist Church Central Letchworth
3rd January 2021 @ 10:45 am

Call to worship

I will bless the Lord at all times.
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord.
Let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

Hymn:345 (S.t.F):

Prayers of thanksgiving and confession

Reflecting on this third verse of the above hymn, in confidence and freedom approach the throne of Glory. Tell him how much you thank Him for anything you are grateful for. Then, take some time to say a prayer of confession. Knowing that you are speaking to your friends who loves you unconditionally. As you get to the end of your prayer of confession: Listen to these words: "*your sins, mistakes and wrongs have been forgiven.*" Amen

Let us join together as we say our Lord's prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen**

Hymn 254 (S.t.F): Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

The Gospel reading is from Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the

Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"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."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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.' 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Amen.

Ephesians 3:1-12

Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this Gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what the plan of the mystery is hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Reflection: Matthew 2:1-12, Ephesians 3:1-12

Go and search diligently

Searching for something or someone involves looking, seeking, carefully and thoroughly, hunting, pursuing, exploring, fishing about and around, looking high and low, People search for different things. For instance, when Police investigators search for a missing person, they look for crucial information and search in every possible place they might think of. Those who search for a job take time to write their CVs and make more preparations to ensure they're ready.

A common ground for all researchers or investigators is that they search diligently, they take time to find things that they didn't know. Their expectation is that they will find what they are looking for. They have the purpose in their search. Many researchers and investigators are commissioned by someone to do the search

In our Gospel reading, king Herod commissioned the Magi and said: *Go and search diligently for a child.* While Herod's motive was to kill, one commentary suggests that the central theme in our Gospel reading today is Gentiles' homage to the king Jesus.¹ It is a story of the mysterious Magi, who overturned the traditional motif of Jewish hero's superiority (Herod) to foreign wise men.²

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When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, where David was brought up and anointed, he fulfilled the promised king from David lineage as it was prophesied in Micah 5:1, 3, the Magi from the East to do him homage.

Who were these Magi? The scholars are not specific about the origin of these Magi; however, some have guessed that they came from Persia. Others guessed Babylon, while others suggested that they came from Arabia. Wherever, their origin, the truth is that they represent the best wisdom of the gentile World and its spiritual elite. They were men of holiness and wisdom, skilled in Philosophy, medicine and natural science. They were soothsayers and interpreters of dreams, who sought the truth. However, their names lost

¹John Barton and John Muddiman, the oxford Bible Commentary (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001)
Pg849

² Ibid, Pg849

credibility later in time. It became Magus- a less meaningful name, which meant fortune-tellers, sorcerers, magicians.

However, God restored their names by allowing their eyes to see a special Star that the ancients generally believed to be animated. The Jewish people identified it with an angel compared to the Exodus's angelic guide as we read from Exodus 23: 20, 23:32-34. This Star led the wise men to the Jewish king, the king that Jewish leaders were determined to destroy.

Like the Magi, Paul was given a mission that led him to become a servant of the Gospel by the Gift of God's grace, given to him through the working power of God. Although he was less than the least of all the Lord's people, God's grace was given to him to preach to the Gentiles about the boundless riches of Christ.

Friends, as it was in the time of these Magi, and Paul, we have been given a mission of sharing the mystery of the Gospel. The devil is looking for ways to reduce the mystery Gospel to nothing. The enemy is distracting us from seeing what the World cannot see. The devil is always looking for ways to destroy and finish us in one way or another, thinking that we will give in to his evil plans.

It is my prayer that in 2021, we will continue to seek God diligently, using our talents, gifts, wisdom, and knowledge to develop a close relationship with God, which enables us to see what people of this World cannot see. We will be guided by the Star of the truth, the Star of hope and love. We will take the right steps at the right time to discover the hidden truth about his plans and our future. Jeremiah 29: 12-13 "Then when you call upon me and come and to pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart," declares the Lord.

What else can we learn from these Magi?

When the Magi knew that they were going to worship the King Jesus, they choose significant and meaningful gifts. Gifts that matched Jesus's character and his work.

Gold: One of the Bible scholars, named Parthia, suggested that Gold was a gift for a king of men. Jesus was a man born to be a king to rule not by force but by love. To rule over men's hearts. Not from the thrown but from the cross. The Magi's hearts surrendered fully to Jesus's leadership. God does not need our Gold. Only our hearts. When our hearts are fully surrendered to him, giving to church ministry will be easy

Frankincense: these were gifts of sweet perfume in the temple of worship and sacrifice. It was a Gift for priests. The function of the priest was to open a bridge between God and man. Jesus is a high priest, the only way to the Father.

Myrrh: this was a gift for the one who is to die. **Myrrh** was used to preserve the body of a dead person. Jesus came in the World to die for all of us all.

Gold for a King, Frankincense for a Priest, Myrrh for one who was to die. These were the Gifts of the wise men, and even in the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true King of Peace. Christ was the perfect High Priest and, in the end, the Supreme Saviour of humankind. In Christ, there is no Gentile or Israelite, we are all together with the members of one body, and all share together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians, 3:6) good news!

The question is, what kind of Gift would you give to Jesus this year? What would guide you to choose this Gift?

Hymn 563 (S.t.F)

Prayers of intercession

The Magi journeyed for to find you,
Redeemer and Saviour, we too must search for you all our lives,
Help us to find you, Lord.

The coming of the strangers from
the East marked the showing forth of Christ to the whole world.
As we start this new year, once again
Help us to find you, Lord.

You were in the world, but they did not know you.
You came to your own and they did not receive you.
There was no room for you at the inn.
Is there any room for you in our hearts?
Saviour, help us to respond to you

The Magi were prepared to leave their homes to search for the new king whose sign was a star in the East. We too must be prepared to search and become a pilgrim people.....
Give us the strength to put false security behind us and live as people who are on a journey in your footsteps. You are with us.

As we journey together with our brothers and sisters around the World, we thank you for signs of hope and growth amid challenging socio-political tensions in Togo. Loving and gracious God, we pray for Methodist Church in South East District in the time of shifting relationship in their Church and the World, when they seem to be standing on sand rather than solid rock, and when the familiar has become bewildering, hold them and all us together in your love.....

Light of the world, you called us out of darkness into the light.
May we experience your kindness and blessing and be strong in faith, hope and love.
Because we are followers of Christ, who came as a light shining in the darkness, through diligent search, we have found his light. May we show the light of God to the people we find around us. Amen

Hymn 545 (S.t.F): High King of heaven, thou victory won!

Blessing

Lord, as we continue our journey with you throughout this year 2021,
as we seek to live out our faith everyday
Be with us, surprise with your love,
Nudge us when you want us, to see or do something new-
For Jesus's sake.