**Salendine Nook Baptist Church – Church Together**

**Sunday 19th December 2021 – Journey To Bethlehem – Is The Hope For The Wise Men?**

**Welcome**

Welcome to **Church Together.**

**No matter wherever you are, whatever you do, whoever you are, together we can grow as Church Together.**

Our flexible Sunday worship patterns blend together on - line services, home deliveries and E - mailed copies of Church Together.

Today’s service will be looking at: **Matthew 2 v. 1 - 12**

The theme for today’s service is: **Journey To Bethlehem - Is There Hope For The Wise Men?**

Today’s service that is set out in this edition of **Church Together** is looking at **Journey To Bethlehem ~ Is There Hope For The Wise Men?** We also welcome to our service this morning **Huddersfield Wind Band**

We hope that you will be able to engage with what has been produced for our **Sunday Service**

and that you would indeed **Continue To Journey With Us As We Draw Even Closer To Bethlehem**

**Call To Worship**

**Isaiah 9 v. 6 - 7 NLT**

For a child is born to us, a son is given

to us.

And the government will rest on his shoulders.

These will be his royal titles:

***Wonderful Councillor, Mighty God,***

***Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end.

He will rule forever with fairness and

justice from the throne of his ancestor David.

The passionate commitment of the Lord Almighty will guarantee this!

**Opening Prayer**

All praise be to you, O God, because you have come to give us your peace.

All praise be to you, O God, because you have opened up the way for us to experience peace with you.

All praise be to you, O God, because you give us peace when our heart is troubled.

All praise be to you, O God, because you are in the process of establishing your peace on earth.

May the celebration of the angels fill our hearts today as we hear those beautiful words:

***‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased’.***

**Amen**

**Moment Of Reflection**

We Have Come To Worship Him

**Song Suggestion**

Angels From The Realms Of Glory

**A Prayer For The Fourth Sunday In Advent**

Jesus, you are constantly coming to your people, even when we fail to see you. In each and every moment that we are blessed to recognize you here and now, give us the courage to leap with joy at your coming. **Amen**

**Lighting the Fourth Advent Candle - The Candle that represents PEACE**

**Advent Wreath Prayer Week 4 - Peace**

On this Fourth Sunday in Advent, we come and pray:

Heavenly Father, You are the God who gives peace. This fourth week of Advent causes us to remember that because of Jesus we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos. Regardless of our circumstances or our situations, you offer us peace that passes understanding.

Heavenly Father, when you sent your Son, you sent the one who is called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Even the angels cried out, ‘Glory to God in the highest [heaven](https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-heaven-like-11636670.html), and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’ The angels knew your purpose. They know the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love that Christmas held. They recognized that the fullness of God was wrapped in the tiny flesh of an infant as you humbled yourself and dwelt among us. Emmanuel. God with us as the baby Jesus.

You exalted Him and gave him a name above all names. Every knee in heaven and earth and under the earth must bow to the name of Jesus. He rules and reigns as king overall. No situation or circumstance that we find ourselves in is a match for Jesus.

We are able to have the fullness of peace in our hearts on Christmas Day, and every day, because that same Jesus sits at your right hand in heaven and makes intercession for us. He loves us with a love that is unfathomable. Nothing can separate us from His love. He is good and his plans for us are good.

Father, this fourth week of Advent, keep us in perfect peace as our mind is stayed on the truth of your powerful love. Thank you for your mighty, sovereign hand. Help us to trust fully in you and rest in the peace that you offer. It’s in the precious name of Jesus we pray.

**Amen**

**Song Suggestion**

Unto Us A Boy Is Born!

**Bible Reading**

**Matthew 2 v. 1 – 12 NIV**

**The Magi visit the Messiah**

2 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 worshipped 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.

**Welcoming Into Church Membership**

On this Fourth Sunday in Advent, we come together to share with Alireza as he enters into Church Membership here at Salendine Nook. We enter a covenant with Alireza as we seek to build up the Church to the glory of God, working alongside one another in his service in the world, and encouraging one another in the love of God.

As the family of God here at Salendine Nook Baptist Church, we will share together with Ali in welcoming him into the church family here through both prayer and commitment to him and each other.

Alireza will be asked the following:

**Do you believe God has called you to serve Christ as part of this local Baptist Church? Do you commit yourself to love and serve the Lord within this church community and in the world; and being filled with the Holy Spirit, to fulfil your ministry in the Body of Christ?**

When he has responded, the Church family at Salendine Nook will be asked:

**Do you welcome Ali, into the family of God in this local Church?**

**Do you promise to love, encourage, strengthen, guide, pray for and care for Ali, as an equal partner in the Body of Christ?**

On response from the Church family, Alireza will be offered the right hand of fellowship and the following will be said:

**In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and on behalf of this fellowship, I now warmly welcome you into church membership here at Salendine Nook Baptist Church.**

We will then pray for Alireza, that God’s Holy Spirit would rest and remain with him.

**Church Together Thought**

A story is told of a little boy who was going to visit some relatives during the Christmas holidays.

