

Giffnock : the Park Church



Wise men still
SEEK HIM



Sunday 13th December 2020

Good morning everyone,

I wonder if like me you feel it is so good not to be in Tier 4. I am glad to see that we have come through that period and hopefully as the event of Christmas is on the up we will also continue to see the Rate of infection come down as we all wait patiently for our letter to come for Vaccination whenever that might be in the next few months. The really good news for us as a worshipping church is that more people can come to our church service now, where the limits on numbers can be upgraded from 20 to 50 adults and children. It has to be also said that this will be a Christmas Season like no other gone before and they are without doubt right and so our approach to the season will be very different this year in relation to our Christmas Appeal and what we will do for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the detail of which is intimated elsewhere in this devotional.

I have heard it said and it has also been reported to me that others are saying how much they have missed coming to Church on Sunday mornings. That is a lovely sentiment to hear expressed having endured almost 9 months of restriction in movement, fear for health, worry about isolation and uncertainty of how things are going to pan out. In our services and devotionals thus far we are being reminded of how even in such dark times, Light conquers the Darkness, a common and rich theme of John's Gospel, some of which we have been exploring through the Advent Season. Like the wise men of old, there are those today who still seek Him that they might Bow down and Worship Him and that will be the theme of our devotion this morning which I hope you find encouraging, enriching and affirming. In the mean time let me wish you well for the coming week in the hope that the mania for Christmas shopping does not prove to be too frustrating.

With Best wishes from at the manse

Calum D. Macdonald

An Advent Prayer

*A Season of Hope
& Expectation*

The Marvel of Christmas is not in the Presents but in His Presence

Let us pray

Our Loving God and Father as we come before you in this moment of prayer, in our Season of Advent, enduring the difficult moments of these pandemic times, we pray that You would indeed show us the Marvel of Christmas again, not in the presents that we might look forward to but in His Presence, the light and love of our Lord Jesus. As our minds come to focus on the manger scene fill us with an awareness of Immanuel: God with us.

Our Father we thank you for the excitement that Christmas stirs within us and as we look forward to that day with anticipation, preparing for the holiday period that we look forward to so much and the gifts given and received, Remind us again of the gift You gave when You sent Your Son from Heaven. We acknowledge that the first Christmas gift was truly the greatest gift ever; a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes born in a manger and wrapped like the gifts we might find under our Christmas tree.

Forgive us for our neglect of You and all that You have done through your Son, being more concerned about the superficial trappings of the season and not focussed on the reason for the season. Forgive us when we have spent our time on the lesser things this world has to offer and, in your forgiveness, reveal once again a sense of Your love towards us. Restore to us the wonder that comes with Jesus' birth, as we remember how He left the riches of Heaven and wrapped Himself in the rags of earth to be one who is truly Wonderful, the Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

As Your presence dawned that night with angels announcing that Light had come into the Darkness help us to remember the message he gave the Shepherds to not be afraid. Speak to our hearts this day and help us to yield our lives to You. May we be obedient to Your call, setting distractions and worries aside, surrendering them all to You.

Surround us once more with your loving presence, Lord God. We long to hear You speak to our hearts and so we pray that you clear our minds of the countless concerns and all the holiday noise. Slow us down this Christmas, fill us with your peace. Dwell within us and around us, as we look forward to the Hope that Christmas offers and Your Love that Christmas brings in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen



Matthew 2: 1 - 12
(New International Version)

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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 worshiped 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.



Arrangements for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Given that our love for singing these great Christmas Carols of old is not something we can do because of Covid Restrictions we have thought to do things differently this year and so:

Sunday 20 th December (11am)	The Simplest Nativity Service Ever led by the Sunday School
Thursday 24 th December (Christmas Eve) (4- 6pm)	A Christmas Movie will be shown for our Sunday School after during which they enjoy a McDonalds Meal and finish the early evening with the Internationally planned Jingling of the Bells for Christmas at 6pm
Friday 25 th December (Christmas Day) (10.30pm)	A Reflection & Prayer Family Service giving thanks for Christmas. Any Children present may wish to bring one of their presents along and let us all see how good Santa has been to them.

Our Christmas Appeal

This year we are looking to support the East Renfrewshire Dementia Project here in Giffnock. Any financial donations to this are most welcome.



*The Flowers in Church this morning were gifted by Elizabeth Hutton in fond memory of her Dad,
Mr. Jim Brew*



Good morning

Our theme this morning is a simple one following on from the thoughts presented in our video recordings, our Sunday morning services and of course these written devotionals where we look to remind one another of a very special gift - Jesus the Light of the world. For so many today though, this great gift of God will somehow pass unnoticed because people are so wrapped up with many of the other things going on round about them. As many of you know, I have a passion for the history of aviation and I came across a story that I thought highlights one of the great maladies that people have about Christmas and I want to illustrate it in a true story that has been told about the Wright Brothers. They of course are pivotal figures in the story of Powered flight.

On 17th December 1903 four miles south of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, after several attempts, brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright were the first ever to make a controlled, sustained flight of a powered, heavier-than-air aircraft travelling a distance of 120 feet. Film cameras were on hand that day and the Film footage shot captures that moment of history recorded for all posterity. The Wright brothers, thrilled at their success in getting their "flying machine" off the ground telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet-will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas."

