

Make Room for Jesus in 2023



?? Have you taken your Christmas tree down yet?

Some people get very traditional about this sort of thing – you should not put up your tree before December and you should keep it up until the 12 day of Christmas – 6th January.

Easter Eggs in Checkers yesterday!!



?? What day of Christmas are we on today according to the song? 8th Day – 8 maids a milking!

Where does the tradition come from? It was an old church tradition to celebrate the visit of the Magi to visit Jesus on Epiphany – 12 days after the birth of Jesus. Actually, we do not know for sure how long after Jesus' birth this visit took place – we know that Mary and Joseph had moved to a house at the time of the Magi's visit, and we know that Herod targeted babies under 2 years old when he was trying to get rid of Jesus but other than that we don't have exact days.

As I was preparing for this morning, I really did not want to do a Christmas bible passage again – it's a New Year, time for something new, but I kept coming back

again and again to this story of the Magi – the wise men. Maybe there is something they can bring to us as we start out on this New year?

Matthew 2.1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ “ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ” ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” ⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

There are a few characters in the story that need a bit of a bio.

Who were the Magi? We know them from tradition as the Wise men or the three kings. Tradition even names them Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar



Yet the bible does not give them names or even a number. When I grew up hearing the Christmas carol, 'We three Kings of Orient are' I thought of Chinese kings. In fact, the term Magi more likely refers to learned priest or scholars from Persia – modern day Iraq & Iran. For about 200 years (from 536 to 332 BC) The Medo-Persian Empire ruled over Israel

The bible books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther & the prophets prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are all set in the context of the Medo-Persian Empire. During this period the captives of Judah were permitted to go back to Jerusalem and restore their ancient city and its temple.

The Medes and Persians were known for their love of astrology, science, and magic – hence the term the wise men! Knowing that they were from a nation that formerly oppressed Israel makes for interesting reading when it comes to the second character – King Herod.

The Magi somehow ended up in Jerusalem after following some astrological phenomena – the star they are tracing seemed to disappear, so they headed to King Herod's palace – the obvious place to find a new king. Herod was given the title King of the Jews, but He was in fact not the most Jewish Jew in the world. He was third generation Jew and through his Father Antipater he was given the position of Prefect of Galilee. He was an interesting character – he was successful in squashing guerrilla warfare against Rome (his ultimate boss). He was clever and a capable warrior and diplomat. He was also cruel, merciless, and obsessed with keeping his position – to the point that he turned on his own family – that makes for some gruesome reading if you are into Horrid Histories.

The arrival of the Magi would have freaked Herod out on two fronts – one would be the visit from the impressive men from a former enemy – it is likely that they travelled with a whole entourage – not just three men and their camels! Also, the threat of a new king – someone who may have a more rightful claim to the title of King of the Jews. Herod held the title but was not qualified by birth to hold the position – he was an Edomite by decent! Yet, he clearly knew from his scholars' investigations that the threat was not from a grown man, but from a baby. But he reacted in the extreme. He tried to use the Magi to find out the exact location of the new King, but thankfully God bypassed the need for Herod's help and dealt directly with the Magi. The star reappeared and the Magi were warned not to return via Herod.

What can we learn from the Magi for this new year?

- **Make an effort to look for Jesus in 2023**

While the Magi probably did not travel by camel from China, like I thought as a child, they did come a long way.

A trip of 400 miles (about 640 KM) would have taken the magi two to three weeks on camels or around a month's journey by foot. If we assume that they travelled by night to be guided by the star, this will mean that their journey would have taken even longer time – over 40 days. Therefore, we can conclude that the magi might have

travelled from the “east,” a vast area in Mesopotamia, which could range from 400 to 700 miles.

That is quite a journey and quite a commitment.

Can I be really honest with you – I am speaking about myself here, not you. I think I have grown lazy in my faith. Life for the past few years has become quite limited and routine – more about survival than big adventures or efforts. What room is there for me to find Jesus this year when the routine and the to-do list seem so full up. What gap is there in the day for Jesus? The Magi remind me to make an effort to seek Jesus. King Herod was 9km down the road from Bethlehem and made no effort – he had the experts investigate it, he had the Magi do the leg work.

