



ENTER God's presence

The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.

– Psalm 10:16-17

Heavenly Father, you sent us your only son, Jesus Christ, to be our saviour and king forever. May we be reminded, as we gather around your word which became flesh for us, that King Jesus has promised to always be with us, to hear us and help us. May we come to a greater understanding of that truth today and every day. Amen



SHARE life together

1. **Share your highs and lows with each other?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **As you enter 2021, what fears do you hope to leave behind?**
4. **What gift will you give Jesus in 2021 and how will you do it?**

“As 2020 closes, most of us will be pleased to say goodbye to the year, hoping to herald in a new year with expectations of a smoother, less complicated and more normal 2021”. So began a letter recently received. “I’m glad that’s over. Hope this _____ is better.” But it is not just the word “year” that we use to fill in the blank is it? Perhaps you insert job or relationship, or school, or church. As we begin a new year, we get caught in the inbetween world of our fears and our longings, between staying where we are and with what we know, and being open to something new and embracing the unknown. The inbetween place is the place where epiphanies occur. That’s what we discover in the encounter of Herod and the Wisemen. Christmas is more than a day, it is the continuing ‘yes’ of Christmas that invites us into a new journey that opens our life to eternal possibilities.

Week beginning:
Sunday 3rd January 2021

Worship series:

Christmas is more than a...



VERSE for the week

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.

Matthew 2:11



REMEMBER this week

Christmas is more than a day to remember. It's an invitation to leave behind all your fears and longings, and to offer all of your life in worship to the one who calls you to follow him home, by another road. It's a call on your life that cannot remain unanswered. How will you respond?



LISTEN attentively

Read Matthew 2:1-12

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. What do you imagine the Wisemen may have said to each other after their encounter with Herod?**

I wonder how many of us have already moved on from Christmas? After all, it has been a couple of weeks since Dec 25. The leftovers have been eaten, perhaps some of the presents are already broken. If you have a real Christmas tree it is probably beginning to look a bit sad and many people will begin taking down Christmas lights in the next week or two. One of the details that we often miss in the story of Christmas, is that the Wisemen, or Magi, did not arrive to worship baby Jesus on the night he was born. They only arrived at the house where Mary and Joseph were staying around 2 years after his actual birth. This is why in the verses following today's reading (Matt 2:16), King Herod sets out to kill every boy aged 2 or younger living in or around Bethlehem. This had been a long journey for them. Yet at the end of the journey they presented their kingly gifts and recognised Jesus as the child born to be "King of the Jews". To some extent, the Wisemen's encounter with Jesus presented them with a choice; they had met King Herod, the current 'King of the Jews' and they had found Jesus, the new 'King of the Jews'. At this point they have a choice between what they have known, the tyrannical and more than likely crazy, King Herod or the child who the stars had foretold would be the new king. Recognising Jesus and acknowledging him as king was a dangerous move for the Magi, they really ticked off King Herod by doing so, but when they came face to face with God's only son, they could not help but recognise him and praise and worship him.

- 8. Did you know the Wisemen took so long to get to Jesus? Sometimes it can also take us a long time to recognise Jesus as our king and to allow him to rule all of our hearts. We often want to hold things back from him. What things might you be holding back from King Jesus?**
- 9. How would you describe the journey that you have been on which led you to acknowledge Jesus as your king?**

Throughout this passage (v2&11) it is made clear to us that the Magi or Wisemen intended to worship Jesus. I wonder what the idea of worship means to you? I suspect that for most of us, the first thought we think of when we consider worship is our Sunday morning 'worship services'. If not that, then probably the idea of praise and worship music. Yet these Wisemen show us a different form of worship. There is no singing (not in Matthew's account anyway). There is not set form of liturgy or sacramental words or phrases that must be adhered to. The Wise men simply bring the gifts that they have, they humble themselves (they bowed down v11), and presented themselves, and their gifts, in service to the king. After submitting to Jesus as king, there was no question for them when they were warned in a dream to go home a different way to avoid Herod. I suspect that the different route probably took them much longer, was less convenient, possibly more dangerous even. Yet their allegiance was to Jesus the newborn King and so they took his direction.

- 10. Worship is more than just what we do at Church on a Sunday. William Temple, a former archbishop of Canterbury, once said, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination with the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." How do you show that kind of worship in your life?**
- 11. The Wisemen brought Jesus gifts, all things which come from God's creation which is one of his many gifts to us. What other gifts, physical, spiritual, or otherwise would you like to see have a place in our LifeWay expression of worship?**



Take a look at Romans 12:1-21

Life with Jesus as your king looks very different to the way the rest of the world encourages us to live. Life with Jesus is to walk with him, in his footsteps of servant leadership, as living sacrifices. This is what real worship is. Jesus did not get born on Christmas just so that you could receive a once for all payment for your sin (although that is certainly part of it), Jesus came to invite you into an ongoing journey of learning more of who he is, the unrelenting consistency of his love for you, and the fullness of life which you now already have through his death and resurrection. Unfortunately, so many Christians have bought into a belief that the church exists only for them. While God's people are all certainly blessed and sustained in the faith by participating in a church community, the real purpose of the church is to reach out to those who have not yet recognised the life transforming truth that Jesus was born for them. Real worship happens when we get to work living under the Lordship of Jesus and listening to him, rather than trying to convince him to listen to us.

12. How have your ideas about worship changed as you have read through this study? What will change in your life of worship because of it in 2021?

13. It is often through prayer and reading of Scripture that we come to understand more closely God's will and plan for us as his people. How might you find a little more time for these activities in 2021?



Each day we face a choice, of who or what we are going to allow to set the direction for our lives. We can humbly submit ourselves to the will of God, or we can place in his throne our own ego, power, success, wealth, you name it, there is someone who has let it direct the course of their lives. Only Jesus promises to lead us to our heavenly home with him for eternity. So how will you worship him with your life?

14. What will be the gift of worship that you will give to Jesus in 2021? How will you do it?



- Praise God for his holiness and majesty
- Thank Jesus for opening up the way for us to enter God's presence in praise and worship.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help your life be one of worship of King Jesus every day.



You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], may the light of Christ shine in you and through you. Amen.