

## Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

### Week beginning Sunday 6 January 2019 On another road

Pray that we would be willing to travel God's road – that whatever earthly roads we journey down we would be observant for God's direction, adding insights of faith, righteousness and morality. Pray that we would not be blinded into accepting that God's way is not an option. .

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 2:1-12.

Background There is much we don't know about the Magi. They were well off (they could afford to travel and their gifts to the child were such that only the wealthy could afford). They were gentile – far from being participants in the people of God. They don't seem to be particularly religious (in a biblical sense) indeed their fascination for reading the stars is something that was very much frowned on in OT. They followed traditional expectations to some extent (heading for palace to seek a king) but they don't seem to have been constrained by tradition. Neither did they feel bound by their promise to Herod to return and inform him when they found the child. And yet, these outsiders, these strangers from outwith the "norm" became among the first worshippers of God's Son and the first "missionaries" to the East.

#### Possible questions/points to consider

1. New Year – a time for a rethink. Fresh impetus to re-evaluate our plans. What normally figures in people's thinking as they go into a new year? Resolutions – if so, what form? Worries – what sort of thing concerns us? Fresh start, new openings? If so, in what ways? Where do politics come in? Where does money come in? How do we ensure that God gets a look in?
2. The visitors from the East were probably unlikely candidates for invitations to come and worship the new born king and wouldn't have got an interview from the Jerusalem Missionary Association had there been one. Why does Matthew give them such prominence? What can we learn from them about the opening up of the scope of the gospel? Why is there such a tendency these days to home in on "our rights"? To what extent is the "trans-nationalism" of the good news a difficulty for some today?
3. Though many educationists decry it, there does seem to be a huge pressure on measuring "success" by some group of criteria. In almost everything there are boxes to be ticked and scores to be given. But some things aren't covered. The visitors route had to change – not just once but at least twice – they first went to Jerusalem, thinking that a palace was where they might find a king. And then having found Jesus in Bethlehem they were warned in dream not to go back to Herod who had plans to do away with Jesus. How do we ensure that moral, ethical, spiritual values get a look in in our own decision making and in that of the nation?
4. How do we stand up for right and wrong? Where right is what God requires and isn't just as defined by those in power. What does it mean to say "righteousness alone exalts a nation"? How do you get across to people that there is more to life than economic measures? Can we advocate being a caring, compassionate, generous and kindly nation? If so, how? And if not, why not? We don't follow a star but we are called to follow Jesus. How do we demonstrate that in both loving God and loving neighbour? How do we do that when others are suggesting that we need to put up barriers to immigration and cut the international aid budget?
5. We can be fearful of the unknown. There does appear to be a lot of uncertainty in the country at present. How does our trust in a Saviour who has promised never to leave us impact on the practical uncertainties? How do we cope with the conflicts and strains? How do we begin to sow seeds among others that Jesus can make all the difference? Many would find our talk about having a moral, ethical, spiritual compass ridiculous. How can we prove them wrong?
6. Please discuss/consider anything else that arises from the passage or service.

Prayer Lord as we go into 2019 with all its uncertainties help us both to hold to your lead and to encourage others to follow it to that together we might become a righteous nation. Amen.