

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING

CHRISTMAS SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

10.30 AM 29TH DECEMBER 2024

LED BY REV DR JULIA BINNEY & SELINA CHAN PREACHING

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

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THEME: The God of Wisdom (Matthew 2:1-12)

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Isaiah 60:1-3*

Arise, shine, for your light has come; the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,

But the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come into your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

MP 110:

Darkness like a shroud covers the earth;

Evil like a cloud covers the people.

But the Lord will rise upon you,

And His glory will appear on you—

Nations will come to your light.

Arise, shine, your light has come,

The glory of the Lord has risen on you!

Arise, shine, your light has come,

Jesus the Light of the world has come.

Children of the light, be clean and pure.

Rise, you sleepers, Christ will shine on you.

Take the Spirit's flashing two-edged sword

And with faith declare God's mighty word;

Stand up and in His strength be strong.

Here among us now, Christ the light

Kindles brighter flames in our trembling hearts.

Living Word, our lamp, come guide our feet

As we walk as one in light and peace,

Till justice and truth shine like the sun.

Like a city bright so let us blaze;
Lights in every street turning night to day.
And the darkness shall not overcome
Till the fulness of Christ's kingdom comes,
Dawning to God's eternal day.

GRAHAM KENDRICK © 1985 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

CHRISTMAS SUNDAY WORSHIP:

We worship the God of time and eternity who existed before creation leapt into being:
our beginning, our present and our future.

We worship the God who has been with us in this last year:
our beginning, our present and our future.

We worship the God who will be with us as our stories continue:
our beginning, our present and our future.

As wise men from various nations followed the star,
so great and wonderful God, we seek you today.

As they were called to worship before the Christ child,
**open our ears to your call, open our eyes to your glory and open our hearts to your love
that we might worship you today and always.**

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION AND THANKSGIVING

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever and ever. Amen.**

FAMILY TIME: Is it all in the stars?

THE CHRISTMAS STORY: The Journey of the Wise Men

BP&W 189:

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star.

*O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light.*

Solo: Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

O Star of wonder, star of night...

Solo: Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising
Worship Him, God most high.

O Star of wonder, star of night...

Solo: Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes of life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

O Star of wonder, star of night...

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice!
Heaven sings 'Alleluia' -
'Alleluia' the earth replies.

O Star of wonder, star of night...

ORIGINAL: JOHN H HOPKINS (1820-91)



PRAYER OF DEDICATION

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:1-8, 13-20

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: Matthew 2:1-12

THOUGHTS OF A WISE MAN:

When we first saw the star there was so much excitement among my fellow gazers about what it might mean and how to explain its appearance. Our hearts were beating so fast. What was visible, predictable and understandable served only to make us more aware that this was something indefinable and mysterious.

We travelled, we followed, we enquired. Then the star showed us the way and we almost fell over ourselves in our haste to reach Bethlehem.

We found the baby. It was all quiet - no crowds, no family bustling around offering their congratulations, no throng of excited visitors, just an ordinary house - so ordinary we thought we'd gone to the wrong place. But we went in anyway, and the moment we saw the child, we knew he was the One - not just king of the Jews, but a prince among princes, a ruler among rulers, a King of kings!

Then our journey took us home; the star faded. Report made, case closed.

But our hearts would never again beat without that rush of hope-life-fear-joy that we knew when we first saw that star. It redefined, with one glimmer of light, our life's meaning. What captivated us then has stayed with us. What we saw and experienced in that ordinary house continues to have an extraordinary effect on our lives. We still sense the wordless and indefinable call to seek beyond what

can be found, to gaze through what can be seen, to ask more than can be answered... and to worship. So now we live always for what was embodied there that day.

BP&W 190:

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
Dawn on our darkness and lend us your aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining;
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall.
Angels adore Him, in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all.

Say, shall we yield Him, in costly devotion,
Fragrance of Edom, and offerings divine;
Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,
Myrrh from the forest and gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
Vainly with gifts would His favour secure;
Richer by far is the heart's adoration;
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
Dawn on our darkness and lend us your aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

REGINALD HEBER (1783-1826)



SERMON: God of Wisdom (Matthew 1:1-12)

Today is Christmas Sunday and we would like to learn about the God of Wisdom from the story of the Magi in the Gospel of Matthew.

The Magi, or the three wise men, travelled far away from the East to the manger in Bethlehem. They made the 500-mile trip from where they began, most likely in Persia, to the manger in Bethlehem (6 miles south of Jerusalem) to visit the new born Jesus. During their long journey in the wintertime of December, they could only ride on camels (of course not direct flight in the comfy setting of plane!), and you can imagine that they had to endure harsh weather conditions as well as other potential dangers on the road.

The Magi embarked on such a tough journey which shows their great faith in God, trusting in the wisdom of God to guide them, and led them to search for the Messiah. From the book of Matthew, one can feel the tension as they had to discern and navigate the schemes of King Herod, a symbol of worldly cunning and wickedness.

A. God of Wisdom revealed in the Christmas story

The Guiding Star

The Magi inquired about the location of Jesus, "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" (Matthew 2:2). 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 (Matthew 2:9)

The star is a good reminder that God's wisdom leads us even when our path is unclear. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5&6) Just as the Star guided the Magi, God's wisdom directs us towards truth and life.

Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem

Have you found that God's wisdom often contradicts our human expectations? Compared to other cities and towns in Israel, Bethlehem was insignificant in size (simply a typical Jewish village) and influence (with only a population of 300 to 1,000 people at the time of Jesus' birth). Having said that, God has made it a perfect place of origin for David's line and the birthplace of the Messiah!

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8&9) The Saviour of the world was born in humble circumstances, showing that God's ways are higher than ours indeed.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this Christmas season, let's reflect about our path of life: have we always been seeking for God's wisdom and guidance? Are we allowing God to guide us to weather the adversities, or are we being too confident in ourselves, and stubbornly succumb to our own limited understanding to carry on?

B. Wisdom in Worship – The Gifts of the Magi

Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh

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

These three valuable items were gifts to honour a king or deity in the ancient world: gold as a precious metal, frankincense as perfume or incense, and myrrh as anointing oil. The book of Isaiah, when describing Jerusalem's glorious restorations, tells of nations and kings who will come and "bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:6)

The presentation of these three gifts symbolise a wise heart that recognises and honours Jesus as Lord, God and Saviour: Gold for His kingship. Frankincense for His divinity and Myrrh for His sacrifice.

Dear brother and sisters, as we usher in the New Year of 2025, shall we reflect on what gifts we've offered to or will offer to Jesus in gratitude and faith? Are they **time, talents, money or other treasures** that we possess? Are we leading our life with a surrendered heart? And have we aligned our lives with God's purposes?

C. Wisdom to Avoid the Deception of Herod

In the Gospel of Matthew Herod had asked the Magi once they've found the location of Jesus, they should report to him so that he himself too may go and worship him. (Matthew 2:8) We all know that Herod's true intention was to persecute Jesus.

Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (Matthew 2:12) We can see that God's wisdom protected the Magi from falling into the trap of earthly powers.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this world filled with false promises and distractions that draw us away from God, **discernment**, or the capacity for distinguishing between good and evil, is utterly important. Have we always invited the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with God's words and inspirations? Have we always prayed, read the Scripture and interacted with our Church fellows?

D: Christmas is A Call to Seek and Worship

The story of the Magi has challenged us to seek Jesus above all else. Their journey was not easy, but they were rewarded by encountering Christ himself. Christmas is an invitation for us to leave behind our comfort zones, and to follow the light of God's wisdom in a world often shrouded in darkness. The celebration of the arrival of Jesus Christ is to remind us to follow God's wisdom into new life and new purpose.

**Let's close this sermon with a prayer of dedication:*

Dear Father God, please teach us how to honour You by seeking You, discerning Your guidance and offering our best gifts in worship and service. Please make us the bearers of Your light in the world. Amen.

TIME OF RESPONSE

CAROL: <https://youtu.be/nn7L53UyKf4>

Three Kings from Persian lands afar
To Jordan follow the pointing star:
And this the quest of the travellers three,
Where the new-born King of the Jews may be.
Full royal gifts they bear for the King;
Gold, incense, myrrh are their offering.

The star shines out with a steadfast ray;
The kings to Bethlehem make their way,
And there in worship they bend the knee,
As Mary's child in her lap they see;
Their royal gifts they show to the King;
Gold, incense, myrrh are their offering.

Thou child of man, lo, to Bethlehem
The Kings are travelling, travel with them!
The star of mercy, the star of grace,
Shall lead thy heart to its resting place.
Gold, incense, myrrh thou canst not bring;
Offer thy heart to the infant King.

PETER CORNELIUS (1824-74),

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS: Lam Yee

Dear Lord, Your Star has guided us through this year, Lighting our way and calming our fear. With You, we are safe and brave, Looking to Heaven, not what this world gave.

Thank You, Lord, for being our Star. With You, we'll never lose our sight. Amen.

Even though we are small, You show us our worth, Just like Bethlehem became Christ's place of birth. Help us learn from Jesus, humble and kind, To bring peace and love to all humankind.

**Thank You, Jesus, our Saviour and Friend. We seek a life with meaning, without end.
Amen.**

Give wisdom, Lord, to those in power, So kindness can flourish all the time. Let there be no war, no hate, no pain, Bring peace and justice once again. Bless Your Church and all who believe,

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for all we receive. Amen.

Help us, Lord, to share Your love, With hearts that give and eyes above. Teach us to serve, to give our best, To help the poor, the sick, the stressed.

**Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son. May Your Will through us always be done.
Amen.**

BP&W 593:

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through;
strong Deliverer,
be thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side;
songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

WILLIAM WILLIAMS (1717-91)

THE BLESSING:

May Christ be a bright flame before you,
a guiding star above you,
the wisdom of God upholding you;
and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you now you and always. Amen.

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Dates for your diary:

Church Prayer Meeting:

- Friday 3rd January - In person in the Upper Room Prayer Room at church 10.30 – 11.30 am.

2025 New Year Motto Text Service

- Sunday 5th January – ‘Keeping our Eyes on Jesus’ Hebrews 12:1-3 - the best way to start the year!

The Leadership Course Session 4 dates are:

- Tuesday 7th January 2025 – 2.30 pm in person in the Brookside room.
- Friday 10th January 2025 – 7.30 pm on Zoom (ID: 828 1505 7805 Passcode: 461165).

Baptismal Service: A baptismal service is being planned for 12th January and another one on February 9th. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to the Minister or one of the Deacons.

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