Matthew 2.⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

What can I do this year to seek Jesus? How about you? We can’t outsource our faith to others – relying on second hand faith. There is so many great resources out there – but none of them can replace the leg work of bible reading for ourselves, prayer, listening to the holy spirit and plan old obedience. (Maybe it is committing to attend Bibel school this year)? Do you believe that Jesus is worth the effort? It amazes me the effort we put into different things when we want to – is Jesus worth your time and effort this year?

I can’t promise you much for 2023, but I can promise you that if you make an effort to seek and worship Jesus you are not wasting your time:

James 4.8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.

- **Trust God to lead you in 2023**

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

....”⁹ **After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.**¹⁰

...¹² **And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**

I think we all long for God to speak to us and direct us so clearly – but I wonder how many of us would have noticed something new in the sky? As I said before life has become quite the routine for me. I was looking to see if there is a word for when you drive home or to work and it is so routine that you actually can’t remember the journey: some people call it ‘**highway hypnosis**’ when you drive from one place to another and have no recollection of doing it. I sometimes think with me that God would have to do a song and a dance in front of me to interrupt my routine! Yet these foreign astrologers were convinced that something amazing has happened and they wanted to be in on it. Three times we read in their story of how God led them in different ways – twice they followed the star and lastly God warned them through a dream. God speaks, He is active and living – He still speaks today through His

word, through the Holy Spirit, dreams and through other people. I love that the Magi's diversion to the palace allowed them to have their belief that a new king was born confirmed by scripture – God's word lined up with the leading of the star and their dream – a healthy practice! Will you let God lead you in 2023? I believe fully, with all my being that God is alive and speaks to us today - do you? But I also believe that some of us (me) are often too busy to notice and listen. Or that we really don't want Him to speak because we might be inconvenienced by what He asks? **Will you make room for God's voice in your life in 2023? Ask Holy Spirit to speak to you and lead you.**

- **Worship the whole Jesus in 2023**

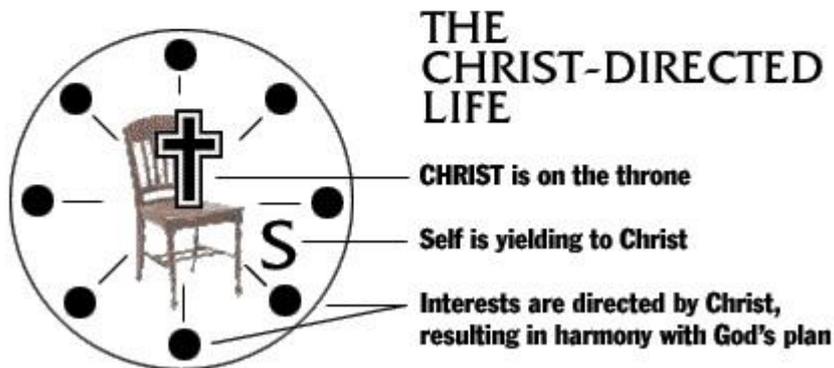
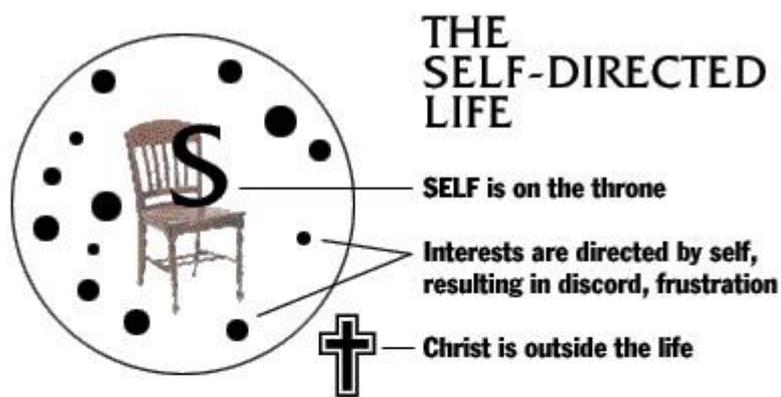
Finally, the worship and gifts of the Magi remind me this year to worship the whole Jesus, not just parts that I like – let me explain:

Matthew 2. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These were strange gifts for a Baby – not so practical (although they probably funded the escape to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous rage). But the gifts spoke of who Jesus is – why He is to be worshipped:

Gold – for a king.

