

The Jesus we never knew x02 (PP1)

VPBC Sunday 08 January, 2017.

The need for revelation: the adoration of the Magi. MATTHEW 2: 1 – 12. (PP2)

Introduction to the new theme.

One of my hopes for 2017 is that you and I will individually and together get to know Jesus better. That is the real Jesus of history and also personal experience.

This may mean that some of our misunderstandings and misconception about Jesus have to fall away. It will hopefully mean we take the New Testament especially the Gospels more seriously and that we do some new thinking and discovering too. Discovery about Jesus will enable discovery about ourselves also and also cause us to consider the message we are passing on.

Mary: what stories would she have told Jesus about his birth? (What stories were you told about yours? **(PP3) Mengo: mud brick hospital. Run then and now by CMS: lovely nurses and happy birth).** Mary would definitely have explained why they were in Bethlehem and about laying him in a manger. She would have told him about the shepherds (marginalised, tough working men who came talking about hearing angels sing to them on the hillside and went away after seeing Jesus singing. But also, she would have told them about strange visitors who came *from the East*, I rather suspect she also told Jesus to keep quiet about these stories and not tell other children or adults about them).

Are we willing to stand behind the real Jesus and are we representing him properly to our children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren? They and so many others who visit churches may have gathered some very strange ideas about Jesus: after all no one arrives on planet earth with a full understand. If we are asking others to put their trust and base their lives on Jesus then it needs to be the real Jesus.

(4) Today we continue with the historical accounts of Jesus' birth and the events which surrounded it. We realise I hope that we need to separate these from many of the images that are pumped out on cards, religious art and films. **Could you recount the main facts quoted about the visit and adoration of the Magi easily?** (Magi plural old Persian word Magus).

The Magi – often called wise men. (Suggestions that they themselves were kings – cos of references in Psalm 72: 11 to kings bowing down to the Messiah). These were very distinguished visitors – Gentiles (almost certainly from IRAN – ancient Persia). They came to worship and bring gifts: worship here means to fall down/ kneel/ bow or even prostrate before Jesus. Although we are told that they brought 3 gifts we have no idea how many there were. The Eastern churches especially the Syriac churches celebrate 12 magi. Their visit was certainly weeks, months or even longer after that of the shepherds came to adore and the Magi visited the baby in “the house”.

This was yet another of the strange events around the birth of this child – that indicate the supernatural event. The name MAGUS as we have said derives from the old Persian – and specifically the religious cast into which the prophet Zoroaster was born approx. 3,500 years ago. It is pre-Islamic in Iran. This was a priestly cast – that studied stars and astrology as a science and were strongly opposed to sorcery.

“**NEMO**” – We have no names given in the NT for the magi from the East.

They visit Jerusalem and made for Herod’s palace to seek to find – **the baby born “King of the Jews”**. As we know this was the title Herod – insisted was used of him. We are told that Herod was afraid – by their appearance but also so was Jerusalem’s residents. What upset Herod caused Jerusalem to tremble – which the later “slaughter of the innocents” proved was a genuine fear. GTH told us of the murderous practices of Herod. (We don’t know if they visited Jerusalem’s palace because they looked for a king – or if they were just checking in as visitors to this foreign land? We know that Herod consulted with the Jewish chief priests (he was an Idumean) and teachers of the Law who quoted MICAH 5: 2 to say that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

They claimed that God had revealed this birth of the Jewish Messiah through ancient prophecies and writings and through heavenly sign especially that of a significant STAR. (Firm beliefs in ancient world of the use of celestial risings and great births).

Their gifts were for a KING: our thinking needs to focus on Kingdom and these gifts emphasize this. (Would also have funded early flight and resettlement in Egypt)

Myrrh: commonly used as anointing oil (and embalming)

Frankincense as a perfume (sign of deity)

Gold as a valuable currency (sign of Kingship)

Although the visit of the Magi is not recorded the Quran it is a story much told in the Arab world.

Question: if Jesus came to earth to reveal God to us (and we admit that is absolutely essential as we cannot find God through our own intellect and merit alone) – **then what do we learn about God from the birth of Jesus – the place and the people?**

The birth is not just about domestic bliss: the birth happens within political upheaval and power struggles and oppression.

The birth event is itself important – Jesus did not arrive to visit planet earth as a grown adult – even though that may have presented less complexity? Jesus life begins and ends with struggle and blood – life and death.

Supernatural events surrounded this birth: angels, revelations, - dreams.

“Inclusivity of the nativity” (to steal a title from the TES Dec 2016), there were drawn to the baby Jesus – shepherds (marginalized unholy rough necks), magi – of another faith and Gentiles, and I have to say animals) – inclusive of creation/ earth. **This reminds me that this birth was not just for the benefit of Joseph and Mary, or even the Jews, this was not just for this time – but the birth was planned even before the planets and the stars began to die or live.**

This tells me that GOD wants to be known and so he visits this tiny planet – to speak to us and reveal to us...flashes of light – God’s knowledge and wisdom break into our consciousness. We begin to conceive of a God who cares, visits and lives among us...we begin to conceive that God has bigger plans for humanity and futures.