

SUNDAY 6th JANUARY 2019 – MATTHEW 2:1-12

Study Group Notes

WELCOME:

Have you ever thought that you know something (perhaps a fact, or words of a song or someone's name) only to discover that you have been wrong all the time.

How did you feel?

Are you, or have you been, fearful of something happening in your life or in the world? What does, or did, fear do to you?

WORSHIP:

Read "A Song of New Jerusalem".

Think about the darkness in our world today and give thanks and praise to God for the light that he brings to those who believe.

WORD:

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

1. As background to the military and political times around Jesus's birth, read the passage on Herod the Great.
What are the over-riding fears of the political establishment?
What is the result of these fears?
2. Consider the Christmas carol "We three kings".
In St. Matthew's account who come to visit the baby Jesus and how many were there? (NB only Matthew tells us about these visitors from the east.)
Think about the key political issues of today. What are the main fears? What are the results?
3. Why have they come to visit Jesus (v2)?
Who do they believe Jesus is?
What is the difference between "worshipping" and "paying homage"?

4. Discuss the traditional explanation of the gifts:
Gold: A gift for royalty.
Frankincense: An expensive incense used in the Temple and signifying Jesus' divinity.
Myrrh: An expensive oil used for anointing the dead, foreshadowing of Jesus' death and a reminder of his mortality.
What do you think Mary and Joseph would have thought about the frankincense and myrrh?
5. Read the description of the medicinal properties of frankincense and myrrh.
Now discuss the usefulness of these gifts from God (via the magi) for:
 - A 14 year old mother who recently gave birth to her first child;
 - In a society where infant mortality was between 50% and 75%;
 - For a birth and first few days of life in an animal shed;
 - For a family about to flee into exile.
6. How does God use the fearful Herod and Jerusalem establishment for his own purposes?
7. Read Isaiah 9:1-7 and John 1:1-5
What is the darkness being referred to in these passages?
Who is the light and what does he come to do?
Consider the linkage of light and darkness in Matthew's account of the magi:
 - A phenomenal star shining in the night sky;
 - A life born into poverty and dirt (God into the "unclean");
 - The goodwill of the seeking (gentile) magi confronted by Herod and the Jerusalem establishment.
8. Read Isaiah 40:1-5, Ephesians 3:7-12 and Philippians 2:12-18
Think of who in our world today (also our country, our town, even in our church community) might be living in terrible darkness.
Is there anyone you know personally?
If so what might you do to bring them the light of Jesus?

PRAYERS

- **Give thanks to God that he has a plan for our lives and pray that we may learn to see the working out of that plan and join with him in bringing light to this world.**
- **Pray that the powers of darkness will be overcome and God's rule will prevail in our life-times.**
- **Pray for our nation's leaders in these difficult times; that they will not be overpowered by fear of losing power and status; that they will not use the power of fear to further their own aims.**
- **Pray for the sick, frail and bereaved on our notice sheet and those others known to us.**