Gold is obvious. Its valuable and a great way to store wealth. Gold was the Old Testament symbol of kings. Thus, when the magi brought gold to honour Jesus, they were proclaiming him king. More, they were proclaiming him to be the ultimate king the "king of kings."



(Bill Bright's Four Spiritual Laws) – who is on the throne in your life?

Frankincense – for a priest or for worship

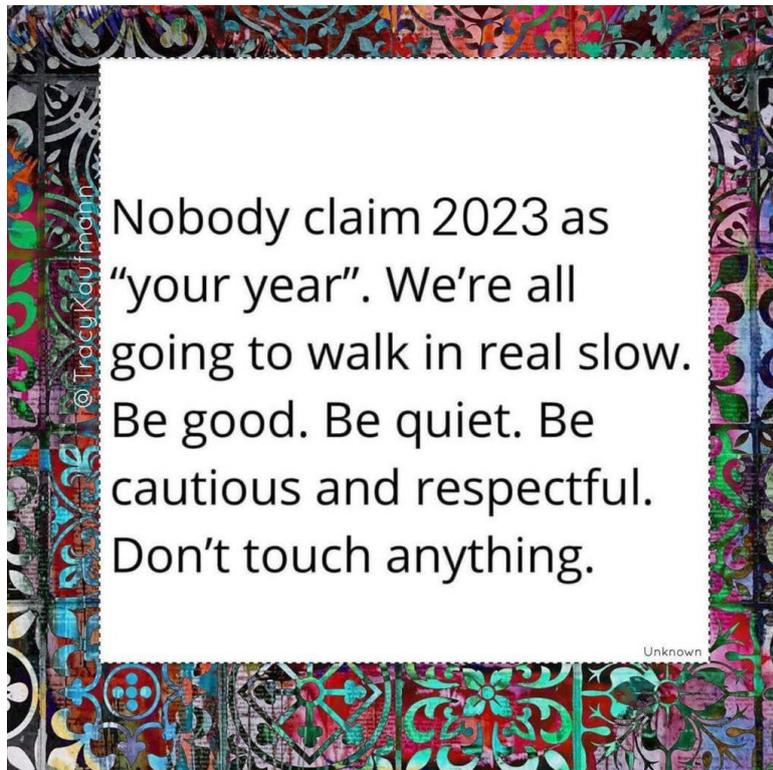
When the magi brought frankincense to Jesus, they proclaimed him to be their high priest. Frankincense & myrrh are both tree resins, or gummy sap that oozes from the bark of two different trees native to the Arabian Peninsula and Northeast Africa. Incisions are made in the bark of the tree during important times of year, and the sap pours out. The Frankincense reminds us both that Jesus is the great High Priest but also of His holiness -He is the only one who can stand before God on our behalf.

Myrrh – for burial

The last gift of the magi, myrrh, is the most solemn, but no less prophetic. An embalming oil, Myrrh symbolized the Christ's mortality as a man. Imagine bringing a gift to the Messiah proclaiming his suffering and death.

In their gifts the Magi acknowledged different aspects of Jesus' person – He is King of Kings – worthy of costly worship. He is the great High Priest, the one who is the intermediary between us and God. He also the one who died – who sacrificed His life for ours. It is easy to focus on one aspect of Jesus – for example He understands our weaknesses because He knows what it is like to be a man like us. But sometime we focus too much on that to the point we forget that He is Lord and that He is Holy. The gifts of the Magi remind us of the fullness of Jesus.

So here we are – 2023



Just like every year that we have encountered we truly do not know what lies ahead – whether good or bad. We are not in control and we will wear ourselves out if we think we are. There are some things we can do this year though:

- Make an effort to seek Jesus
- Trust God to lead you
- Worship the fullness of Jesus – don't limit Him

As we head into a time of communion, I think this is a really fitting way to start a new year.

Luke 22. 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

At Communion we look back – we look back to what Jesus has done for us on the cross and why He needed to come.

We look to today – the present and we acknowledge that we struggle to follow Jesus every day. We make mistakes and we are so thankful for His forgiveness

We look to the future – knowing that it is in God's hands and the ultimately one day we will worship God in heaven and see His full glory – that pain and suffering will be over.

Hebrews 13. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.