The Editor completely missed the real news - Man had flown!

There are many today for whom this story is relevant. As we come out of this Tier 4 Lockdown we have endured and with great relief might be saying,

"that's nice we will be able to get home for Christmas or perhaps welcome family home at Christmas".

Of course, the cautionary tale in all this is to be careful during these Covid times where the risk of infection is still high, and the fear of spreading the disease is very real. Sadly, there will be a great many people who are like the Editor and miss the point of the Good News of Christmas. While it will be lovely to catch up with family albeit in limited numbers and enjoy the sharing of presents with one another, suitably wiped down or left appropriately for sufficient time to make it infection free; while all this may be true, we can do this anytime in the course of the year. Like the 17th Dec 1903 and that first ever powered flight, Christmas is a pivotal moment in the history of the world and what makes it so is that this is the moment when God broke into human history in the form of a little baby who as he grew up would go on to do something Humanity could not do for itself, righting the broken relationship of humanity with God in the event of Calvary and the Empty Tomb.

While Luke's gospel looked to focus on the story of the Shepherds, Matthew adds a new dimension to the story. Traditionally 12 days on from Jesus Birth wise men came to visit Jesus. Our text this morning from Matthew's Gospel concerns the story of the wise men. We have all heard the jokes about the three wise women who if they had come instead of the wise men would have asked for directions before they got to Herod, would have arrived on time, help deliver the baby, clean the stable, make a casserole and bring practical gifts.

Having travelled a considerable distance from the East, they revealed three things that we can perhaps take to heart this day.

Firstly, seeing this strange astronomical phenomenon in the night sky of an especially bright star, the Magi had enough smarts to realise that this was a story where there was something going on that could be world changing that they should be prepared to seek out what this is all about, no matter how long it takes and how far they have to go. They had the Wisdom to seek the Gospel news out. Many today can be very ambivalent about the Christmas story, you dig out the Christmas tree and decorate the house/flat with lights and spend time with family and that for them is Christmas and they will maybe attend or have attended an occasional Carol Service. (which we can't host this year). As we know the story of Christmas is much more than that, involving the maker of the heavens and the earth his son and the Angels of heaven and now magi from the east. The conversation with King Herod in verse 2 reveals how much they knew already **"Where is He who is to be**

born King of the Jews?" they asked. They had the wisdom to seek out this Jesus. Too many of us resist this at our peril, or who have once had and an interest but over time or some negative experiences has made that interest grow cold. Like the Wise men - we need to seek Him still.

Secondly, we read of how these wise men followed the Light. The signs were all there for them to follow. They were not distracted by all the other stars in the sky, nor were they dissuaded from the task at hand from having met Herod. They were focussed. For the Christian, it is Jesus the light of the world that shines in the Darkness. Churches across the centuries have valued the simple symbolism signified of a single candle in the night. It affords us light for the way ahead, it also serves to warn of any pending dangers. The story of the Lighthouse system around our shores has saved countless ships from running aground and pilots flying passengers through the air in the darkness of night will have the landing lights of the runway to offer them the way forward. Today as Christians we don't need to follow the stars as Astrologers do but we can have the Light of God's Word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119: 105)

Finally, when the Magi found Jesus, the first thing they did was to bow down and worship Him. (verse 11) Think about this for a moment. These wise men having travelled a considerable distance, enduring discomfort in the journey, contending with the danger of politically crossing King Herod, come across a scene in the most humble of circumstances, a carpenter and his unmarried fiancé with a new-born baby in a stable - hardly the setting for one who was to be the King of the Jews. And yet they worshipped Him. In submission to the Kingship of Jesus they take the knee and bow before Him in humility. In these past months we have all too often become familiar with the idea of such a mark of respect as people in their respective sporting fields bending the knee in support and solidarity with the Black Lives Movement. But in the case of the manger, it is not just an act of solidarity, it is an act of Worship. Ministers on day of induction are asked to kneel before God as those in the Presbytery pray for God's blessing upon a new ministry beginning. An act of worship, an Act of Service. The Gifts of Gold Frankincense and Myrrh are of course said to symbolise, in the case of Gold, the Kingship of Christ, in Frankincense this symbolises the deity of Jesus and finally in Myrrh an embalming oil to symbolise Jesus' death.

As people pass the doors of our churches as they see the Christmas lights or Candles in the window, it is my fervent hope that when they see such things they are truly reminded of Jesus the light of the World.

I hope the week ahead is a good 'un as we begin to see the end of one year on the horizon and the start of a new year which will hopefully be better and brighter for all. In the meantime as always, the words of the hymn writer to be true,

God is always near me hearing what I say
Knowing all my thoughts and deeds, all my work and play.

Wishing You God's Blessing

Calum D. Macdonald

A black and white silhouette illustration of a nativity scene. In the foreground, the Virgin Mary is kneeling on the left, looking towards the infant Jesus who lies in a manger. To the right, Joseph stands holding a staff. The background features a bright star with rays of light in a dark sky filled with smaller stars. A palm tree is visible on the right side. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*In the birth of Jesus,
May we share in the
Song of the Angels,
May we share the gladness
Of the Shepherds,
May we worship like the
Wise Men of Old
May we know the Love of
God our Father
God the Son
God the
Holy Spirit*