

Sunday 5th January 2025: The Second Sunday of Christmas
For use by the Central Norfolk Circuit at 10.30 am or some other suitable time.



Theme for today is “Follow the star”

Our call to worship:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Hymn: Stf 199 H&P 101 Glory be to God on high, and peace on earth descend:

Prayers

God of endless light, you sent a star— rising from darkness, guiding seekers and sages, overwhelming us with joy. Let the splendour of your dawning light grow in us and in all the world until the whole creation shines with your glory, through Jesus Christ our light.

The grace of God has dawned upon the world through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for us to purify a people as his own.

Let us confess our sins.

Let us turn to the Lord and renew our faith in his promises by confessing our sins in penitence and trusting that in his grace, he will forgive us our sins. **Amen**

Introduction:

John Hull, one of our Local Preachers shares some thoughts about the visit of the wise men, Magi, kings, whatever title we want to give them. I find the birth narrative in the gospel according to St Matthew quite fascinating, there is no journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, no stable, no shepherds, and reading the story would suggest that Jesus was born in the home of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. This doesn't detract from the wonder of the incarnation, but reminds us that the baby born in Bethlehem was not simply the king of the Jews, but the God of the world and it seems that Matthew wants to include gentiles in his birth narrative.

Hymn: StF 227 H&P 123 Brightest and best of the sons of the morning

Bible readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6 Ephesians 3: 1-12 Matthew 2: 1-12

A message from a Circuit Friend John Hull, one of our Local Preachers reflects on the visit of the Magi

I've always loved maps. If I am going on a long journey by road, I like to have a clear idea of the route well in advance. If journeying by train, I can learn about the area as I look out of the window. My cars don't have GPS, but our smart phones give us the information we need when in a busy area and maps are not so helpful. At least we do not have to rely on following a star!

The Magi's visit to Jesus in Bethlehem is the final part of the Christmas story. Although our classic Nativity plays bring them into the stable, we do know that the visit was some time after the birth, as the Magi visited a house where the family was living.

We are not told much about these people, other than that they travelled a long way. They came from the east, so were not part of the Jewish faith. They were probably rich, to be able to undertake such a journey. Though they brought three gifts, we do not know for sure that there were only three of them. They almost certainly would have needed other people to enable them to complete their long journey. We presume they were astrologers, as they were following a star that they thought showed that a king had been born, a king of the Jews.

Following a star would seem to be fairly inexact science. When arriving in Jerusalem, the Magi needed to ask 'where is the one born king of the Jews'. Not surprisingly, this soon reached the ears of King Herod, and he was very concerned.

Obtaining information from the scriptures about a ruler being born in Bethlehem, he told this to the Magi, requesting that they let him know when they had found the child. On they went, found the Holy family, presented their gifts. And then returned by a different route, presumably having realised that Herod had a darker motive than just worshipping the child.

In our journey through life, both personally and in our church activities, perhaps we can see some similarities to the journey of the Magi. We are unlikely to follow a star, but we may have had an aim in life to follow a particular path. We could be determined to develop our faith, to follow and to worship Jesus. We could use the gifts we have been given by God for the benefit of others. Like the Magi, we may have been unsure at times, getting a bit lost on our way. We might have been pleased to have some advice from those who had more knowledge than us, guidance that enabled us to move on and to experience some of the wonderful moments of our faith. But, as with the Magi, we could also have found a time when we needed to change the way we were going, to take a different route, do something new.

The journey of the Magi might be a traditional part of the Christmas story, but it is much more than that. It's an object lesson for us all, and with a New Year ahead of us, something to which we could give serious thought.

Hymn: H&P 128

Wise men seeking Jesus

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God,
We gather as your people seeking your presence, your comfort and your love.

In this Epiphany Season of light Shine your light upon us – Into the recesses of our spirits,
Those places where we experience anxiety, depression, fear and despair.
Today, we lift up in particular all among us who are grieving.

God of grace and healing, Shine your light upon us – into those places of conflict and tension
In our families,
In our friendships,
In our work and community relationships.
May your light be a healing balm, bringing with it forgiveness and reconciliation.

God of connection; Shine your light upon us – onto the common human ties that bind all of your people together:
Neighbour and stranger, friend and enemy alike.
In your light, remind us that you have created us all of us in your image, unique and beloved by you.

God of power and mercy, Shine your light upon our nation and its leaders that they may govern justly and wisely.
Taking into account the needs and concerns not just of the most wealthy and powerful, but especially of those who are poor,
Those who struggle with physical and mental illness,
Those who fear for their families because of financial hardship or immigration status,
Those who are forgotten and forsaken.

God of compassion and peace, Shine your light on all the places around the world where violence and war are found:
In Jerusalem, Istanbul and Baghdad;
In Aleppo and Ukraine and South Sudan
And in places we cannot name or do not know.
With your light bring peace to those who languish in fear, violence and despair.

God of goodness, we thank you for the light that shines – thank you for the light that shines through this community, young and old, who remind us of your presence in tears and laughter, teaching and learning, order and disruption, work and play.

Shine your light upon us and around us, and within us, that we, too, may be a light to the world.

Offer to God your offertory for the week, and say the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn: StF 224 H&P 121 as with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold.

Closing blessing –

May he, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill our hearts with his light and joy and peace; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit remain with us always. **Amen**