

Service –Langbank 09/01/2022

Introit

Welcome

Intimations (Welly Collection)

Call to Worship

And I said to the man who stood at the
gate of the year

“ Give me a light that I may tread safely
into the unknown ”

And he replied:

“ Go out into the darkness and put your
hand into the Hand of God. That shall be
to you better than light and safer than a
known way”

So I went forth and, finding the Hand of
God , trod gladly into the night

Let us worship God by singing the First
hymn

CH4 161 O God our help in ages past

Prayer
Lord

We rejoice that we are gathered here.
This day is a new day that has never
been before

This year is a new year. We open the
door of our hearts to You. Enter, Lord
Christ we pray. We share our joy in Your
coming. You have given us life and we
welcome You.

Even though the day be laden
Our tasks dreary and our strength small
A song keeps singing in our hearts
For we know that we are yours
We are part of you. You are kin to us
And all our times are in Your Hands
Loving Lord, we praise you for you have
created us and redeemed us. You know
each one of us and care for us. You call
us by name to come and worship you.
You draw your people together to be with
you Make us aware of your presence now

that we might give ourselves in worship
to you

Lord, in your kindness you promise to
strengthen us for all times and
circumstances. Forgive us for those times
when we have not sought your help but
have relied on our own resources. for
those times of trial when we have failed
you because we did not look to you. Yet
through your mercy we can move on
learning to walk in Your truth, putting our
stubborn independence behind us and
turning again to You

Lord,

You have many tasks for us, some are
easy and some challenge us. You call us
to step into the unknown as we face the
uncertainties of the future. Help us to be
obedient to your will and to trust always
in your love as we say together the words
that Jesus taught us

Our Father,

Who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever

Amen

Reading : Matthew Chap 2 v 1-12

CH4 326 As with gladness men of old

Sermon

We have entered – but only just a New Year, a new beginning for some as they make resolutions that will change their lifestyles.

A look at the 10 most popular resolutions reveals that losing weight is number one , followed by giving up smoking, then there's taking up exercise. The remainder of the top ten mainly deal with money, budgets, savings, earning more, finding a better job. Only 3 are about personal growth, becoming more mature and more patient with others and getting organised.

The tradition of making resolutions at the beginning of a year goes back to 153 B.C. Janus a mythical king of early Rome, was placed at the head of the calendar. With two faces he could look back on past events and forward to the future. He became the symbol of resolutions. Many

Romans looked for forgiveness from their enemies and exchanged gifts before the beginning of each year. For them it meant a new start.

But before we plunge into the challenge of a new year today's gospel reading keeps us focused on the Christmas Story and for many Christians throughout the world January 6th is when they celebrate Christmas with the coming of the wise men

Traditionally we remove all the Christmas decorations on that day but as I was reminded by someone on the radio the church season of Epiphany lasts until February 2nd so strictly speaking our tinsel, lights, trees and cards should remain until then. Perhaps it would brighten up the darkest days of our winter.

Going back to our reading we always seem to be in such a hurry to tell the Nativity story that we have the wise men appearing at the same time as the

shepherds while in actual fact they came much later . Who were they anyway? Matthew's description in the NIV Bible is brief – they were Magi from the East who studied the stars and came from the East Other translations of the Bible call them wise or astrologers.

Some scholars have concluded that the ancient Magi were a hereditary priesthood of the Medes who came from Persia which we know as Iran. They had a profound and extraordinary religious knowledge. Their ancestors knew the Hebrew prophet Daniel and it is said that he entrusted a vision he had of the Coming of the Messiah (to be announced in due time by a star) to them

Throughout the centuries people have decided that there were three of them because of the gifts but it was unlikely that three men would undertake such a hazardous journey on their own, the names of Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar

have been given to them but we have no real evidence of the accuracy of this.