As they passed by a very large church, the little boy saw in the grounds of the church a manger scene and the little boy asked his parents what the scene was. They replied: *‘That’s Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus, there in the manger’.*

A few streets further on they passed another church, a little smaller than the other one, where a scene was depicting the journey of the Wise Men. *‘Who are they’?* the little boy asked.

His mother replied: *‘Those are the Wise Men, who are looking for the Baby Jesus’*.

*‘Well’*, said the little boy to his mother, *‘they won’t find him there, we saw baby Jesus down at the other church’.*

Lots of legends have grown up around the story of the Wise Men that we read from **Matthew 2 v. 1 – 12**, one of which is that there were **‘three Kings’**. The gospel account does not say there were three of them … or five or ten or thirty! The idea of there being three kings came from the three gifts that were given to Jesus, one from each of them. Names and personal descriptions have even been assigned: Caspar – young, beardless, ruddy complexion; Balthazar – a bit older, dark - skinned; Melchior – old, grey hair, long beard. But again the Gospel accounts do not mention this.

What about the idea that they were actual kings? **Matthew 2 v. 1 – 12** actually calls them ***‘Wise Men from the East’*** – MAGOI in the Greek (which is where we get our term MAGI) – who were probably Royal Astrologers which explains why they would have noticed and then been so excited about coming across something unusual in the sky.

As they would later say to Herod: ‘*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him’* (**Matthew 2 v. 2**). It was not unheard of in that day that the idea that heavenly signs marked the births and deaths of great leaders was widely accepted. What the Wise Men saw excited them, even enough to make them drop what they were doing and follow the star.

There is a wonderful lesson for us right there in this account that is found in **Matthew 2 v. 1 – 12**. These three or however many Wise Men / Royal Astrologers met God in the midst of doing what they were supposed to do: they were at work. God is not limited to meeting with us in a certain place, such as a Church or at a certain time during the week, such as 10.30am on a Sunday. No, God can and does speak to us anywhere and at anytime. The lesson to be learnt is that we need to *BE ALERT*! Just as the Wise Men were.

Another lesson is in their willingness to take action. They could have noted the appearance of the star, indicated their conviction that this phenomenon probably heralded something or someone very special, and then gone about their business. But this isn’t what they did. They put commitment to their conviction, feet to their faith, and commenced on a journey (which was no doubt difficult and dangerous at times) all because they knew, at the end, they would finally meet the new king.

**I often wonder, when God presents us with some new opportunity, are we willing to get excited about what is before us and begin a journey of faith?**

For the Wise Men there is something special that awaits at the finish of their journey all because they were prepared to follow what God had placed before them!

One of the things that intrigues us about this story is the incredible wrong turn these Wise Men took as they neared the end of their journey. Instead of following the star to Bethlehem, they stopped off in Jerusalem to ask directions of Herod. In a way the visit with Herod might be expected though: after all, they were convinced that they were coming to welcome a new ‘King of the Jews’, presumably Herod’s baby son. However, with the benefit of hindsight, we know the trouble that turn of events caused.

Of course, as we know, the Wise Men did get back on track, found Jesus and gave him their gifts. There is even a lesson for us all to learn in the gifts that were presented to Jesus.

**Gold!** It is easy for gold to become our god. Over and over Jesus noted how hard it was for any of us to manage money and keep it in proper perspective. Put it to use in the service of the Christ child, and we begin to break its dangerous hold on us.

**Frankincense!** They burned that in the temple as a symbol of prayer. Bring the Lord your hopes, your dreams, your petitions, and don’t forget your thanks.

Finally, **myrrh!** A spice used by the ancients as medicine and for embalming. Tradition says that the gift was given in anticipation of Christ’s crucifixion and death. Perhaps it was also given to encourage us to bring him our sorrows and sadness, our depressions and despair, because only then the work and the healing process of God can begin.

With all of this in mind, let’s ask the question that we have been looking at throughout this Advent period: Is there hope for the Wise Men? The answer simply has to be Yes!

Who then, were these Wise Men? In fact, many details about them are supplied by later tradition; but as we have said, we know that they came from the east, probably from Persia (now Iran), and in Western Christianity it's been assumed that there were three wise men because there were three gifts. The fact that they were wealthy and conversed with Herod led to a belief that they were kings, as well as some Old Testament passages, such as **Isaiah 60 v. 3,** which says: ***'Nations and kings will come to the light of your dawning day'*** (CEV). Names only seem to be given to them in documents several hundred years later.

What of the star? There is little certainty about its origins, but the Magi certainly believed it signified the presence of a great man. It may have been the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC. If this is true, then the journey lasted some considerable time and a reference to 'the child' (**Matthew 2 v. 11**) may indicate that when they arrived, many months had passed since Jesus' birth. What is certain is that their journey to Bethlehem took a little while.

Matthew describes the events, but his purpose is more theological than historical. He wants his listeners to understand clearly that the origin of the Messiah's birth is Bethlehem and that his appearance provoked hostility among his own people but was accepted by representatives of the non - Jewish world.

Judea was the name of the Roman province, but it is probably mentioned as a reminder of Jesus' descent from the royal line of Judah. Herod was a puppet king under the Romans and given the title the king of the Jews. This title, which the Wise Men use of Jesus, is set in contrast to Herod's kingship.

