

Ardoch Parish Church & Blackford Parish Church

Sunday 27th December 2020

Rev Mairi Perkins welcomes everyone to our service of worship and reflects on the importance of the Magi and their search for the Christ Child



Last Sunday was sadly Blackford's last service in their Church because of further Covid restrictions.. We will enjoy sharing worship together for the next two Sundays.

3rd January will be a live Joint Zoom meeting and the following Sunday 10th January will be conducted and recorded by Gordon Roy.

The first hymn is “Brightest and best”

Brightest and Best of the sons of the morning,
Dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine 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!

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.

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Mairi leads us in Prayer

Slowly and sleepily we come to you today, O God.
Christmas, for better or for worse,
is behind us for another year.

We are variously glad to have experienced it,
and glad that it is over.
Disappointing or fulfilling,
the same as usual or strangely different,
surrounded by family, happily or painfully alone,

Christmas is past. The festival is over.
As we breathe a sigh of satisfaction or relief,
we stop to think what happens now.
Christmas may be over, but incarnation is not.
The mysterious presence, the divine spirit
that confronted people all those years ago
in Jesus, is here with us still—
always has been, always will be.

You are Emmanuel, God with us,
and having glimpsed you once,
we can never be the same again.

Loving God, it was not the people like us—
religious, respectable—who recognised you
when you came before.

May we not miss you this time.

May we learn from this ancient story
where you are most likely to be found:
not among royalty, but with the refugees;
not in the centre, but on the margins,
with those whom people like us,
are most likely to overlook.

Forgive us if we have been dazzled
by the qualities that don't matter
and discounted the things that do;
if we have written someone off
because they were too old;
or not taken them seriously
because they were too young.
If we have not had the patience
to listen carefully to someone speaking
with a foreign accent,
or to speak more clearly for someone
whose hearing was poor.

O God, how easy it is to judge
without even knowing that we are doing so,
and how much poorer we are if we do.
We miss out on learning from one another;
we miss out on meeting with you.
God, who sees the amazing potential
in every person you have made,
help us to look with your eyes
on every person that we meet.
May we be astonished every single day
as we look in the mirror,
or in the eyes of friend or stranger,
and see you there, God with us, Immanuel.
Amen.

We say together 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for
ever. Amen

Michael Boxer reads from Matthew Chapter 2 v 1-23

The next hymn is "As with gladness"

As with gladness men of old, did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming
bright;

So, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to Thee!

As with joyful steps they sped, Saviour, to Thy lowly bed;
There to bend the knee before thee, whom heaven and
earth adore.

So may we with willing feet ever seek the mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare at the manger, rude and
bare;

So may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to Thee, our
heavenly King.

Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way;
And when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed
souls, at last,
Where they need no star to guide, where no clouds Thy
glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not
down;

There for ever may we sing Hallelujahs to our King!

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Reflection

The very next passage in the gospel after the report of the birth of Jesus records the visit of the wise men to Bethlehem. The account is short and straightforward; but it does include a reference to an Old Testament prophecy which will be important in the interpretation. The story essentially tells of the homage of these "Magi" to the one who was born king of the Jews. But it is a story that is tightly connected to its context; it not only builds on the information revealed in the previous passage about the birth, but it also lays the foundation for the crisis to follow.

At the outset it will be helpful to explain the historical sequence of the narratives. This is because a lot of traditional teaching on the visit of the wise men puts the event a little later, when Jesus was a year or so old, probably because of Herod's desire to kill the children two years old and under. But we know that Herod died in the spring of 4 B.C., and since the wise men come to Herod to find out where the king was to be born, the visit must have been shortly after the birth of Jesus. Herod probably set the age of two years old in order to be sure he killed the one who was to be king, thinking that the wise men had been traveling for some time. So the sequence would be: Jesus was born somewhere late 5 B.C. or early 4 B.C., the wise men showed up in early spring, and Herod the Great died shortly after have the children slaughtered.

[Matthew 2](#) tells us that the magi, or wise men, travelled from the East in search of the Christ child. They inquired of King Herod where they might find Him, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" ([Matthew 2:2](#)). Upon finding the baby Jesus, "they bowed down and

worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh" ([Matthew 2:11](#)).

Gold is a precious metal and as such was a very valuable commodity. Its value could very well have financed Joseph and Mary's trip to Egypt. The Bible does not tell us any other significance to these three gifts; however, tradition has it that there is a deeper meaning for each of the three. Gold is a symbol of divinity and is mentioned throughout the Bible. Pagan idols were often made from gold and the [Ark of the Covenant](#) was overlaid with gold ([Exodus 25:10-17](#)). The gift of gold to the Christ child was symbolic of His divinity—God in flesh.