However whoever these men were we can still learn from their actions. God reached out to them using a communication that they would understand. He had a purpose for them in the Nativity story but they had the freewill to dismiss what they observed in the night skies or by using rational thought decide that it was all too risky and potentially dangerous to leave the comfort of the wealthy homes and step out into the unknown - but they did

There have many people since who have risked everything to find Christ Bilquis Sheikh was one of them. She had the most comfortable of lives. Part of a conservative Muslim family that for over 400 hundred years had been landed gentry. She had acted as hostess to diplomats and industrialists from all over the world and had been accustomed to shopping trips to London and Paris. When

her husband left her Bilquis retreated to a substantial home near the Himalayan mountains. Much of her extended family lived nearby and she became the principal carer for her grandson. Financially she was secure and she had servants to cook and clean for her. Yet Bilquis found herself through several mystical experiences and dreams being drawn towards Christianity. At first she resisted because in becoming a Christian she risked not only being cut off from her family but the possibility that she would be killed. However Bilquis decided to take the risk and with the help of the few Christians in her neighbourhood became a Christian. The rest of her life was spent travelling all over the world sharing what God had done in her life.

Two thousand years before The Magi did not come looking for the Christ through preaching, liturgy, sacrament, a welcoming congregation, or a vital social ministry. They came seeking the Christ after studying the night skies.

There has been much discussion about the Star that Matthew wrote about. Some have said it was a comet, or a supernova, or a rare conjunction of the planets. Or was the Star of Bethlehem a miracle star?

Hubert J. Bernhard, who for many years was a lecturer at San Francisco's Morrison Planetarium made a series of four LP record albums in 1967, trying to educate and popularize astronomy. They were called "The Planetarium Lecture Series" and one of his topics dealt with the Star of Bethlehem. Near the end of his lecture Bernhard placed this discussion into perspective when he said:

"If you accept the story told in the Bible as the literal truth, then the Christmas Star could not have been a natural apparition. Its movement in the sky and its ability to stand above and mark a single building; these would indicate that it was not a normal phenomenon, but a supernatural sign. One given from on

high and one that science will never be able to explain."

Indeed, perhaps this is a mystery that modern science can never truly unravel. Astronomy has taken us as far as it can go. The final decision is ours alone.

The wise men were not just led to Jesus by the star that they saw in the East. In fact, the Wise Men did not find the one they sought, they did not discover Jesus and worship him, until they had done one other very important thing until they had consulted the holy Scriptures, until they had asked Herod, and Herod had asked the chief priests, and teachers of the law, where the Christ was to be born.

The same thing that was true for the wise men, is true for us we may know the way to Christ, what direction to travel in, and we may have a general idea of where he lies , but until we, like the wise men, consult the scriptures or those who know the scriptures well, we cannot find

Jesus and worship him as we would like to.

And so guided by the star and the words of a Biblical prophet the wise men reached their destination and they brought gifts as they knelt in worship

Gold Frankincense and Myrrh
First there was Gold – this rare and precious metal

Gold is always at the top – athletes always aim for the gold medal
Gold is held in highest esteem – a gold band is the token of love and commitment given and received by husband and wife in marriage
And when that marriage lasts and endures for almost a lifetime it is celebrated by a golden wedding

Bernard Levin , the journalist once wrote an article about gold

Why is gold so important – he asked

It is not because
Gold cannot be tarnished
Nor is it because
Gold shines with a glow that cannot be
matched by any other metals
Nor is it the fact that one ounce of Gold
can be beaten into a sheet of 100 square
feet or stretched into 50 miles of thin
gold wire

Gold is important and is valued because
it is the one metal all mankind bows
down to

The wise men, these clever and
intelligent philosophers brought gold – a
present fit for a King
The child in the manger was the King of
kings and Lord of Lords. God himself had
come to live as part of our world

The second gift was frankincense

A group of young children took part in a
nativity play – the three wise men

entered at the appropriate time – they each had a sentence to say

I bring gold said the first

I bring myrrh said the second

The third child who had the frankincense struggled with this difficult and unfamiliar word but anxious to play his part he knelt before the manger and said

“ Frankie sent this”

Frankincense was used in the temple – it was a symbol of prayer and pointed to a relationship with God through Jesus. Christianity is first and foremost about relationships rather than rules.

