

# Hope for the New Year

MATTHEW 2:1-16 — Revd Guy



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**2** Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they

departed to their own country by another way.

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Matthew 2:1-16 (ESV)

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## Introduction

After the great joy of Christmas - being able to celebrate the birth of our saviour Jesus Christ at outdoor carol services (where we could actually sing!), the celebration of the Eucharist on Christmas day, and presents and good food aplenty - the New Year seems to have put a damper on it rather too quickly. With the latest Coronavirus restrictions here in Somerset meaning we are no longer able to meet others, or enjoy a drink at a cafe or pub this new year has started not with a bang, but a whimper.

But today I hope to bring you a message of joy, a message that can sustain our faith that was re-kindled at Christmas, a message that we can hold onto during these times because today we celebrate Epiphany!

## A sequel we can enjoy

I really love the gap between Christmas and New Year. In those six days there is nothing I enjoy more than catching up with some of my most loved films. Unfortunately, since having children I do not get quite so much time to do that, but given that at that time of year there is always an film on the television for the entire family to enjoy the tradition has been reborn somewhat. Often there are some well-loved classics that appear such as *Chitty Chitty Bang-Bang* or *The Sound of Music*. Other times we are left with sequels which, more often than not, fail to live up to the original.

But if the story of Christmas was a film then the arrival of the wise men at Epiphany would be a sequel that we can all enjoy for in it God's plan of salvation is shown to be for all humanity. The original story with the shepherds, the full inns,

the songs of angels, and the birth of Jesus is great - but it only reveals the birth of Jesus to the nation of Israel. Only they know of the saviour, in fact, only those in the little town of Bethlehem do!

But God's salvation plan was not solely for the people of Israel but for all humanity. Jesus' birth was not to be confined to the narrow limits of his father's birthplace for it needed to be recognised by all as Christ was born for all. So, a star was put in the sky and revealed to

three wise men the significance of it so that they might behold the saviour of the world. But although we celebrate this event around twelve days after Christmas, it is likely the wise men had to wait up to two years before they arrived. This is the great sequel to the Christmas story, the revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles showing he came to save the whole world including you and me. It is truly a sequel for us all to enjoy.

**“Jesus’ birth was not to be confined to the narrow limits of his father’s birthplace for it needed to be recognised by all as Christ was born for all.”**

## **A fool-proof plan**

The wise men followed the star recognising it to signify the birth of the king of the Jews and so naturally went to Jerusalem, where the current king of the Jews, Herod, was in residence. Out of fear, Herod suspected that his successor had been born and so hatched a plan to use the wise men to locate the child for himself and to kill him. But warned by an angel, the wise men do not return to Herod and Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee to Egypt before Herod's plan to kill all children under two in Bethlehem and the surrounding region (Matt. 2:12-16).

The thwarting of Herod's despicable actions, born out of fear and jealousy, show that nothing can overthrow God's divine plan. It was not God's plan for Jesus to die at this time, by Herod's hand. First he must reveal the Gospel, the good news of salvation for all humanity; establish the Kingdom of God and reveal it through miracles and healings; and then and only then, could Jesus die and then defeat death three days later by rising again. Herod was not able to prevent God's plan from coming to completion, in fact nothing can prevent the completion of God's plans and so we move into the New Year knowing that God is in control.

## **Hope for the year ahead**

The year that has just passed has been a hard one for all of us and with things as they currently are it is hard to look ahead with any optimism. But, in and amongst all this doom and gloom, there is hope - and no i'm not just talking about the Coronavirus vaccines! Firstly, within the story of the wise men we see that God loves each and every one of us because the wise men represent God's sal-

vation plan being revealed not just to his chosen people Israel, but to the whole world. God's story is not just for the religious or the good, but is for everyone - you are all invited to be part of God's story of salvation.

Secondly, we can hold onto the fact that this salvation is assured. Whilst we are surrounded by uncertainty regarding our health or livelihoods in the midst of this pandemic the story of the wise men reveals the certainty that God is in control. No human, no nothing in all creation, not even COVID-19, can prevent God's plans from coming to completion and so we can be sure that God's gift of for our salvation cannot be stopped or taken away from us.

As we look ahead to what the year might have in store for us, I hope that through it all you can hold onto the truth of God's love for you, his desire for your salvation, and his supremacy over everything. Amen.