

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 81

Sunday 3rd January 2021

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Happy New Year to everyone and welcome to this Sunday’s edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passage

Matthew 2: 1-12

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.

Reflection

The story of the Magi coming to see the baby Jesus is part of every nativity play. We're so used to seeing small children in cloaks and paper crowns, we forget who they really were. And Herod himself tends not to appear in children's plays, although I bet little boys would fight to be him. The theme he expresses is pretty well known by children. Light vs darkness is common in fiction and films, from *Star Wars* to *The Lord of the Rings*, and what about Harry Potter, eh? And even starting with fairy story and pantomime, secrecy, evil plans and wicked rulers are part of storytelling.

We learn early that darkness and night represent evil, and light represents goodness. And as adults, we learn about our world from the media, and we see that there is much good in the world, and much evil. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs said, *the juxtaposition of good and evil, harmony and conflict, global peace and holy war, seem to me a fitting metaphor for the century we have just begun*. That was twenty years ago, and he was standing in the hole where the World Trade Centre had been, praying for peace; and he was just as fervent as the people who did it had been for destruction. I have to say, I find the sum of the situation in the world today frightening. Not the virus—we'll get through that, but I worry that Christianity itself seems to be on the retreat from an enemy that won't easily be beaten. There seems to be a lot of darkness, and not a lot of light.

But the story of the Magi and Herod shows us, and the beginning of John's gospel reminds us, *the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness couldn't put it out.*

The star that led the Magi to Jesus represented years of wondering, centuries of mystery, a beautiful shining in the darkness of those times. As it was then, the meaning of the star has been for all the generations since, truth, wisdom, peace and the presence of the divine. We've long ago lost sight of the understanding those old astrologers would have had of it. Today, we don't attach any mystical significance to eclipses or comets. We understand at a scientific level what they mean. But for ancient people, a thing like a star, new in the sky, had to be a sign of something. What the prophets had foretold came to pass, all within the timing and commission of God. Isaiah told of the light that would come for all creation, all peoples, nations and rulers, a new generation living with, in and for the light: Jesus, the light from God. And the mysterious star was taken to be a sign of all this.

In this story of the discovery of the birth of God's Son, the Magi represent the wealth and wisdom of the Gentile world coming from afar to worship - the generosity of worship born of a yearning to learn, understand and appreciate all that creation points them towards. The direction of the star towards Bethlehem, draws us again into the skies' worship of this King, because, just as the prophets foretold, even creation worships the coming of God's creative love in human flesh. And within this, all people will respond with creation, and so the Gospel will spread to all nations and all peoples beyond Israel. Here, within the mystery of the star's presence, is the hopeful lead towards God's call and promise to all his creation.

But then all this mystery and wonder collides with the awful reality. Herod's secret planning, his lies and his pretended desire to worship the new born king are born out of fear, jealousy, insecurity, and darkness. Herod knew that his grip on power was far from secure. He was only half Jewish, so he

pretended to be super-Jewish to make up for it. The Romans could have deposed him at no notice. He killed two of his own sons, suspected of plotting against him. Killing the children of Bethlehem was quite in character. So the end of the Gospel, the repeated motifs of fear, and plotting, secrets and innocent death, is foreshadowed in the beginning, and yet the new generation has come with the light and hope of Christ. Just as was foretold, with the coming of the new king, all nations and all creation will bring their praise, tyrants their fear and the glories of scripture will be recalled in the renewal of reality.

We are part of this new generation that knows the end of the story even as we hear the beginning again. We are members of the same body that will praise the Lord as one whose power is revealed in love, whose glory was shown in Bethlehem whose light has come into the world and into our own lives. Let's learn again the significance of the star, the Magi, their gifts and the clash between evil and good, darkness and light. Let's live in the commission of God's grace for our lives and our world today. Creation is joined with all humanity in the praise of God.

The story of the Magi is our story. They travelled so far because they saw the star, and they didn't understand, but they wanted to. In their seeking, they worshipped; in their worship, they found joy and greater wisdom, and showed it in their generosity and praise. Here is our connection between light and worship: the promise of new life as foretold in the scriptures; new life for all creation and all peoples for all time.

Ron

Hymn Suggestion

There are a number of traditional Epiphany carols. One of the best known is 'We three kings of Orient are'.

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship, living in the commission of God's grace
- Measures taken to slow down the spread of the new strain of the coronavirus
- Give thanks for approval of vaccines for use in combating coronavirus and pray for their roll out
- Need for further largescale testing
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes
- Those suffering from coronavirus in hospitals, care homes and at home
- For decisions on services and communications in the Camelot Group in the New Year
- Our Bishops (please see notice below)
- For schools in our benefice facing the complexities of the new school term
- Prayers for those affected economically by the lockdown, for businesses and those who have become unemployed
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Tier 4 Rules now in operation

The Camelot Group falls within the area of South Somerset. This is now in Tier 4. Full guidance on what this means can be found on the government website:-

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tier-4-stay-at-home>

Tier 4 Rules and the holding of public worship services

The Church of England comments 'public worship may continue in all tiers, in line with the Government guidance ... We are also conscious of those who will not wish to attend a church building in light of increased numbers of cases, as well as churches who for different reasons cannot currently safely accommodate public worship.'

In the light of this, individual churches within the Camelot Group are considering how best to proceed and whether to continue with or cancel services. Please read the schedule of services for this Sunday and next accordingly and note that on this Sunday North Cheriton have decided to cancel Camelot Matins. We are planning to go ahead with the other services this Sunday at Yarlington and North Cadbury.

Obviously we do not know how long we will be in Tier 4 or indeed whether we will be entering another lockdown in which the rules will be stricter still. If further decisions are made to cancel services then we will try to give as much notice of this as possible.

Schedule of services for this Sunday and next

Please read this schedule in the light of the note above.

Sunday 3rd January

9.00 am	St Mary's Yarlington	Communion
11.00 am	St Michael's North Cadbury	Group Communion

Sunday 10th January

9.30 am	Galhampton	Communion
9.30 am	St John the Baptist North Cheriton	Communion
9.30 am	St Michael's Blackford	Matins

11.00 am	St Michael's North Cadbury	Communion
11.00 am	St Nicholas Holton	Sunday Worship

Videos on Vimeo

The video of the Midnight Service and of the Christmas Day service have both been uploaded on to Vimeo. The respective links are:-

<https://vimeo.com/494547191> and

<https://vimeo.com/494861975>

Christmas Services

Many thanks to all those involved with preparing and delivering the Christmas Services in the Camelot Group - officiants, musicians, churchwardens, sides people and to Dan Gruner and his team for his work on livestreaming, recording and uploading services.

Excalibur

The January edition of Excalibur including all the service information is available online at camelotparishes.co.uk

The Parish Office

The Parish Office is closed although Rob does come in regularly. In his absence please contact Rob via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Update on Bishop Peter

Bishop Peter thanks everyone for all the cards and other expressions of support which he has received. A card was sent to him on behalf of the Camelot Parishes as a whole. He says that he has been lifted on 'eagle's wings' through the love and prayers of others. He has now received a stem cell transplant. Please pray for the new cells to 'do their bit' and for his continued healing. Please continue to pray for him and his family in this challenging time. Please pray also for Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Bishop's Staff as they take on the oversight of the diocese in his absence.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5:2)