And then there was the third gift – Myrrh. This was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus is the only man who has ever chosen to be born and he is one of the few who has ever chosen to die. He came to give his life as a ransom for many. Payment of a ransom ensures the freedom of the person held hostage. Because of Jesus we are no longer held

hostage to sin, we are forgiven and we have the freedom to change.

The visit of the wise men is described by the word Epiphany and half the Christian world celebrate Christmas not on December 25th but on January 6th which is designated as the date of Epiphany but there is another definition of epiphany –

An epiphany mean a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something. In the story of the magi we discover that God accepts real people, just the way they are. That people do not have to be right, holy and perfect before they come to meet Jesus. We discover that it was by the grace of God that the Christ child was born to accept the worship of those who come to him with humble hearts and open spirits. We discover that the Christ child is even now in our midst waiting for us to humbly seek and obey him.

The wise men bowed down before the Christ child and it is sometimes in the very act of worship itself that we can see things from a new perspective

We worship by prayer, praise and service yet perhaps there is another way

I remember reading about a couple Richard and Anne who lived in a street where many high ranking academics lived. They were the sole Christian worshippers at their end of the street. That fact was never an issue or an antagonism to their neighbours, but whenever it came up it was made plain that Richard and Anne were considered rather superstitious and naive for their faith.

Then a child was born to their immediate neighbours – two prominent academics for whom career choices meant their firstborn came rather late in life. The whole street rejoiced in this child. One early evening the proud parents knocked

at Richard and Anne's door with their baby. Ushered in, their question was a direct and simple one: 'We don't know what it is you've got, and we don't think we could ever have it for ourselves, but we want our daughter to have it. Please tell us how she can be baptised.' Richard and Anne had shown Jesus in their living.

I'm not a Richard or Anne— to my knowledge. Too often I feel guilty about that. It's a sadness that those we love don't see in our living the quality and the difference that that couple saw in Richard and Anne. Yet we do ourselves a disservice. As I said, those in whom I see Jesus often don't see Jesus in themselves. Might that not also be the case for you, for me? Who knows what influence for Christ we shed?

Show Christ as we may – neither dismayed by our apparent failures nor over-bearing in our earnestness. Rather live as one in whom Christ may live and

leave the outcomes to him. Live in the ordinary way with Christ as our inspiration and let the showing, the manifestation, be his concern.

Your part, my part – to speak, to care, to pray, as one who has seen Christ and recognised him.

That is our worship and our testimony.

Amen and thanks

CH4 328 Wise men, they came to look for wisdom

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Glory to you, Trinity of love,
for your life pours out towards us,
generous and gracious.
We feel your strength in our bones,
energy to meet the day.
Glory to you, O Trinity of love,
for your love gathers us in towards you.
We feel your warmth,
your compassion healing our
fragmentation,
making us whole.
For your love for us,
cherishing the best in us,
enabling us to respond,
we give you thanks.

In faith we journey into another year and
we pray for those who cannot look
forward with any sort of confidence
because poverty confines them to a day
by day existence, just battling to survive.
Help us to help them in any way we can
by giving of our plenty or making do with

less of the world's resources. We think of all who are hurting this week Lord.

Who came among us as the Prince of peace, grant that this world knows a real and sustained peace. We pray for a peaceful end to the conflicts
We pray for those in pain or distress, physically, emotionally or spiritually, that they may hold on to their faith through all the bad times, trusting in your love which never fails

We bring before you all families represented here especially those who have troubles that they may not be damaged through their suffering but rather grow in compassion and understanding

Knowing that you hear our prayers we pray in silence our own individual prayers

Father we ask all this through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen

CH4 237 Look forward in faith

Benediction

As we leave this time of worship, let us be filled with hope, trusting in our Lord always whatever challenges we may face and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with and remain with us now and forever more