

HOME GROUP QUESTIONS : The Magi (Matthew 2 v1-12)

1. The Magi were foreigners and from the viewpoint of the Jews unbelievers. They were not part of God's chosen people. Yet they saw things that the 'religious' people failed to see. They recognised God was at work when the Jews did not. Do you think God sometimes works through non-Christians today (whether they belong to another faith group or are agnostic or are even atheists) ? Can you name any examples of that?

I believe that Christianity offers by far the best way of knowing God because of the witness and work of Jesus, but are there things we can learn about the nature of God or about worshipping God or about daily living out our faith that we can learn from other faiths?

2. Despite all their regular attendance at their synagogues, despite all their repeated reading of the scriptures, despite all their efforts to live life as God intended, the Jews had got their concept of what God wanted wrong. They had **no** expectation that the promised Messiah would be born in poverty and that he would be the Prince of Peace. They were expecting a warrior Messiah - hence Herod's response : 'This child must be killed because he's a potential threat to my political power'.

Sometimes we think God should be doing what we want, but actually God is greater than our wants . If the Jews had listened to one prophet's voice they might have envisaged a different kind of Messiah. Look at the view expressed by the prophet Isaiah (chap 53). Why do you think the Jews preferred to think of the Messiah as an all-conquering hero?

3. It has been said that we should look on the Bible as 'recorded conversations between God and mankind for us to look into, examine and investigate'. Do you see the Bible like that? Do you examine and investigate what's in it or do you just read it? Or not even read it? Just rely on others to tell you what to believe? The Magi were seekers after truth They wanted to understand what was going on. Their quest for truth began when they saw a new star in the sky. That discovery led them to ask questions. To those questions they applied first their own learning. That did not provide all the answers. Then they sought knowledge from other sources and ultimately that led them to visit the religious authorities in Jerusalem. It was by drawing on the learning of the Jews that they discovered the potential end of their journey lay in Bethlehem. But that too did not give them all they needed to know. They then went to see for themselves. And they saw in the Christchild someone who was going to shed light on the true nature of God.

Do you feel your life is a journey of faith?

4. The Magi's gifts are usually looked at as symbols:

Gold was a symbol of the child's royal status. They saw in Jesus a future King. Not just the expected King that the Jews had been waiting for, but a King who would be in charge of all nations. **Frankincense** was a symbol of holiness and of priesthood. It was traditionally burned as an offering to bring about divine forgiveness and blessing.

Myrrh was used for healing purposes and to embalm bodies and so the gift can be seen as either foretelling that Christ would be a healer or predicting his death.

People can get a lot from the use of symbols and Churches are full of both physical and sacramental symbols. What religious symbols are important to you and why?

5. I offered a practical alternative as to why the Magi gave what they gave. They wanted the child to survive. Offering gold would have been a way of giving Mary and Joseph financial support to cope

with becoming refugees from Herod. And burning frankincense and myrrh together was a primitive way of offering some protection from disease. Though not understood at the time scientists now know burning frankincense and myrrh together forms a synergistic antimicrobial combination.

Do you find this a helpful way of looking at the gifts? And, if so, why?

6.

What can I give him?
Poor as I am
If I were a shepherd
I would give a lamb
If I were a wise man
I would do my part
But what I can I give him
Give him my heart.

What does it mean to give Jesus your heart?

You might want to look at Ezekiel 36 v26 and 2 Corinthians 5 v17 . These passages talk of the importance of exchanging our heart for a God-given one and of becoming a new person.

A Prayer to Share

Lord, help us to find you today in our world just as the Magi found Jesus in theirs.

And keep us travelling on the path towards a greater understanding of you.

May we give you the gift of our hearts just as they gave their hearts to you.

We can do that symbolically through the way we worship, particularly when we take communion together, but let us never forget to show our love in practical ways, in the way we behave towards others, in the way we offer help to others.

Help us, O Lord. to offer our lives in your service by giving us a new God-given heart . Give us the strength we need and may all the good that we do be to your glory. Amen

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