

Like buses? Matthew 2

Three kings came riding, riding from the East, the children of Duxford primary school sang at the Christingle services in church just before the end of the last term... And in a more adult fashion, later today we will be singing *We three kings of orient are ...* because, like buses, the strange visitors to the home of the infant Jesus come in threes... of course they do... Well ... not really... listen carefully to Matthew's gospel and what you get is *wise men from the East*... No camels or horses... perhaps they came on foot instead of riding – who knows? No number (there's more than one but that's as much detail as you get) and not royal but *wise* (not that I am saying the two things are mutually exclusive...). Magi...is the plural of magus... priests of an ancient Persian religion... or even wizards...(it's where our word magic comes from)

Actually, lots of the modern translations miss another lovely feature of the text... here we have not just wise men from the east, but *Behold!* Wise men from the east

Why *behold* (or look or wow or similar)? Because their arrival is out of the ordinary... it's in tune with elements like the star that guides them in (roughly) the right direction and the dreams that warn them once they've completed their mission. As a sign that something amazing is happening... that someone amazing is here...

I wonder whether they created a bit of a stir simply arriving in Jerusalem... perhaps they are exotic figures, richly dressed, speaking in an unfamiliar language, accompanied by a band of followers to carry the gifts... just like in all the lovely renaissance paintings that adorn our Christmas cards? Even if their physical presence has no impact, their question does: '*Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?*

It's a question that strikes fear into the heart of the present king, Herod, and *all Jerusalem with him ...* which I think means his top team ... all the people in Jerusalem *who count*... all the movers and shakers... all the people whose position might be threatened by a *new* king.

we observed his star at its rising, the magi continue *and have come to pay him homage*.

In contrast to the many people who had turned up in Jerusalem over the centuries announcing a new regime... these people don't come with an army but with *curiosity* and an *attitude of worship*

Curiosity...

We observed his star...which tells us the Magi are already scanning the sky for data, for guidance...they are open to possibility... they are watching out

for what God is doing in the world... they might not name God in the same way, but they are looking...

However, they are also guided by their understanding of how the world works, so they go to the place where one might expect a royal birth, the capital city, Jerusalem. Which is exactly where the holy child is *not*. They gain some insight from Herod's advisers, who search the scriptures and find that Bethlehem is the right place. Then, once they turn toward the city of David, the star - and the *behold!* - appears again... *and Behold there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising*, the star they have seen in their distant homeland leads them to the infant king and his mother.

What star do we follow... how do we read the signs in the world around us? It's easy to be caught up in the doom loop of our 24/7 news cycle and not see the sources of joy and the hope around us. It's easy to focus on what the world around us values and not attend to the values that Jesus demonstrates and teaches in his life, death and resurrection

The magi, as they diligently follow the star, remind us about setting our sights by Jesus, the morning star...

So curiosity... and also...

Worship

We have come to pay him homage... We are here because this new king matters, they say.

If you're listening for resonances from the old stories, you might be thinking of the Queen of Sheba, bearing gifts for Solomon... there's only one of her, though... Matthew's gospel tells us there are several magi (some traditions say 10, rather than our usual 3). And unlike the Queen of Sheba, I guess these are ideas people, not so much part of the political power base as thought leaders...they are people who are more interested in hearts and minds...

Perhaps that explains why they are *come to pay him homage...* they don't need to stand on their dignity, they don't jealously guard their status, but they lean in, they kneel, just like our lovely crib figures, who have quietly, secretly moved across the church since Christmas Day, to be present at the stable.

What my text has translated as *pay homage* is the usual word for worship...it's attitudinal and it's physical... it involves kneeling... making oneself smaller in the presence of someone greater

Even if you aren't a new year's resolution kind of person, the start of another year is a great time for a bit of a reset. So how about this: begin the year in an attitude of worship... if not actually kneeling, then bowing the

knees of our hearts... acknowledging that we don't have all the answers...
recognising and giving thanks for God's loving care in our lives and in our
world...