Frankincense is a white resin or gum. It is obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark and allowing the gum to flow out. It is highly fragrant when burned and was therefore used in worship, where it was burned as a pleasant offering to God ([Exodus 30:34](#)). Frankincense is a symbol of holiness and righteousness. The gift of frankincense to the Christ child was symbolic of His willingness to become a sacrifice, wholly giving Himself up, analogous to a burnt offering.

Myrrh was also a product of Arabia, and was obtained from a tree in the same manner as frankincense. It was a spice and was used in embalming. It was also sometimes mingled with wine to form an article of drink. Such a drink was given to our Saviour when He was about to be crucified, as a stupefying potion ([Mark 15:23](#)). [Matthew 27:34](#) refers to it as "[gall](#)." Myrrh symbolizes bitterness, suffering, and affliction. The baby Jesus would grow to suffer greatly as a man and would pay the ultimate price when He gave His life on the cross for all who would believe in Him. Well, in this story we have Herod. He certainly represents the response of the unbeliever to the news of the coming of the Messiah. He wants to know about it, but is not interested to go four and a half miles to see for himself. In fact, he is more concerned that the presence of the Christ will interfere with his power, with his position, with his lifestyle. The world is filled with people who like Herod want to know, but are not

actually looking for the One who will save people from their sins.

But there are the wise men, the focus of the story. The primary application would call for identification with these men. In other words, the way of faith looks for God's provision of a Saviour, and finding it in Jesus, submits to Him and worships Him, even though it may not yet be clear how it will all work out. Over and over again the gospel will call for faith; but as the passages unfold it will be clear that faith in Jesus will be well founded.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

God of new life, and old lives;
God of fleeting, human life and of eternal life,
we see all of life coming together
in a sacred moment witnessed only
by a young couple, two aged saints,
and a child full of hope and promise.

We give thanks for the inclusiveness
of this story, and of your concern for those
whom we so often undervalue,
or simply fail to notice:
the very old and the very young;
the ordinary and seemingly unremarkable ones.
They are not invisible to you, and must not be to us
if we are to follow in the footsteps
of the child whose birth we have just celebrated;
the man whom the powerful rejected
and the poor received gladly;
the one who noticed us, and showed us our worth,
and enables us to do the same for others.

Gracious God, this is not a story
about powerful heroes, but vulnerable ones:
the very old and the very young.
We pray for our children and our old people
(for ourselves, if that's who we are).
May they know kindness from those
on whom they depend for care.
May they not be overlooked.

May they be valued, not for what they once were
or what some day they will be,
but for who they are now.
May their wisdom be sought, their gifts values
and their stories heard.

We pray for new parents in these strange
and troubling times; for grandparents
separated from their grandchildren;
friends unable to meet as they would like to;
and for those who consider them lucky
because they have no-one close,
or are estranged from those who once were.

We pray for children who have never known
the security that Jesus had from loving parents;
for those who have reached old age
without their prayers being answered
or their dreams fulfilled.

We pray for any who, like Mary, have known
the heart-piercing joy of loving another human being
so much that the thought of any harm coming to them
is far worse than being hurt themselves.

God, who loves us with that kind of love,
multiplied more times than we can calculate,
hold us in your arms, we pray,
with gladness and a song of praise,
and a promise of good things yet to be.
Amen.

Our closing hymn is

Love came down at Christmas,
love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus,

but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token;
love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and others,
love for plea and gift and sign

Benediction

Now go with the love of Christ in your hearts. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Amen

Intimations

Services for Ardoch & Blackford

Last Sunday was sadly Blackford's last live service until further notice, because of further Covid restrictions.. We will enjoy worshipping together for the next two Sundays.

3rd January will be a live Joint Zoom meeting and the following Sunday 10th January's service will be conducted and recorded by Gordon Roy.

Ardoch

Items for the Link should be with Gordon Roy by the end of the year. Gordon.roy@outlook.com

Used Stamps

Please keep saving your used stamps, always remember to leave a small border of the envelope round the stamp. Put them in a bag and put them through Liz Paterson's letter box at Drumsheugal, Church Street.

The money raised is used to support projects for the Church of Scotland World Mission.

Church offerings

We have had members asking for the Church's bank details, which for security reasons are not published. As the Church is not re-opening for Sunday Worship in the foreseeable future, it might be a sensible time for us to consider changing our method of giving.

1. using internet banking, transfer directly each month to Ardoch Parish Church..
2. authorising a direct debit mandate in favour of Ardoch Parish Church.

To obtain further details of these methods, please contact Treasurer, Stuart Brannen. Tel.880394 and he will be very pleased to help in anyway.

Remember Easyfundraising—easy to do and an effective way of adding to the Church offerings.

Blackford

Blackford elders are now discussing how to offer the building open as a place of prayer while it is closed to worship. We would hope to have news of this fairly soon.

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Those in Blackford who are collecting their stamps can still put them through the door of Jeannette Barr at Cedar Cottage, Moray Street.

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