As we celebrate Jesus' birth this Christmas, we can use the story of the Wise Men to help us refocus our hearts and minds on Jesus, to seek his face, renew our love for him and to bring the best gift we can offer, ourselves, to his feet.

So, what did the Wise Men do when they came to where Jesus was? What hope was in their hearts as they met with Jesus? **Matthew 2 v. 1 – 12** gives us some of the answers!

**THEY WORSHIPPED JESUS**

On seeing his star (**Matthew 2 v. 2**) and on seeing him (**Matthew 2 v. 11**) we are told that the Wise Men worshipped Jesus. It was common practice in the Ancient Near East to link astronomical phenomenon with the birth of great men. Yet the surprise here is that these Gentiles were willing to travel great distances to worship a king not their own.

Let this thought stir your mind for a moment - How far are we willing to go - literally or metaphorically - to worship him?

They also worshipped him despite the fact he was an infant in poor surroundings. Which Jesus are we worshipping? The powerful resurrected one who meets our needs, or the crucified, despised one who demands our obedience?

**THEY WERE FILLED WITH JOY**

At the prospect of meeting Jesus they were filled with joy (**Matthew 2 v. 10**). They had finally found what they were looking for. If our lives are lacking in joy, it is probably because we are still searching, often in the wrong places, looking for joy itself rather than for the only one who can provide it as we worship and serve him.

**THEY GAVE HONOUR TO JESUS**

On meeting him they fell down and honoured him (**Matthew 2 v. 11**). When was the last time you - literally or otherwise - got on your knees before Jesus? For many, Jesus is often seen more as a friend to do us favours rather than being our Lord and Saviour; our King to be honoured and respected.

**THEY WERE OBEDIENT TO THE LEADING OF GOD**

In recognition of who Jesus was, the Wise Men presented him with gifts (**Matthew 2 v. 11**). But when it was time for them to leave and return to their own country, in obedience to God’s leading they returned home another way and did not go back to Herod as he requested. (**Matthew 2 v. 12**).

We are commanded to give our lives to him; but too often we don't do this because we fail to recognise his right to tell us what to do and how to do it.

**Wise men ended up in Bethlehem . . .Where this Christmas will you and I find our journey ending . . .?**

**Song Suggestion**

Away In A Manger No Crib For A Bed

**Offering**

No matter wherever you are, whatever you do, whoever you are, together we can grow as Church Together here at Salendine Nook.

Now that we find ourselves once again holding services in Church, we are able to give of our finances to the work of the Lord when we are in church.

If you feel that your are able to, then please keep on giving with a cheerful and grateful heart, praising God for all that he has given to you and share in the finances of the church.

**Moment of Reflection**

We Have Seen His Star, We Have Come To Worship Him. **Matthew 2 v. 2**

**An Advent Prayer**

God of light and hope, look upon us on love, and fill us with the Spirit of Jesus that we may love you and serve you in your kingdom. Protect us during this week and keep us watchful in prayer as await the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world, and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Song Suggestion**

As With Gladness Men Of Old

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
**Amen.**

**Song Suggestion**

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

**Prayers of Intercession**

Loving Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning as a people who are waiting: waiting to celebrate Jesus’ birth; waiting to see what this day and every day holds as Your blessings for us; and waiting to see whom we can bless with Your love or from whom we may receive a blessing.

Loving Lord, we come to you today with our needs and our worries, our hopes and our dreams, because You have invited us to come when you said: ‘Come to me, all you who labour and are over burdened’. So in prayer, we come this day.

We come praying for the Church throughout the world today and we especially pray for all who bear your name in places where it is dangerous to do so. Sustain and strengthen them by your grace, we pray.

We come, as well, with prayers for the Church in this country … and for this our congregation here at Salendine Nook. We pray that we may all benefit from the various gifts offered in service to you Lord Jesus; that in faith and unity we may be constantly renewed by your Holy Spirit into acts of mission, mercy and love.

We come to you this morning Gracious Lord, praying, too, for peace in our world, and for an end to violence. May there be peace in our homes and in our hearts so that we may live and work together in harmony and with genuine concern for one another. Remind us all that we share your world with others, many who are less fortunate than we are; and enable us to be faithful stewards of both the resources and the gospel which You have entrusted to us.

As we continue to pray, we come with prayers for our families, friends and neighbours, that we may serve and love one another as Jesus first loved us. Help us to make our homes patterns of your love, places of mutual trust and forgiveness, places of true sharing and caring, of deep joy and peace; and unite us all, one to another in the circle of your love.

We also bring before you in our prayers all those who need you the most today. We pray for those who are anxious, sorrowful, or in any kind of need or distress; we pray especially for those who are known to us personally today.

Also help us to remember in the quietness of our hearts others who are dear to us. We know that you love them and know their every need far better than we do. We ask that you do for them as you see best and bless them with your love and peace.

Merciful Loving God – as we wait … hear these, our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Amen**

**SONG SUGGESTION**

Joy To The World, The Lord Has Come

**Blessing**

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

**Amen**